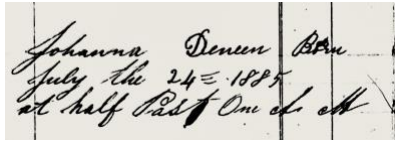


Branch 1 of 7

1. Johanna Deneen—Jo

July 24, 1885–June 5, 1971

Great Grandaunt



Johanna "Jo" Deneen was born on July 24, 1885, in Corning, New York, carrying the name of her paternal grandmother, Johanna Desmond (1822–1898), as well as her paternal aunt. Within her traditional Irish Catholic family,

Jo held the heavy mantle of the firstborn daughter. This role came with the cultural expectation to bear substantial domestic burdens and serve as a moral anchor for her younger siblings. She spent her youth assisting her mother with endless household tasks and childcare—a duty that stretched deep into her adulthood, as the youngest of her seven siblings was born in 1905, when Jo was already 20 years old.

Jo's formal education began attending St. Mary's School which was always within walking distance as the family moved around Corning. Though the 1940 census notes she completed just her first year of high school before entering the workforce, she explored several local industries. By 1910, the census recorded her working as an inspector at the local Glass Works; city records from 1911 show a shift to glove making; and by 1915, she was working as a clerk at a cigar stand. However, a deeper calling emerged. Her obituary notes she graduated from local schools, including the rigorous nursing program at Our Lady of Victory Hospital in Lackawanna. This three-year investment cost \$35 annually, a fee that covered her room, board, laundry, and medical care, setting the stage for her life's work.

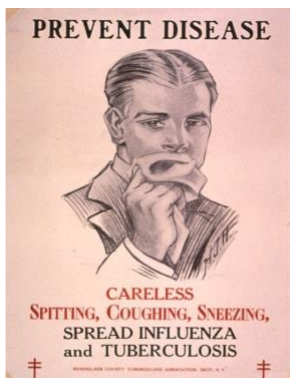
By the time the 1920 census was captured, Jo had entered the dangerous world of respiratory care, working as a nurse at the Iola Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Rochester, New York. Living on-site alongside a community of fellow nurses, doctors, laborers, and maids, she resided in staff housing that featured sleeping and sun porches overlooking the distant southeastern hills and the Erie Canal.

At the time, Tuberculosis (TB)—historically dreaded as "consumption"—was a leading cause of death worldwide, ravaging the lungs and causing chronic bloody coughs, wasting, and night sweats. Following Dr. Robert Koch's 1882 discovery of the underlying bacteria, the medical community popularized a "fresh air cure." The Iola Sanatorium adopted this method in 1914, initially treating patients in heated tents before expanding into a permanent hospital. By the late 1920s, it grew into the largest county TB facility in the state, housing 400 patients.

Jo served at Iola during its pioneering, most hazardous years. Her daily routines required immense physical and emotional stamina. She monitored volatile patient conditions, assisted physicians on rounds, dispensed medications, and managed the patients' basic physiological and nutritional needs. Beyond clinical care, she provided



Jo in her nurse's uniform
circa 1920



Public health campaigns in the 1920s tried to halt the spread of TB.

Family Group: DENEEN | KEOHANE

critical emotional comfort, supervised therapeutic tasks like gardening, meticulously flushed the wards with fresh air, and strictly enforced the rigid daily rest schedules. Because TB was highly contagious, this work was not only physically threatening but also carried a heavy social stigma.

The 1920s brought profound personal loss; Jo's father, Patrick, passed away in 1920, followed by her mother, Julia, in 1929. Seeking a professional change, the 1930 census found Jo living and working at the Hudson County Contagious Disease Hospital in Secaucus, New Jersey.

