

Garland

Norma Grover Airmet

[Her memories of Mary Elizabeth Grover Innes]

As usual, should have done this years ago. It's now January, 2004. I started gathering these thoughts together last July but never finished. But to the best of my waning ability, I submit the following:

Everyone should have an Aunt Mary – and a little town like Garland in their lives. Our Aunt Mary exuded stability, love, life, fun, laughter, family, integrity, warmth, work – all the things we so desperately needed.

Aunt Mary was Dad's sister and she was my Mother's sister-in-law and her best friend. The Grovers were already living in Garland when the Heber Clayton family moved there after Mother's mother, Mary Ellen Elmer Clayton, had died.

Mary met my mother, Mary Vilate, in school. She had taken Mother to her home where my dad met her and apparently fell in love with her. (In my imagination, I think Uncle Leslie fell in love with her, too, but because George was the oldest, he got the "girl.") It was sometime then, because of the confusion of the two "Mary's" that they began calling Mother Mayme. Mary and Mayme remained the closest of friends until Mother's death, and after that, she was not only our Aunt but more like a surrogate mother to my brothers and me.

Uncle Tom, Mary's husband, was a pretty special person, too. He never seemed to mind taking in all of Mary's relatives. Even when Grandpa Innes came to live with them for a few months each year, there was always room for us. (I liken Elliot to Uncle Tom. You always knew where he was. If he was not in his dentist office, he was in his garden. If he went fishing, he took the family with him. He was low key, solid and dependable.)

That little two bedroom, one bathroom, house in Garland must have had rubber walls because no matter how many of us descended at one time, there was always room and food. If there was a crowd, we kids may have gone to bed in a "bed" but we usually woke up in a floor bed somewhere – and I mean on the floor. There were no fancy sleeping bags or mats in those days. We were lucky to have a quilt under us and one over us. But what fun it was – always three in a bed, Beth, Bobbie (Barbara May) and me – always giggling, always close, especially Beth. We were only a year apart. Bobbie was two years younger than Beth.

One of my first memories of Aunt Mary was when they visited us in Hollister the summer of 1924, probably just before we moved to Salt lake. (I feel sure they must have visited us several times before that.) And maybe that was the time that Maurice locked Beth and me in the outhouse because we had been trying to get away from Bobbie and Maurice took Bobbie's side. But the "Aunt Mary" memory is shown in the picture. We apparently went camping somewhere where there was a little stream. All the kids got to go in the water but I had a bad cold and they didn't want me to go in. Aunt Mary (who owned a camera) gave me Uncle Tom's fishing pole to hold over the kids' heads and told everyone I was fishing for "kids." She always made us feel

good.

As I wrote this, it reminded me of something that happened many years later. Our son Wayne had just returned home from his mission and we went to visit Aunt Mary, who, by then, had early Alzheimer's, and was living in a Catholic nursing home in Salt Lake. We were sitting in a visitor's room talking. We were trying to explain that Wayne had just returned from his mission. An old man sitting nearby chirped up, "Been fishing'?" A sweet little Catholic nun who was working there said, "Yes, he's been fishing for souls." Aunt Mary seemed to understand that and laughed with us. Don't know if Aunt Mary always knew us when we visited towards the end, but she told Beth one day, "I may not know who you are, but I know you are somebody who loves me." And love her we did.

Mother and Aunt Mary were close – and we kids were close because we matched up so well. Wayne and Vera were born first before Aunt Mary got married. When Vera died while Dad was on his mission to England, I'm sure Aunt Mary was the one who stood by Mother's side and got her through that terrible ordeal. When Dad got home, Mother had Keith and Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom had Hazel (or Hattie as she was called) and they were close friends. Then there was Maurice for us and Gladys for them. Their friendship didn't have much time to develop as Gladys died when she was 11. Then Mother had me and a year later, Beth was born. Then she went on to have Bobbie, Reid and Marilyn. (As of this writing, only Reid, Marilyn and I are left.)

After we moved to Salt Lake, the Innes's came to see us often. For one thing, Aunt Mary could drive a car! That was pretty special in itself as not many women were driving in those days. And, of course, not every family had a car in those pre-depression days.

At what point I started spending a month in the summer in Garland, I don't recall, but I was probably 9 or 10. Then, Beth and Bobbie would spend a couple of weeks in Salt Lake with us, but those days don't stand out in my memory like the summers in Garland.

To me, Garland was pure heaven. What more could any little girl want than a special Aunt Mary who also lived in a special small town? It didn't even matter that every time I went to Garland, I also visited Uncle Tom's dentist office! As I look back, we were very lucky to have Uncle Tom who took care of our teeth and gave me a life-long habit of regular visits to the dentist (even after I had to pay!). Relevant to nothing, if I died tomorrow, there are two things of which you can be assured: one is that I will have been to the dentist within the past six months, and two being that I will have washed the sheets within the past week! Now is that important or what. . . .

