

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF  
FLORENCE MAY TAYLOR DUDLEY  
(1892 - 1969)  
AS WRITTEN BY HER OWN HAND ON

JUNE 15, 1967

"I'm my Mama's little Darlin',  
Don't you think I'm nice and sweet?  
With the roses on my shoulder  
And my muslin dress so neat.

Mama made it just on purpose  
So I could speak to you.  
Like it? Wish you had it?  
I bet you do."

At age 3, I spoke the above piece in church at Christmas time. For this, they took a green ornament from the tree, which was very heavy. Your Mom used to place it on your tree every Christmas, if you remember.

I, naturally, was a church girl and had a contralto voice that was strong. I had been written about in the paper as being a "child wonder", and it had also stated that if they had not seen me, they would have sworn it was a woman singing. My voice was very well developed.

I was the soloist in church and was so little, I could not stand up in the choir, so had to stay on the pulpit with pastor.

When I went on, we had a musical director, Alva Nichols, who led the organist for my singing. He, himself, had a wonderful baritone voice. I was appearing at the United Congregational Church at this time.

I was a Methodist, but sang I guess, in all the churches of Brooklyn and New York.

The Superintendent of my Methodist Sunday School used to take my Grandmother and I to the "Bowery Mission" of which Tom Noonan was the head. I saw some pitiful sights. They used to wander in there for food and shelter.

I sang with the "Volunteer Organist", who had a little history himself. It seems he took to drink and did not have a "sou". He had papers stuffed to his body to keep warm and had no shirt.

This day, we had no music because of main organist was home sick. Tom Noonan asked if there was anyone in the audience who could play the pipe organ. This gentleman raised his hand and at first, they were reluctant to give him a chance. Nevertheless, they did and as soon as he struck that organ, he was "in". He played for many a time and always liked to play for me, for the reason I could read music and had always had a good ear for music. I needed no rehearsals. From that time on, he was noted as "The Volunteer Organist".

I appeared at different functions from then on, such as Masonic and Clubs. The "Marx Brothers" were always on the same bill. I had to go to their home for complimentary tickets, one for Grandma and one for Aunt Martha, as they always traveled with me. The Marx Brothers had a skating act which was very good. I worked for the same agent. I also had worked at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, which they were affiliated with.

My Grandmother - your Great, Great! - had a wonderful contralto voice. She bought all my classic and "sacred" music which cost quite a good deal. She knew I loved "modulation and incidentals" - anything that had changes and dramatic touches. She traded in one place only, which was "Fuchhardt and Belders" in New York. They had always known what she wanted.

It went on this way until age 18. Then, I started to get "ants in my pants" because I felt that I wanted to make more money to try and reciprocate what my dear Grandmother had done for me. She had sort of a dramatic life also: her family belonged to the Dramatic Society, so she knew just how to go about these things. One of her family was the owner of the "Henry Irving Players", also acting in same. When I reached 18 years of age, my wish came true:

I had this wish fulfilled when I spoke to my Uncle George, who was affiliated and worked with the Dudley Brothers. He said, "Okay, I will try to get a hearing for you with Mr. Dudley, as they have a wonderful class of work and will get you in right for something worthwhile".

He spoke to Vess Ossman, who made an appointment for Gramps and Audley to hear me. I got the hearing.

I had my own accompanist, my Aunt's Sister. We all met at Uncle George's home with Gramps and Audley being there. Jean started my music and away I went. They were amazed right from the start and said, "What a voice" and I was "tops". They could hardly wait until reporting to Ossman, (who was Gramps partner on phonograph records).

Right off the "reel", Vess Ossman said he wanted me to go down to the Richmond, Virginia Automobile Expedition at the old "Horse Show Building". If I made good, he would put me at the Martinique Hotel. Well, there was no trouble to that, I knew I had the job. He sent Dad's brother down there to manage the show, with about 14 altogether in the "Troupe". Both Audley and myself were riots, which pleased Audley very much, as he and I received all the write-ups. The Leading Lady was no in it with me. I "had it all over her". Well, it was to the Martinique for me....I was on my way!

They were all so delighted at my success, that they started to get ready for me to make my "debut".

My Grandmother bought me an "Ecru lace dress, over white satin with coral velvet bodice, set with sequins and had matching white satin slippers". I was sure proud of it and was the "cats". My Grandmother knew how to dress, as all her family were that way.

Now for "Show Biz"....

They wrote me up as a "Riot" everynight at the Martinique Hotel and was billed as the "Little Girl with the Big Voice". The "Chocolate Soldier" was playing on Broadway and I was under contract to sing "My Hero" and also "Sands of the Desert", for the whole season.

They wouldn't let me go off the stage, "that's why they said I was a "riot".

Sophie Tucker came two years after. Although, same as myself, she had been before audiences plenty. She went up to "Reisenweber's Peacock Room" and was there for quite some time. She was good with that nostalgic voice and was also a drawing card.

Now then came summer....so, I took a job up in Albany, New York.

I worked for the Keelers on Broadway and Maiden Lane, opposite the Railroad Station. They had a large restaurant and cabaret where I worked. They were swell to work for. In the winter when it was so icy, I had to hold on to all the railings and in the middle of the street were same. This was on Hamilton Street.

When Audley passed away up at "Saranac Lake", it was in that same station that I waited until 4:00 in the morning for the train to come in with Gramps.

He was all alone with no one to help him. He had dozed off, so I had to send a Porter in to locate him. Finally, Gramps stuck his head out of the berth's window and told me to get on the third section of the train that he would meet me in New York. I could have been "knocked down", but nevertheless, I had a private compartment for myself which was quite lonesome. Of course Gramps wanted to get back to New York as soon as possible as he had to make arrangements where to take Audley. Sure enough Gramps was there.

We took Audley to an "Undertakers Funeral Parlor" on West 38th Street. Well he took care of everything. So while in New York, Gramps asked me then and there if I would marry him. He said he needed a "Help-mate". We tried to get married before going down to Washington, but we had to have a license to do so. I had no baggage, but he said I wouldn't need any, as his Folks would take care of me, which they did.

They were just swell to me. His Uncle Bill asked me about my religion, so when I told him I was a Methodist, he said "You're okay with me gal". They had sacred music in the rack and I sang for them. They were just elated and enjoyed it very much. I stayed with Gramp's Cousin Howard and his wife and son, William. Gramps stayed at Uncle Bill's. So when the time came to be married, we had the same Minister that preached services over Audley. He said he knew we would be very happy.....and we were. Quite a romance, wouldn't you say?

After one year or so, came my blessed baby. Was Dad proud of her. Mayor Gaynor's daughter lived opposite us and used to call us "love-birds". At night, when Gramps would come home for the evening, my baby was happy and as soon as she spied her Daddy, arms and legs would start wiggling. He would wave the newspaper to her and she was all smiles and couldn't wait until he picked her up in his arms.

I gave up steady work, as I thought....but, they wouldn't let me retire. The "Precatalen" opened a new place and they wanted me there for the opening. So, Gramps would come and stay up on the mezzanine waiting for me at closing hour. It was getting too much for him, as he did have to get his rest. So, I had to find other means of getting home with friends.

I kept on for quite awhile, until I finally gave up steady work, . Gramps said I could do club work, if I wanted to, and this I did. Finally, I gave it up.

There were numerous other colorful happenings and too numerous to mention, but I feel this has given you a synopsis of my life, which I know you will enjoy reading....I think!

Bye - Bye Sweetie,

Your Nan

....Kiss my babies for me, am exhausted Hon, so will "rest".