



# KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

THE FINEST IN BEAUTY CARE FOR THE DISCRIMINATING WOMAN

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**Corea's Beauty Shoppe**

FLORENCE M. ALEXANDER

26 Conant Street  
Provincetown, Mass.

SPECIALISTS IN HAIR SHAPING, STYLING & PERMANENT WAVING



I entered Florence's Beauty Parlor at 26 Conant Street and entered a world of nostalgia and energy. The past and present stood in tandem and I had to step up the pace to absorb those two worlds. Florence has been in the beauty parlor business for fifty-eight years. She was setting Eva Silva's hair when I arrived as she has since 1941. She only missed her weekly appointment "when I had my babies." Mary Enos, also a client since 1941, was under the dryer. "Mary's husband stood for me, he was my best man." Johnny "Bike" Corea came in and familiarly sat in the second chair for his regular haircut. "This is my nephew John, my godson. I've been cutting his hair since he was five years old. He gets free haircuts. I never charge my family. You don't get rich charging your family."

"Well, I pay for them in my woodworking," John quipped, "a cranberry scoop, the magazine rack, spoons and frames for her pictures. I made these frames." Johnny points to a wall of photographs. High School team photos from the mid-thirties, wedding and baby pictures... parents, grandparents and great-grandparents take more time to notice in their distant subtle sepia tones. Florence continues "That picture is from the book *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*. That's Theresa and Gloria Bent. Amelia, the third sister, isn't in it. That's Gladys Silva's great grandmother. Theresa on the left, the oldest, is my great grandmother and Gloria on the right is Reggie Cabral's great grandmother." All this information comes as if for the first time and only to me as Florence moves deftly from Eva to John and a quick eye to Mary - exceptional concentration and skill.

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funeral parlor and do their hair for the last time." Having finished, Eva sits to listen until her ride comes. Mary is out from the dryer and in the chair and Johnny Bike, newly shorn, is off to work as chef at Tips for Tops'n.

"I always wanted to be a hairdresser. I quit school in the eighth grade. My family used to go to Gloucester to fish. My Dad and Mother used to go over on the gasoline boat. My uncle Joe, brother John and I would go over the road. We'd go for a few months of winter fishing. I was supposed to go to school, but I wouldn't go. I'd go hang around the playground. Well, when I came back to Provincetown the truant officer said I was too young to quit and would have to go for ninety days. So I did.

"That was 1933. I used to play on the basketball team with Irma Aho, (She was a forward) and with Ethelann Chapman. When I quit school I worked with my mother. She ran a laundry where #5 Clothing is today, at 199 Commercial Street. My Dad and I used to wash. He's come in from fishing and help out. They would put me on a box since I couldn't reach the tub. My mother did the ironing. She wouldn't let anybody else do that; it had to be perfect.

"I still wanted to go to hairdressing school. I cried for two years to go. So my Dad said, if I earned and saved the tuition money, he would pay room and board. Tuition was \$250. Room and board with two meals for seven months was \$1,000. So I went to work at Kalmar Village on Beach Point and worked for Sivert and Isabelle Benson. I worked with Rebecca Freitas and Burgundy. I cleaned eight cottages and got \$8 a week. I saved for two years and then I went to school—Wilfred Academy.

For 7 months I stayed at the Franklin Square House for \$8 a month. It was a rooming house for women. My Dad was making \$18 a week fishing. I went to school Monday to Friday and three nights we would play ping-pong and have dances to relax. Isabelle Benson stayed there when she went to the Boston Conservatory of Music. I would take the train at Duarte's for \$3 round trip. My Dad would give me the \$3 so I would be sure to come home every weekend and then he would give me \$5 to eat all week. I spent \$1 a day at the Waldorf Cafeteria and every day I ate the same thing. A small glass of milk and one meatball with spaghetti, every lunch. Finally, the chef, in his big hat would holler when he saw me coming, "One small milk, one meat ball and spaghetti!" I would take a doggie bag for a later snack."