The saddest thing to me is that I don't have many pictures of "those good old days." I'm just going to have to write of different things that have stuck in my mind. (Don't think I'll remember anything at all when I get to the stories of our early marriage!!! Memories are funny, as you know.) It's a lot easier to remember the long ago things.

Natch, the first wonderful memory is of wash day! (My calling really was to be a "washer woman.") I loved the smell of that hot soapy water when, on Monday mornings, we were

wakened up with “take the sheet off your bed; we’re about ready for that load.” In those days, you took the bottom sheet off for washing, then used the top sheet for the bottom with a clean sheet for the top. Actually that was not a bad idea but it wouldn’t work today what with the box corners. However, we may have to figure out some new measures if our water shortage continues.

Washing was a day’s work. You didn’t just turn a few knobs and load the machine. The water had to be boiled on the old coal stove and taken to the porch so there was always a big boiler full steaming away, and one batch with “bluing” in it for whitening the sheets. But you haven’t lived until you’ve fed the clothes through the clothes wringer. We fought for our turn – and a wonder everyone came out with all his fingers. Then we’d take the baskets out to the clothesline. It was then I learned that “a good shake at the line was worth an hour at the ironing board.” Aunt Mary taught us to hang like things with like and to me it was a beautiful sight. I loved it. Perhaps it was the stability or the discipline of it all – or that it was a family project cause everyone helped. Monday was always wash day and it was fun. At Aunt Alice’s, it was drudgery. . .

The washing machine itself was one of the most important things on the big back porch that had been closed in with windows to make another room. It had a wooden cover with a skirt on it which was set aside on Monday. Every other day it was the catch all for everything that was lost or looked for. I can still hear Aunt Mary saying, “Look on the washer. . .”

That big back porch was where we lived in the summer. It had two double beds and a big dining room table where we ate all our suppers. . .suppers that were sometimes just bread and milk, little green onions, sliced tomatoes, corn on the cob, cucumbers sliced in vinegar – all out of Uncle Tom’s garden. Aunt Mary made bread practically every day of the week except on wash day. Then when Uncle Tom came home for lunch, he would say, “Well, guess somebody has to go to the store for some laundry bread,” dragging out the laundry to l-a-u-n-d-r-y! It was his imitation of Wonder Bread – the wonderful new sliced bread!

And Beth and I would take the nickel and run the few short blocks to town for the Wonder Bread. I have since wondered why he didn’t pick up the bread on the way home from his office, but pondering this, I’m sure there was a method to his madness. It gave him time to rest a bit while listening to “Amos and Andy” and “Ma Perkins” on the radio before eating lunch and walking back downtown to his office.

Although the Wonder Bread was quite a treat, there was nothing ever to compare with Aunt Mary’s bread. She made many loaves at a time, one of which we always got to tear off the crusts all around and spread it lavishly with butter and homemade jam - - - or make sugar bread!

We ate a lot of bread and jam in those days. My favorite was raspberry made from the berries we picked in the big patch that was enormous and grew way taller than any of us. Before you went to pick the raspberries you had to pull cotton stockings over your arms and legs so you wouldn’t get scratched.

The raspberry patch reminds me of Uncle Tom’s garden. I’m sure it was therapy for him after

working on people's teeth all day. He grew everything and it was the mainstay of our diet. Aunt Mary must have kept a few chickens, too, but they were never allowed to run all over the yard like Grandma Grover's did in Salt Lake when they lived on California Avenue. I'm sure we had beef once in a while but it wasn't something I craved. Uncle Tom probably was paid in beef and produce for some of his dental work since he took care of everybody whether they could pay or not. But I know we never went to bed hungry.

As did everyone, Aunt Mary did lots of "canning" of fruits and vegetables. One of the best smells in the world in the late summer was that of chili sauce and ketchup simmering on the stove. Home canned peaches and pears were delicious and a beautiful sight lined up in neat rows on shelves in the basement.

Aunt Mary always wore a clean starched cotton dress called a "Hoover" apron. It was a wraparound dress – perfect for being thin or pregnant. Very functional. (If I had a computer I would like to research that dress. I feel sure it was named after President Herbert Hoover or his wife. As you remember, he was President before the great depression.) Every afternoon, she would put on a clean one.

We all wore starched cotton dresses – not cute little shorts or T-shirts. We'd worn coveralls when we were little. Every afternoon, after the chores were done, we, too, put on a clean dress, having worn in the morning the dress we had worn the day before. I don't think we fretted over "what to wear." There simple weren't a lot of choices.

