

Story of the Sock

Irene Moody & Marge Guilbeault
Collected by Thomas Christopher

1.0 Thomas Christopher:

When I married into the Guilbeault family, I started hearing the lore of “the sock.” Last year I started to collect the story from Irene Moody and Marge Guilbeault. Here is the story as they tell it.

2.0 Irene Moody:

Marge Guilbeault called me to tell me you were interested in the story of the sock. I'll do my best to try to recall the sequence of exchange over the years. The sock would lie dormant for long periods a time, just waiting for the chance to reappear. It all started at Cedar Lake, Indiana where the Guilbeaults had rented a cottage. I believe that was next door to Marge's sister, Jane O'Neill and her family. Gene, “Onie” and I had got into a teasing scuffle on the beach. I got Gene's sock off, filled with sand and seaweed and used it as a weapon, whirling it around. The sock, of course, stretched to an enormous size in length and Gene proclaimed it unwearable and said I owed him a new pair of socks. I said he could wear it if he just folded it under. He refused to take the sock so I tied it on the front bumper of the car. It traveled that way all summer.

In December, about the time of my birthday Gene and Marge were over for a visit. After they had gone Bernie and I were going to bed. When I pulled back the bed spread I discovered a beautifully wrapped gift on my pillow. Thinking it was a birthday gift from Bernie, I excitedly opened the package to find the sock! The game was on. Months later it turned up wrapped on Gene's workbench at Garden Homes [the Guilbeault homestead]. I don't remember for sure, but I think I got it back next, soldered into a beer can which was put in a six pack when Marge and Jean came over. Hilarious. Loretta Angelici, our exchange student from Italy, next mailed it from Rome.

It came back, mailed from Honolulu, with some white sand from Honolulu added to it by Gene's nephew Bruce. One Christmas I wrapped it as a gift and left it in a pile of gifts under the Guilbeaults' Christmas tree.

It was then mailed to me at the office of the publishing firm where I was working in downtown Chicago. I smelled a rat and refused to open it. My friends at work would not believe me when I told them I thought I knew what it was, what was in it. I told the story of the sock and they badgered me so much I opened it and we all have a great laugh. (I really intended to return as “package refused.”)

One year--in this year the Santis were in from Minnesota--Gene Santi was doing pasta and we were guests. I baked a chiffon cake in a tube pan, put the sock in the hole, frosted the whole cake, and brought it for dessert. Don't remember how I got it back.

One time, about Christmas time when I had the sock I asked a friend of our family if he would help me pass the sock. (After all this time a lot of people knew about the sock and were always interested in: "Who's got the sock?") Marge was a crossing guard at the corner where Henry DeBoer's daughter Kathy crossed to go to school. I asked Henry if he would deliver a box of Fannie Mae candy that I would prepare to Marge as a token of appreciation from Kathy. He was delighted to take part in the exchange of the sock. I bought a two-pound box of candy, removed part of the second layer, put in the sock, put back the top layer and rewrapped the box. Lo, and behold, the Sunday that Henry decided to deliver the candy we were there. Marge was so delighted to get the box of candy I got nervous. She opens the box--Bernie and I hurriedly depart. As we were walking into our house the phone rings--I answered it and it was Marge calling me a rat. I retaliated by calling her hoggish to have found the sock already. She laughs and says the reason they found it so quickly was because Billy dropped the box. I don't remember how I got it back.

The last time I passed what was left of the sock was at Marge and Gene's 50th anniversary. I had a neighbor deliver it to the party at Surmas. You know how it got passed to me at [Gene Guilbeault's] memorial service. We sure have a lot of fun with an old Army sock. I'm doing this in a hurry because we're going to California for a month. Maybe Marge will remember more of the exchanges. If I remember any more I will let you know.

3.0 Marge Guilbeault:

It all started in 1954 at Cedar Lake. We had rented a cottage for a week. It was so close to Chicago that we had visitors almost every day. This day the O'Neill family and the Moody family joined us for the day. Gene and Ed O'Neill were chasing Irene, threatening to throw her in the lake, clothes and all. Irene pulled off Gene's Army issue sock, put a couple of handful of sand in it, and chased them, tried to hit them with the sock. Not succeeding, she went back to the cottage. The next day we found the sock tied to the bumper of our car.

