

Uncle Elmer (1863 – 1941) and Aunt Mary (1864 -1947) Countryman

Woven into the fabric of our lives are the memories of special people. Two of these people to me were Uncle Elmer and Aunt Mary Countryman. I do not know when I first began to know them but it was doubtless when I was a very small child. They were very special to me as they had been to my mother when she was very young also. They lived in the large house on the hill which overlooked the village of Marshville four miles south of Canajoharie, NY. My mother, Margaret Garlock Barshied was born and lived as a child on the ancient Garlock farm which is now the Canajoharie County Club. Mother had a long walk to District # 10 school at Marshville, a country school where her father had gone and I was destined to attend years later. It was a long cold walk that could be broken by stopping at Uncle Elmer and Aunt Mary's house. There were two other children in mother's family, both older than her: a brother, Benjamin O Garlock, and a sister, Pauline Garlock. I'm inclined to think that mother's childhood had not been a particularly easy one. It's been said that she wanted to be a boy. A rather proper photograph survives of her dressed in boys clothes. The Countrymans had no children. Uncle Elmer owned or at least had life use of an old Countryman farm roughly two miles toward Marshville from the Garlock farm. The Countryman farm was to descend to any children they might have, however that was not to be and it became a tenant farm from which uncle Elmer derived a small income. I know that was the arrangement during my childhood and I believe it was the same when mother was a girl. So the big house on the hill another mile or so toward the school was where mother and I, years apart, would find uncle Elmer and aunt Mary. I never knew either to be employed. Quite probably income from the farm and possibly some money that came down to Aunt Mary from her family was sufficient to sustain a lifestyle that would be considered primitive to us. Even when I came onto the scene there was no inside bathroom, a hand pump delivered water to a black cast iron sink, but there was by then electricity and a coal burning furnace in the house. I know that there had been carbide gas lighting, between kerosene lamps and the installation of electricity. Even when I first began going there in the early 1930s the furnishings were the same as they had been years before. The parlor was reserved for special company and funerals. There was a small hall, sitting room and kitchen downstairs. Three bedrooms upstairs and a magic door for a small boy that led to adventures in the attic that held the treasures and cast offs of past years.

At this point I would like to digress to explain my relationship to Uncle Elmer and Aunt Mary. No they were not my mother's uncle and aunt. There was no actual relationship other than the love that passed between them. The strange situation is that my father thereby I also were related to Aunt Mary. Her father Augustus Shineman was an older brother of dad's grandfather Frederick Shineman. Augustus came to America from Germany earlier than the other members of the family and was well established on a farm. My great grandfather Frederick and a twin sister arrived as children to be cared for in their older brother's household. My grandmother was Frederick Shineman's daughter. She became the wife of William Barshied so most of the treasures in Aunt Mary's attic came from a branch of my own family. The attic was a favorite place to play on rainy days. Aunt Mary was like a second mother to me and I treasure her memory. Some of the things from that attic and house remain in my possession down to the present. Memories cling to two brown glass goblets that had belonged to Uncle Elmer's

grandmother that he brought to a small boy in the basket with the Dutch cake Aunt Mary baked when the boy was sick. The spice grinder used long ago survives.

It seemed incredible that Aunt Mary had been born before the Civil War was over. The dishes that she called Strawberry Luster Ware that I first saw in attic were her father and mother's wedding present 1846. She refrained from selling to an antique dealer. Later they were given to me. As I pass them on the sideboard they remind me of a very special old lady, Aunt Mary.

Skip Barshied

Stone Arabia

February 1, 2008

Epilog

Late in the night only a few hours after I wrote the foregoing I awoke to the realization that this story could not be left with only the transfer of material possessions. Aunt Mary left me so much more that cannot be easily described. Memories that have enriched my life.

Both Aunt Mary and Uncle Elmer had come from Seebers Lane farm families who were possibly not wealthy but were not poor either. Their two families had lived only a short distance apart. Aunt Mary was one of two daughters and six sons in the Augustus and Eleanor Shineman family.

As a small boy before being old enough to go to school I was sometimes left at the house on the hill to be watched out for. Uncle Elmer was yet alive. He had a strange characteristic. Through habit his tongue almost always emerged a short distance through his teeth. Both of these folks were headstrong from the long years they had lived together. I never heard any real arguments but I remember an unusual solution to one debate. The house had a long front porch and a smaller side one. There was a discussion over which porch they should sit on one day. The problem was solved by one going to each porch. Too bad all disputes cannot be settled that easily. These old folks had a radio that we listened to along with the family cat. This was a highlight of the day. We listened to Christmas music as that favorite holiday approached. Uncle Elmer passed away when I was eleven years old in 1941. That was the only funeral I ever attended in the parlor.

I believe that I could do no wrong in Aunt Mary's eyes. In contrast I seemed to feel that I was always doing something wrong at home and being punished for it. So Aunt Mary's position with me was an enviable one for me. Aunt Mary's hands seemed never idle. She was baking her wonderful cookies or Dutch Cake for all to enjoy. Knitting and other needlework were favorite jobs. Wool mittens were made to keep my hands warm. She made a great number of knit "baby sacks" as she called them to be sold to some big New York City store. The knitting action had become so second nature that she continued even after she dozed off. I believe the result was a mistake that required unraveling before she could continue. As in much of that generation hands were seldom idle. One peculiar thing I remember those old hands doing to pass away time was linking the fingers together and revolving the thumbs around one another.



Uncle Elmer and Aunt Mary Countryman

The Shineman families including my grandmothers were very religious. In Aunt Mary's bedroom where I was put to sleep when I stayed overnight was a large picture of a cross. If it was difficult to get me to sleep Aunt Mary sung "Onward Christian Soldiers" or "The Old Rugged Cross". The latter when I hear it after so many years still brings tears to my eyes. About 1942 Aunt Mary left her home at the big house on the hill to live with us. She left this earth on July 12, 1947. Many times she saw me come in from

walking to school or riding downhill in cold weather. Memories of the warm house and her warm heart will always be with me.

Skip Barshied

February 2, 2008.

February 20, 2008

An addition to my story about Aunt Mary and Uncle Elmer Countryman

From the time I was a small boy I was allowed to rummage through drawers and most everything else at Aunt Mary's. In a small drawer of her dresser were some things she cherished. Her father's watch with A Sh engraved was there. I gave it to Gary Shineman because it belonged to his great great grandfather who took in my great grandfather and his twin sister when they were young. Aunt Mary's sister's Ella's watch was there. I have kept that to this day. There were other trinkets there also. A pair of earrings and a matching pin were among them. I know the earrings show in the photo of Aunt Mary's mother. I may have given the earrings to Gary also, I am not sure. I ran across the pin recently and am sending it on to Betty Lawler as a gift. She is a much nearer relative to Eleanor Shineman than I am.

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