



My maternal grandmother, Maud Ray Ridley Ortega (1891-1985) was my first hero. She was my bridge to my ancestors. I lived with her when I was a boy, and we would spend countless hours sitting at her dining room table, where she would spread out a treasure trove of archival family photographs dating back more than a century. And I would ask her about our ancestors in each of the pictures, about who they were, where they came from, what did they say, and how did we come to be?

Affirming the remarkable accuracy of the ancient oral tradition as a method for preserving family history, everything Maud told me turned out to be true. I absorbed this history like a sponge, memorizing names, dates, places, people, and events. She never tired of talking about them and I never tired of asking her questions. We made for an odd but devoted couple, and I consequently became the family historian at a young age.

I owe much of who I am, and whatever I have accomplished in life, to her. Largely, because of her enduring faith in me. And as I grew up, I expanded on the invaluable knowledge she gave me through documentary research, genealogy, and travel.

In her youth, she was the beautiful debutante daughter of a bright and pioneering attorney of color in our county, William Henry Ridley, Esq., who passed the bar in 1891. Ridley had a remarkable legal career that spanned 54 years as a practicing attorney. He was the only attorney of color in Delaware County (PA) for the next 50 years. It was not until 1960 that the third black attorney, Robert A. Wright, was admitted to the county bar. Ten years later, he became our county's first black judge.

Maud's mother was an attractive and mysterious clairvoyant from St. Croix, the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy white New York merchant, George Asa Fink Philips (1831-1885).

What should have been a privileged, comfortable life for Maud Ridley was not to be. She had unknowingly inherited a congenital hearing defect, called Pendred's Syndrome, from her mother, who likely inherited it from her father George Philips.

The full force of this family curse hit Maud in her late teens, just at the time she was being courted by young, promising bachelors vying for her attention. But at that time, people were cruel when it came to deafness and partial deafness, pronouncing one with it as "deaf and dumb." And she encountered scorn and rejection as eligible suitors fell away. She married poorly because of a perpetual lack of better men and better options.

In 1918 she met an married a roaming 18 year old bigamist — Tom Bolden of Pittsburgh, PA, who had changed his surname to "Ortiga" to escape his responsibilities to a wife and son he'd abandoned in Pittsburgh. He soon left the stalwart Maud to raise 8 children during the Great Depression. But she persevered, providing a home for her children and grandchildren for decades. I loved and admired her, and live in her house today.



Above: Maud about 18 months to 2 year, circa 1893. Maud (below) about age 12, circa 1903.



Maud (clockwise from left:) about age 3 or 4, circa 1894 or 1895. About age 18, circa 1908.

Opposite: Maud in the surf at Atlantic City, NJ, about age 20, circa 1911.



Above left: "about age 20, circa 1911. Above right: Maud with father William H. Ridley, Esq., at Delaware County Court House, Media, PA. Standing next to Civil War monument Hotchkiss gun; about age 25, circa 1915. At left: Maud with daughters (l-r:) Dagmar, Rayetta (author's mother at (rear), Josepha (front), Nina. Circa 1922, about age 31. Below left: Maud at Swarthmore Public School, standing at far left in white dress, about age 14, circa 1915.

