

## Chapter 4



# **SILVER LINING IN THE PARK**

**Galatians 3:28**

**“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

### **Silver Springs Park**

**Parks are places where friends can come and go, be merry, rejoice, and are never far apart in spirit. What better scene to rest the soul than on a grassy knoll, looking out across the vale. They are reunion spots where needy souls gather to laugh, love and share each others thoughts and dreams. And, most of all, they are settings where friends can talk and cry while reminiscing over lovely times gone by. In the recesses of the heart, parks serve as peaceful reminders of splendid moments that are counted as God's blessings, and will have a reserved place in our hearts until the good Lord calls us home.**

**For every season, there are poignant hours that are known as life's richest, most precious memories created in parks everywhere. These precious memories are treasured in our mellow years when we call upon the spirits golden bounty days for comfort during our idle hours. Without parks, yesterday would be lost forever, causing restless yearnings within our souls. As we revisit the seasons of our lives, we will find that a variety of parks in dramatic locations have provided the backdrop for many monumental celebrations.**

**Although little Mary, due to her skin color, had only one park she was allowed to frequent, the memories of her childhood created there are as fresh in her mind today as a spring breeze after a gentle rain shower. Silver Springs Park was a special place near her home where she listened to the noisy chatter of squirrels in graceful trees; a place that served as the foundation for her first memory of childhood. The sparkling water of Jordan Creek that flowed merrily through it caused Mary to anticipate the excitement of catching crawdads, fishing, or lazily**

skipping rocks creating ripples that traveled in circles across its surface. Its muddy banks felt squishy and soft under her little bottom as she sat for hours using its rich soil to create imaginary, tasty pies and elegant castles. Although it sometimes flooded, she would wait a bit and then return to its banks once again.

When the rays from the sun provided warmth to the cool spring air, Mary's favorite swing relentlessly beckoned her company in the park. Oh, how she loved to soar through the air like the birds that flitted overhead, or gaze at the soft wispy, floating clouds whose shapes changed endlessly. The imaginary animals she visualized in those beautiful clouds were enchanting as they came to life in her mind. She would deeply breathe in the fresh clean morning air that tickled her nose and whistled through her hair as her swing climbed higher and higher.

### Reunions In The Park

Silver Springs Park was a gathering place for reunions among friends and family members. Its quiet tranquility and soft glow would leap to life like a busy city awakening at the beginning of a new day when street peddlers started to sell their wares. Friends and relatives would congregate from near and far to celebrate a proud legacy, while creating lively memories for their tomorrows.

As the loved ones gathered, arms were laden with baskets of food that had been carefully packed with old time favorites. The air was filled with the savory odor of meat grilling on an open fire that tantalized taste buds as it was barbecued to perfection. As cloths were spread on the tables and the baskets unpacked, friends' arms were hugging each other with gusto while jokes and teasing laughter filled the air. The tables were groaning under the weight of deviled eggs, savory potato salad, biscuits baked to a golden brown, accompanied by homemade jelly and churned yellow butter, crispy fried chicken, sweet pickles, spicy baked beans, with freshly baked fruit and sweet potato pies waiting impatiently in the baskets for the final, "too full but I'm gonna have some anyway," sweet ending. As Mary would say, "Shut my mouth, child! That was good eatin!"

Possessing stomachs that were bulging and complaining, the noisy chatter subsided for just a bit before the singing and shouting started. The old spirituals were sung with such rhythm and movement that sweet old and young hearts in

attendance would always cherish this reunion as the best ever. However, with out doubt, the attendees would leave expecting next year's reunion to far exceed this grandiose celebration. As the old Baptist preacher would say, "Yes suh! Now that's the truth, I say!"

### Fun And Dancing In The Park

Other than attending church activities, Silver Springs Park was the place everyone always went. Mary will quickly let you know that her people simply were not invited anywhere else. Segregation set the standard by which Mary's style of living was governed. Other parks, movie theaters, restaurants, schools, and entire neighborhoods were simply off limits for people of color. Mary could not drink from the same fountain or share public restrooms with white folks, either. All this shameful, recorded history of racial prejudice was a part of America's landscape and greatly shaped Mary's childhood.

As a result, Silver Springs park became the central hub of entertainment for her entire community. Mary recalls with great fondness the first beauty contests where contestants wore an array of fashionable bathing suits and paraded around in front of judges. Not only was she asked to judge this big event, but took pride in the fact that she observed not only the physical appearance of each girl, but also the aura and happiness in her eyes.

Later on when a new modern recreational facility was built as the focal point of the park, it opened up the potential for year round entertainment. When Mary told about ballroom dancing being one of the additions on the calendar of events to the community, her face beamed with delight remembering the thrill of it all. Mary Josephine Pascall was well known to have dancing feet. She had learned to dance by watching her uncle and his girlfriend, and would then practice in private, allowing her natural rhythm to set her eager feet into motion.

Mary exclaimed, "Oh, honey! How I loved to ballroom dance! At the sound of the first musical note, I was ready to waltz, two step, Charleston and even do the Cha-cha. Believe it or not, I learned to do the Charleston by dancing with the foot of my bed. I was truly a born dancer."

She continued, "I can still feel the movement of the air gently kissing my flushed cheeks as I floated on graceful feet with my eyes closed." The beautiful music along with each carefully selected dress created a romantic atmosphere and a perfect evening for a free spirited girl like Mary. Her happy heart was lifted and transformed into a world of glitz and glamor at least for an evening.

When Mary compares ballroom dancing enjoyed during her youth with that shown on TV today, she shakes her head in disbelief. She will remark, "They kick their legs out those slits in the sides of their skimpy outfits and do a lot of jerking around. And, there's not enough material in those costumes they wear to make a handkerchief. Their movements are harder and more like an athlete as compared to our soft, floating romantic steps."

