

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FAY AGARD OPPERMAN (Up to high school graduation)**

For a long time now I have been turning over in my mind the possibility of writing down a sort of autobiographical retrospect, not because my life was either unique or significant, but because it is a small part of the cosmic experience and because in the reminiscing I may provide for my children and grandchildren an open window on a time that was different and may never come again.

As I recount incidents of my own life I would hope, at the same time to reveal aspects of the world in which I grew.

To begin – I was born on June 2, 1915 to Lindsay Hoppough Agard and Ivan Hinckley Agard in the village of Little Valley, New York where my father, having completed his education at Valaraíso University, was principal of the high school. He was the only brother of Edith and Blanche Agard. Edith had married a Thomas Costello who operated a farm in Livonia Center where they raised four children – Ivan, Genevieve, Marian, and Aretha, who were destined to figure largely in my later life. Blanche had married an Edward Stark, lived in Perry and had two daughters – Mildred, who died at an early age, and Dorothea, who, like my Costello cousins, was to play a role in my later years.

When I was only one year old, my father died tragically of diabetes, just one year before the discovery of insulin. My mother was left without resources so moved, at that point, to the home of her mother, my grandmother, Margaret Hoppough in Hemlock, New York. Margaret Hoppough was, at that time, a widow with five grown children. They were Mabel, Parker, Vivian, and my mother Lindsay. Margaret had a difficult life following the death of her husband, John Hoppough, but had managed to raise her family and support her father, John Scot, by means of sewing and taking in borders. William and Parker were each married and living in Hemlock. Mabel had married Craig Woodruff and lived in Syracuse with two children, Craig and Jane. Vivian was teaching school in Michigan and died a few years later of diphtheria. I remember her vacation visits in Hemlock when she would bring me gifts of clothing and fix my hair with huge hair ribbons.

To revert momentarily to my grandmother's history – she had come to America from Scotland with her mother and father when she was about one year old. (she spoke of learning to walk on two continents) Her father (my grandfather) was a cabinet maker (some of his furniture is still in existence in the Hemlock area) Her mother (my grandmother) Ann Whitworth, was a daughter of well-to-do Scottish parents who felt that she had married beneath her station and communicated very little with her following her departure for America. The one anecdote I recall of her is that she was an excellent swimmer and swam Hemlock Lake on several occasions. Hemlock Lake, at that time, was a resort community and the present village of Hemlock was only established subsequently.

My mother and I continued to reside with my grandmother until I was five years old, at which time my mother died under somewhat mysterious circumstances. She had been working at Knapp's Store and had been dating the local doctor – a Dr. Mills. I recall riding with them on house calls. I am told that my mother either jumped or was pushed from his car. I am inclined to

believe the latter, for she left me a very touching letter expressing her great love for me. My Aunt Mabel always maintained that Dr. Mills was addicted to drugs.

After my mother's death, my Aunt Edith Costello offered to take me, but it was decided that I should remain with my grandmother. I did, however, spend many happy summers and weekends on the Costello Farm in Livonia Center – riding a horse, driving the cows, driving horse fork, hunting eggs, and enjoying the companionship of a large family – Ivan, Marian, Genevieve, and Aretha. The hired man always referred to me as the “least-est one.”

I, of course, attended school in Hemlock – usually in a class of about eight. My memories of those days are a bit hazy but I remember that life was not easy. There was very little money. Blankets were hung across a doorway to limit the heated area to two rooms, heated by a four burner coal stove. I can recall sitting up late to read with my feet in the still-warm oven and light provided by an oil lamp. I then dashed up to a cold bedroom where snow filtered through the windows on to the floor. A feather bed and a flat iron wrapped in a cloth provided some warmth. In those early days, I read avidly everything from my father's extensive library, plus whatever additional books I was able to borrow. Uncle Will, Aunt Grace and Thelma (three years younger than I) lived next door. Uncle Will was supervisor of the town of Livonia and also much interested in sulky racing which took us to many county fairs in the course of a summer.

In high school I gravitated toward athletics, playing softball and basketball. I also participated in dramatics and the production of a school paper. My academic life was enriched by contact with an exceptional English teacher – Gertrude Rix – who inspired a great interest in, and appreciation of, Shakespeare. In fact, my entire academic experience was a positive and beneficial one. New York State education was dictated by the State Board of Regents and the requirements of a Regents diploma was to pass a state devised test in 4 years of English, 3 years of a foreign language, 4 years of history and 2 1/2 units of Math (Algebra, Geometry + Intermediate Algebra) and 3 units of Science (Gen. Sci., Biology, and either Chemistry or Physics). I spent much out of school time playing sandlot ball in a large lot behind our house. It belonged to the Hemlock Canning Co. which ultimately burned down thus ending our snatching of peas from the wagons as they were being brought to the factory. Thus my days in Hemlock came to a conclusion. I should mention, however, the Western movies in the Odd Fellows Hall shown to the accompaniment of Mrs. Caskey's fine piano playing. Children sat in the front and I became official reader of the lines for the entire row. I believe this had to cease at age twelve because I was no longer eligible for free admission. At any rate I graduated as valedictorian and it was decided that somehow I should go to college. My grandmother managed to provide \$300.00 a year tuition at Syracuse University and I was to live with my Aunt Mabel and Uncle Craig. This jump to a student body of 4,000 was quite a change for this girl of 17 who came from little old Hemlock High.



Mabell Hoppough



Jane Woodruff