

Alone Planting in the Garden – A Time for Reflection

The traditional Memorial Day, or Decoration Day that used to be celebrated on May 30 is fast approaching. It is time to plant the garden with the hope that very late frost will not cut short the life of the small plants as they emerge from the ground. I cannot consider myself a good gardener, but somewhere within me there resides a tradition from my forbearers that were. My wife Ethel was the real gardener from my immediate family. Sometimes I was allowed to drop the corn or pumpkin seeds or even to cover them, but she had a certain exacting ritual which I was not included in beyond a certain point. All had to be absolutely perfect with the goal of producing the best vegetables and flowers for her many customers and to help feed us for the months ahead. Since Ethel's passing in 2006 my gardening has emerged but not to as great an extent or as practical. The gladiolas remained to be given to the nursing homes and the other friends who enjoy them. The zinnias still thrive from the seeds saved from year to year from plants Ethel planted. From about this point I deviate from the practical. A small patch of flax is planted that has no use except as a reminder that in bygone times it was the flax fibers that were spun into linen thread. The white Native American corn I plant is in remembrance of those who gave the first seeds of it to our European ancestors when they reached our shores. The pumpkin seeds I planted in the corn and the beans nearby remind me that they were called the three sisters by the native people.

As I walk among the rows to plant the seeds my thoughts turn from the garden of my own generation to those who preceded me. From my earliest memories my Father was the master gardener. The fertile soil along the creek where we lived near Marshville, NY came alive under his hand. I do not remember mother having any great part in the gardening experiences beyond the big job of cooking the vegetables for the everyday table and the even greater job of preserving vast amounts to sustain the family over the months that the garden lay dormant. Mother also had a great love for the flowers. Father's dedication to the garden came from deep within his ancestry. I believe it was his mother's family, the Shinemans, who were the really dedicated gardeners. However, there still remains a yellowed photograph of a very old lady in the garden at the Barshied farm in Seebers Lane. The lady is my Great Grandmother Katherine Dussell Barshied (1835-1915) wife of Nicholas Barshied (1835-1919). Both immigrated to the United States from Germany in the mid 1800's. Their son William Barshied, my grandfather, was born in 1867 and passed away in 1949. My father often said that as he was growing up on the Seebers Lane farm Grandpa would send him to help his mother Augusta Shineman Barshied (1872-1940) in the garden. A very personal memory from one of these times remained with him all through his life. His mother said, "I was not happy when I first knew you were coming, but I'm now so glad you did". The dedication to gardening remained with my Father his entire life. When he just could not do it anymore my Brother Robert and I did it for him, but I'm not sure it was up to his standards. In remembering the Barshied-Shineman gardeners I would be remiss in not making reference to the three others who I knew very well. My father's sister Carmeta was a lifelong lover of flowers even though she had very limited space other than window space in the apartments where she lived in Rome, NY. Grandmother Barshied's sister Lena Shineman Snyder had an outstanding flower garden including wild flowers where she lived in Canajoharie. I cannot end these remembrances of my gardening relatives without thinking of Grandmother Barshied's brother George Shineman (1876-1965). In the twilight of his life I knew him very well. Behind his house in the Village of Canajoharie he had a very small garden. I remember him spading the earth by hand and making the little patch thrive. When he could not spade

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and I did it for him. I will not forget him getting down on his knees to weed and struggle with the help of his hoe handle to get back up. Even though he was a lifelong banker he, along with his brother John, tried to help the Shineman farm just west of the Barshied at Seebers Lane to survive. His wife Nell Brown Shineman (1887-1977) told me of the effort to preserve the farm while struggling to keep the bank afloat during the great depression. They never had any children. I hope I helped to make life a little easier for them until their final days.

I've tried to record the names of some of my gardening relatives and forbearers. As I plant a small garden become aware that I am not alone, for there bedside me are the footsteps of those who have gone before me. They make no sound nor any foot prints but nevertheless they are with me.

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