As Mary described her remembrance of a time when dancing feet caused her to float on the clouds with her soul lost in the melody and rhythm of the musical notes, it was obvious Silver Springs Park had been the setting for a silver lining in her life for at least a few magical moments. Today, at age 91, Mary will tell you that those dancing feet of hers were still floating to the music at the young old age of 80.

### Neighborhood Watch

Misbehaving in Silver Springs Park or anywhere else in Mary's little world was not even remotely a possibility. There were simply too many eyes watching her every move. Aunts, uncles, and friends of Ella Thompkins had taken on the responsibility of raising Mary with great determination and vigilance. It was due to their involvement that Mary would be taken to task by Ella Thompkins, her adoptive mother, for any unbecoming behavior. When remembering all these happenings in her life, she smiled and exclaimed, "My mother lived on my rear end!"

Without doubt, Mary knew that she would be soundly spanked due to any kind of misbehavior. However, she does have the opinion that her mother's chosen punishment was never done out of anger or with harshness of action. She will state that Ella Thompkins loved her as much or more than if she had been born to her naturally.

**Love Is In The Air**

Silver Springs Park seemed to provide the background for many of the major decisions in Mary's life. The freedom she felt while swinging lasted a lifetime for Mary, and was to be the place where she met her soul mate. One day, as she was enjoying the thrill of swinging in the clouds after a busy schedule of caring for families and sick people, a handsome young man named Grant Edward Pascall took notice. He couldn't take his eyes off this pretty young woman who was totally engrossed in her own thoughts as she flew through the air. It was obvious to him that this young lady experienced a great thrill in swinging as high as possible.

Therefore, he knew the best way to approach Mary was with the offer of a plan to increase the height of her climb in the swing. This cunning boy named Grant talked her into letting him stand up in the swing beside her and pump with all his might. He guaranteed that she would soar to a higher level than ever before.

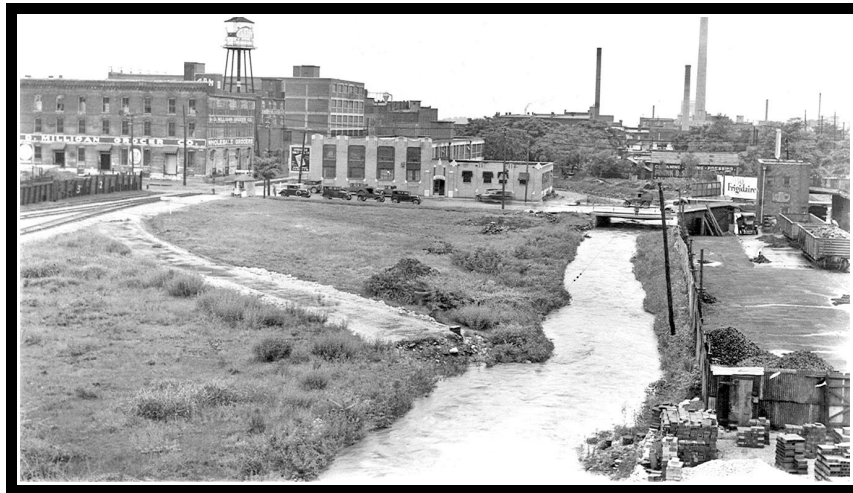
Thus, it took only a little time of sharing that swing together for Grant Edward Pascall to take a real shine to happy, pretty Mary. He also quickly realized that if he desired to see her, it would be necessary for him to attend church, where Mary spent most of her time. Since Grant had a job with the Frisco Railroad that kept him on the move, sparking with Mary usually occurred at holiday time.

All these challenges did not prevent the two young people from getting closer and closer to the altar. When Grant came to town, they made the most of their time together by meeting in the park or going to the fair. Mary will tell you they were "crazy in love" with each other and were married by the Justice of the Peace in 1943; a union that lasted for 61 years.

Mary and Grant were together for only a short time when the drums of war called a madly in love young husband to a foreign land to defend his country. This represented another challenge in the life of the newly married Mrs. Mary Josephine Pascall. Since her mother, Ella Thompkins, had taught her how to land gracefully on her feet in all circumstances, Mary would soon figure out what exciting adventure would fill her time as she waited on the man of her dreams to come home.



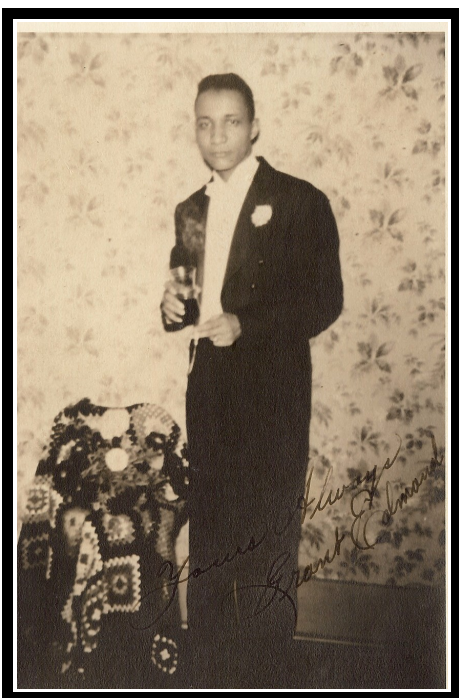
Words in a Thursday morning addition of newspaper show the ugliness of segregation.  
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield—Greene County)



Jordan Creek floods its banks.  
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield—Greene County)



**Example of ballroom dancing attire worn by Mary and her friends.  
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield—Greene County)**



**Grant Pascall ready to ballroom dance.  
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)**



**Grant and Mary Pascall (Newly Married)  
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)**