Her new workplace was situated on Snake Hill (later Laurel Hill) in the New Jersey Meadowlands—a massive, self-contained county complex that functioned like an isolated city. The campus clustered together the contagious disease hospital, a psychiatric asylum, an almshouse for the elderly, a penitentiary, and a functioning rock quarry. There, Jo worked within a highly diverse melting pot; many of her fellow nurses, porters, and doctors were recent immigrants whose native tongues spanned various European languages, all united in the shared, risky task of managing infectious diseases.

As the 1930s began, Jo's siblings had scattered across the region: John and his wife, Rose, were living in Sag Harbor, Long Island; Mary and Anna maintained the family home back in Corning; Kate was raising a family in Buffalo; Teresa was working as a dental hygienist in Buffalo while living with Kate; Frances was transitioning to a new life in New York City.

In the summer of 1932, at the age of 46, Jo undertook a solitary journey to her ancestral homeland. Having lost both of her parents, she boarded a ship for Ireland alone. Unlike her brother John's well-documented trip two decades later, no journal survives to tell us who Jo visited in the Irish countryside or what landscapes she walked. Shipping manifests simply record her return voyage aboard the SS Laconia, departing Dublin on June 26, 1932, and arriving back in New York City on July 5.

By the mid-1930s, Hudson County phased out the Secaucus complex, demolishing the hospital and transferring patients to modern facilities. This closure likely prompted Jo to move closer to family in Buffalo, New York. By

1939, records place her at 26 Brayton Avenue, the same year she filed a legal injury claim against the city. The 1940 census indicates she was not actively working or earning wages as a nurse, yet she maintained a steady independent income—potentially the result of a settlement from her city claim.

A rare personal glimpse survives in a June 1937 letter Jo sent to her cousin Mickey Wren and his wife, Edna. With a touch of dry humor, she wrote:

"I haven't been at the hospital since Jan. 1936—thought it was time—I took a rest—EH! In my old age. So I have been gadding around—have been home since Feb."



Unidentified Nurse and patients at Iola Sanatorium
Rochester, New York circa 1920



Family Group: DENEEN | KEOHANE

In the letter, she extended an invitation for them to visit Corning or Buffalo, noting that Mickey's brother John had recently stopped by. She added a note about family care: *"Anna was quite sick—she is lots better—now—so I hope to go back to Buffalo soon."*

By 1950, a 64-year-old Jo was listed on the census as a resident at the St. Francis Asylum for the Aged at 337 Pine Street near Broadway in downtown Buffalo. Because records show she did

not reside there in 1949, she had likely moved into the home just months prior to the census taker's arrival.

The *REST* of the STORY....

After Jim and Terry Kelly married in 1952, they settled in Buffalo. Jim was studying dentistry at the University of Buffalo, and Terry worked to support them. One day while running errands, they lined up to board a city bus. As the arriving passengers stepped down, a woman warmly greeted Jim, saying, "Why, hello!" Jim friendly replied, "Hello," and she continued on her way. Once they found their seats on the bus, Terry asked who the woman was. Jim replied, "Oh, that was my Aunt Jo." Terry never saw or met her again, leaving Aunt Jo as a brief, fleeting memory from their early years together.



Jo passed away on June 5, 1971, at the age of 85, having outlived her parents, her brother Thomas, and her younger siblings John and Mary. Today, no living great-nieces or nephews hold personal memories of Jo; the oldest among them, Maureen Kelly, was 17 when Jo died. The final quiet trace of her life is found in a brief letter from her baby sister Teresa to their sister Catherine, dated Tuesday, October 3, 1961:

"Ordered Jo's shoes for her they should be in by the first of next week—She asked me to get 9-B—if they are too large—she can put in insoles."

Jo was laid to rest in the same cemetery as several of Cornelius F. Deneen's children, a choice that strongly hints at an intimate, yet-unproven biological connection between her father, Patrick, and Cornelius. Her decades spent tending to patients plagued by the world's most feared contagious illnesses stand as a testament to her quiet courage, profound faith, and an unwavering devotion to the forgotten

and vulnerable. She bore witness to the dignity of life and the acute reality of human suffering.

Children: None.