A year or so later we were invited to the Moodys for dinner. It was December 10th, Irene's birthday. We slipped the gift-wrapped sock under the pillow on the bed while we were disposing of our winter coats. That night, when the Moodys were retiring, Irene found the box under her pillow. Thinking that Bernie was surprising her with a birthday gift, she was delighted, opened the box and found a ratty old sock, still with sand in it. She immediately called Gene and cussed him in a very unladylike fashion.

One year the Moodys had an exchange student from Rome who lived with them for the whole school year. She was a delightful girl (even if she did sort of monopolize the bathroom in the Moody household). Her name was Loretta Becchetti. She became another Moody daughter and called Irene "Mommy." She went to St. Willibroard High School with Karen and Marcia. She was automatically included along with the Moody family in the invitation to Mary's wedding. We all went to the train station to say good-bye when the

school year was up and it was time to go back home. One day we received a package in the mail from Rome, Italy, with no return address. There was the sock again.

Years went by and Bruce Guilbeault, who was a submariner stationed in Hawaii, came home on leave. When he left he had the sock in his baggage. Ardis, Bruce's wife, enjoyed the sock story, because she had a similar thing in her family. They would sneak a heavy stone into a departing guest's baggage, which they wouldn't find until they had lugged it all the way back home. Needless to say, the sock was sent to the Moodys from Hawaii. So, it went back and forth. I can't remember all the times, although Irene remembers it coming as someone's graduation gift.

One day when all of us were going to the Moodys for a party, Gene bought a couple of six packs of beer to take to the party. He took one can out, removed the bottom with a can opener and poured out the beer. (Probably he drank it. He never wasted anything.) He put the sock in the can, filled it with water, and soldered the bottom back on. I can't imagine why, but any time we were to Moodys, people were very suspicious of anything we brought. So every time they opened a can, they sipped it very cautiously or poured it into glasses, so pretty soon the sock was discovered.

So, it was back to the Moodys. One time Irene brought a cake to a party at our house. When I attempted to cut the cake there was an obstruction in the middle. A can with the sock in it had been baked into the cake.

Another time, the sock, wrapped in Christmas paper was surreptitiously added to the gifts under the Moody Christmas tree.

I worked part-time as a school crossing guard. At Christmas, the children sometimes brought me little gifts. It was never anything special--maybe a handkerchief or little perfume samples. One night, the doorbell rang and there were two of the children I crossed every day. They presented me with a two pound box of Fannie Mae chocolates, wished me a Merry Christmas and left. I was astounded. Nothing like this ever happened to me in my 16 years of crossing kids. I happily opened the candy and passed it around to the family. One of the kids dropped the box and the candy spilled out on the floor. There, instead of a second layer of candy, was the sock. The kids turned out to be related to Helen DeBoer, Bernie's sister. So--we had it back again.

More years went by. One day Irene was at work at the Ferguson publishing company. A box, addressed to her personally, was delivered to her desk. She kept looking at it suspiciously, but didn't open it. Her fellow workers were curious and asked her why she didn't open it. She said, "...because I know what's in it." They kept insisting, so she finally opened it. She was right and I guess her fellow workers thought she had strange friends.

Well, the years went by and the Guilbeault kids thought that after 50 years of putting up with each other, Gene and Marge should have a party. So arrangements were made at Surma's restaurant in a Southwest suburb of Chicago. Later, after the party, we were at the Holiday Inn where most of us were staying (we had moved to Arizona by then). We opened our gifts and guess what? Of course, the sock.



Well, we brought it home to Arizona with us and it stayed in Gene's dresser drawer for more years while he tried to think of something different to do with it. I guess nothing good enough occurred to him. After Gene died in August of 1996 in Minnesota, young Gene, my son came home with me and helped me with cleaning out Gene's closet and dresser. There in the top floor of the dresser was the sock. I think then that my husband gave me the inspiration for the perfect ending for the sock. Since you were there at the family reunion in August of 1997, the tree planting memorial, I'll let you take it from here. But Irene never told anybody what the note in the box with the sock said. It said, "All the way from heaven. You'll never beat this."

4.0 Thomas Christopher:

This is how the story ends. These pictures I took at Gene Guilbeault's Memorial Service. They show the final passing of the sock: Irene getting the sock for the last time, contemplating what to do with it, and burying it with the memorial tree.