Tuesday was ironing day. We learned early how to iron, starting on handkerchiefs and pillow cases, graduating later to ironing our own dresses. But when there were three of us taking turns, I don't think we considered it a chore.

I'm sure Aunt Mary had a vacuum – it was probably a Hoover! But we didn't use it every day. But ever day we used the carpet sweeper and dusted around the carpet with the "dust mop" (surely didn't have Grab-Its in those days!) We dusted all the chairs and furniture every day and helped take care of Reid and Marilyn. I can still hear Aunt Mary saying, "Somebody go jiggle Mig." We'd put Marilyn on one of the big beds on the back porch and lie down and jiggle the bed until she fell asleep.

Speaking of Marilyn, we were surely at the right age to have this enchanting little creature in our lives. (We were probably too young to appreciate Reid.) But Marilyn was like having a live doll to play with. (She was born on my birthday when I was nine years old so she was just right to play with that summer.) We thought one trick was especially funny. Aunt Mary would give her a bath in a little tub in the kitchen. She would spread newspapers on the floor and tell someone to turn on the tap in the sink. Sure enough, Marilyn would hear that running water and wet on the newspapers before Aunt Mary put her in the little tub!

But life was surely not all "chores." The days were long and sunny and we didn't have a care in the world. Every afternoon after cleaning up we would walk downtown to wait for the train to come in and then to the post office to get the mail. Some days we would walk over to Aunt

Vin's (my mother's sister) to visit a little. They had cows and usually there would be pans of milk waiting for the cream to come to the top. Aunt Vin would always offer us a glass of warm milk. I loved it but Beth and Bobbie always declined. (Makes me gag right now just thinking about it, although I do like a little glass of milk warmed in the microwave if I can't sleep.)

Aunt Vin and Uncle George Henry had a big house and a wonderful big barn. If the cousins, Glenn, who was about my age, and Veryl, Keith's age, were working around the barn, they'd let us play in the loft where the hay was stacked. We'd jump out the big opening in the loft down onto the pile of hay, sometimes jumping right into a little family of baby mice! Uncle George was a real character. He was a volunteer fire fighter for Garland and beware anybody who had a fire cause Uncle George had a heavy hand with the hatchet. From the stories I heard, he destroyed more than the fire did. Of course, I never saw him in action but he did have a reputation for being a fierce fire fighter!

Aunt Vin was a wonderful lady but I never felt as close to her as I did to aunt Ruth or Aunt Mary. But she was always happy to see us and it was at aunt vin's that Mother spent the last week of her live with Vin caring for her.

Some afternoons we walked won to the East Canal to go swimming. I can't remember Hazel or Keith or any of the older kids being with us, but I'm sure they were. Beth, Bobbie and I would never have been allowed to walk that far by ourselves. Don't think we went too often but two things stuck in my mind. We must have been a little bit careful cause I don't remember anyone getting in trouble or nearly drowning, but I don't know how we didn't all end up with E-Coli (or worse). Perhaps that hadn't been thought of. Maybe we didn't put our faces in the water. I know I didn't cause I couldn't swim. Btu one time, I was just standing there and turned around to look the other way and a great big dead sheep came floating along right under my chin . . . yuk.

But it was walking home from the canal one day that I really got mad at Beth – probably the only time in our lives. Apparently, there were a lot of kids and she was probably goaded on a bit to tease the “city kid.” She put an angleworm down the back of my dress! It got the desired result, I guess, cause I started crying and jumping around while they were all laughing. I really don't think Beth would ever had done that on her own. I stayed mad for a couple of days but it couldn't last. We were too close to stay mad long. But my feelings were really hurt.

A better treat than the East Canal was a trip to Udy Hot Springs. It was fun paddling around the shallow end. One time, however, must have been some kind of family reunion because my folks were there as well as Grandma and Grandpa and lots of other aunts and uncles. Some of the kids started jumping off the diving board and swimming to the side, some with help if they needed it. I finally got up the nerve to try. I stood on the board while Keith and Dad dog paddled below ready to catch me. You know how it is when you're scared – wanting to do it but not wanting to. Keith and Dad were about exhausted when all of a sudden I jumped. When I came sputtering to the top, Keith grabbed me and I pushed him under, then I pushed Dad under until they were both about to drown. Finally, Aunt Mary could see they were in real trouble. She was a good swimmer and came to the rescue and pulled me to the side. Believe me, I never did that again.

Will never know, in later years, how I got up the nerve to water ski, as water of my head has never been my cup of tea. I've always wanted to go back to Udy Hot springs to see how big (or small, probably) it really is or how far to the side!