Florence worked, studied and was chosen to demonstrate the Marcel wave at a competition held at the Copley Plaza, Boston in

1940. Florence needed a model. She asked her cousin Halcyon Cabral Hurst. "Halcyon, we called her 'Caffie', was beautiful, tall... with long hair. She was perfect. She said 'yes' and told me exactly how she was going to dress. She was gorgeous and she got up on that stage and we won." The yellowed newspaper account is framed with her award.

"I graduated on April 23, 1941 and my father put me up in business in May. *Polly's Powder Puff* was at the Grey Inn, where the Commons is now and she sold me the pedestal sink and the lavabo, (my uncle made the drain board) and the vanity table all for \$50. So for \$25 a month I rented the space where the Café Heaven is now. I stayed there four years.

"Then Josephine Cook's Embalming and Funeral Home became available, it's Christine's Jewelry now. Everybody said 'no one would want their hair done in a funeral parlor!' But I took it and worked there two years, that was \$25 a month. I decided to build this shop, next to my home. I shoveled and dug the basement out myself." (Daughter Shirley told me later that Florence was pregnant with her at the time.) "My mother and I made the cement, my mother died at 93, 7 years ago. "We borrowed the cement mixer from Higgins Lumber (now Ace). My cousin Joe White was a carpenter and he built the shop. He said he wouldn't collect until I had it working, but my Dad paid him and so I paid \$25 a month to my mother to pay it off. I sold my equipment, dryers and the vanity to pay for the foundation. I've been here since. This is a family home, three generations. I was born in the room I sleep in, 1st floor. My daughter and son-in-law are on the 3rd floor, the middle floor is for visiting family, we never rented."

"I met my husband Warren Alexander on a blind date. Annie Corea fixed it up. It was East End and West End. He wanted to stay in the East End; I wanted to stay in the West End. Well we stayed here. We had two daughters, I named Shirley, he named Flora Lee. We didn't have much money, but we had a lot of fun.

"We had an old Chevy with balloon tires and we used to go down Conant Street on the Town Road to Brown Street and out to the Dunes. Every Sunday we would go spend the day at the beach fishing. We never had

much money. Life was simple and fun. My husband was in the Merchant Marines. I lost him at age 50, my brother John Corea at 44, my dad at 69 and my mother at 93. Everybody I love is out there. I'm the last of the Mohicans."

Not quite, Florence has 2 daughters, 3 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren, Alexander, Kyle and Kole on the way. She paused to look at a faded photo of a posed fisherman. "I knew them all. I used to take my Dad's dory and row all around the harbor. I spent long times with the fishermen. I knew them all by name and they knew me. I was a natural historian, always gleaning information

from elders."

Florence will be eighty on Christmas Day. She belies time, though she remembers everything in accurate chronology. It's hard to grasp that this sprightly woman has lived enough years for all this experience. Though she says she is athletic and always active, you still can't put eighty years on her. She is ever at somebody's need. She has knit seventeen afghans for Cape End manor residents, volunteers at bingo in Provincetown and Eastham, collects heels of bread there to make bread pudding for seniors. She does the shift before me at the Heritage Museum and is always rushing off with rattling keys to the next place of need.

As I was leaving—you would think she was going to rest after a morning's work—she was heading for Orleans to pick up her cousin Kathleen Packett to go spend the night at Hospice with a terminally ill third cousin. That would give his immediate family a night off. How many 80 year olds do you know would leave their bed for a night to spend it a town far away?

As we whereabout to shut the door on the lovingly crafted building, walls pressed with memorabilia and awards, Florence quipped, "See that bar?"—A curtain rod across the middle of the room, hung from the ceiling—"My grandson asked me once 'Grammie, what's that for?' [And I replied, 'That was for when people wanted their

hair dyed. They didn't want anyone to know, so I used to draw the curtain so no one could see. Especially at night."

