

Aunt Bertha Visits Denver

By Marilyn K. Moody

The photo is blurry, but it's clear enough.
It's my sister's backyard wedding 1981.
Aunt Bertha traveled from Illinois 15 hours
in a hot car with no air conditioning.
She suffered Kansas.

Aunt Bertha wore her precisely pressed best
churchgoing suit—the pink one with fancy fabric buttons
rouged and powdered cheeks looked like matching roses
she'd sprayed stiff her gray permed hair, ignored aching
bunions, slid her feet into pinching tight white pumps.

We thought of her as old then; but now she wouldn't be.
Aunt Bertha didn't drink except for a glass of Mogen David
wine mixed with 7-Up on Christmas Eve. When the young man
mockingly passed her the vodka bottle—she didn't hesitate.

She crooked her elbow.
She downed that shot.
She grabbed the bottle.
She poured another shot.
She barely breathed.

Shot glass glistened in the sunlight. Vodka streamed. Her smile
looked like the devil pasted it on. Or maybe it was just
the smile she conjured up when she decided to do whatever
she damn well wanted.

I miss Aunt Bertha.
I miss all the Aunt Berthas.