I was such a scaredy-cat, no wonder I liked playing paper dolls better – or “player papas” as we called it. Sears Roebuck catalog was wonderful and Aunt Mary let us cut up all the old ones. We'd but out whole families and play for hours. It didn't matter that the paper ladies all had different faces, it was their dresses that counted and we each had a shoe box to keep them in. We all had great imaginations and took our “ladies” traveling all over the world. Can't think now how we would have thought of New York or Paris – where did we learn all that?

Sometimes we slept out under the lilac bushes, with the sun waking us up in the morning. Or on the front porch which was a wonderful place especially if there was a big rainstorm. We loved watching the lightning from our cozy nest under the quilts.

Waking to the smell of new cut alfalfa was heaven. There were fields of it behind Aunt Mary's house and that smell, to me, is Garland. I should ask Elliot about the difference in alfalfa and wheat. I don't know now and I surely didn't know then, but in August, they celebrated “Wheat Days” where they brought in carnival rides and food booths. That was great fun except for the year Beth and I had a crazy experience. Uncle Tom used to make a little wine in the kitchen and then it had to be taken down the basement to be bottled or aged or whatever. Beth and I were going to earn a quarter for doing this. It was in open containers and we couldn't resist a sip or two as we carried it down the cellar steps. It tasted so much like grape juice that it was really pretty good. I remember getting pretty giggly and spilling here and there on the cellar steps. But when we finished, we cleaned up and walked downtown to celebrate Wheat Days. The first ride we tried was some sort of whirling thing and that was a huge mistake. All that “grape juice” started whirling in our tummies and we were two miserable little girls, up-chucking all over the place. As I remember, we weren't too popular about then. As I said, “Wheat Days” was not a lot of fun that year.

As we grew older, we “played out” at night. There was a big streetlight in front of Aunt Mary's and it was a gathering place. The boys came from all over town on their bikes and there were a couple more girls right in the next block so there was quite a gang of us. We played Hide and Seek, Annie-I-Over, Rover Red Rover, Mother, May I and a lot more whose names I've forgotten. I wonder now that Uncle Tom never got mad cause the garden was a favorite place to hide, especially in the pea patch, eating all the while. We even peeled off the outside layer of turnips and ate them raw (with a lot of dirt attached, I'm sure). And the gooseberry bush was a good place. Have never tasted gooseberries since and wonder why we liked them. They were sour and made your mouth pucker up really bad.

When we really discovered “boys,” we used to ride on the handlebars of their bicycles down to the sugar factory at the end of town. Or we played “Spin the Bottle” on Jack Drigg's front porch (his father owned the confectionary when we had money for an ice cream) or we took turns telling ghost stories.

But when the front porch light came on, we knew it was time to come in, no matter what fun we were having or if we were in the middle of a game. That was the signal and we knew enough not to argue. If we wanted to go out the next night, we had better obey the rules. It worked fine.

All the time I had been thinking about Garland, one thing kept bothering me. How did we all fit in the car? I would usually drive back to Garland with them after they had been visiting in Salt Lake and that would be a lot of us – Uncle Tom, Aunt Mary, Hazel, Beth, Bobbie, me, and later Reid and Marilyn. I thought perhaps we sat on the floor. But, the answer finally came when, just this past fall, I visited Ruth in Arcadia (our “girlie” reunion). While there, we visited this fabulous antique car museum – and there was the answer. The cars had “jump seats” – a little seat that pulled down from the back of the front seat. Of course, we didn’t have seatbelts so we could squeeze four in a seat. I had forgotten, for sure, about jump seats.

We didn’t mind being crowded, I guess. That was part of the fun. But it was always a nice break when we stopped in Brigham City to stretch our legs. Sometimes we just stopped by the Courthouse where we played on the lawn or waded in the little stream that ran along side. Sometimes, we visited their friends, the Roberts (funny that name comes to me when I can’t remember some of our friends’ names). That was fun because they had a Victrola and they let us play the records while they visited. Our favorite had “The Doll Dance” on one side and out of the blue it just came to me that the other side was “Nola.” We played each side over and over and danced all around the room. My love of dancing has always been there. Sadly, poor Mr. Roberts stuttered and I’m ashamed to say we mimicked him terribly after we left there – and they were so nice to us, always letting us play the Victrola and usually giving us a cookie and a cold glass of lemonade to last us until we got to Garland.

I could go on for many more pages but must get on to real life. Suffice it to say that Aunt Mary and Uncle Tom were wonderful influences in our lives. All of us loved them very much and we knew that they loved us. Years later, after Elliot and I were dating and Aunt Mary had moved to Salt Lake, she became ill and needed a blood transfusion. Elliot turned out to be a perfect match and gave her the blood she needed. After that, Aunt Mary always said that she and Elliot were blood relatives and she loved him as much as she loved us.

I’ll never smell rain on a dusty road without thinking of Garland and our Wonderful Aunt Mary. .