

Sally Speaks - Growing Up Sally Swift

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Author: Sally Swift

I was born on April 20, 1913 in Hingham, Massachusetts to Rodman Swift and Elizabeth Townsend Swift. I was named after my paternal grandmother "SarahRodman Swift." I had a first cousin named Sarah Rodman Scutter who was about ten years older than I. Her mother was my father's sister. My parents wanted to name me Sarah and "the deal was" that since my cousin was called Sarah, I would be nicknamed Sally. I had one sister, Agnes Swift, who was five years older than me. She was a wonderful older sister. My sister was a great reader all her life. I seem to remember me always playing while my sister read books.



Photo: Rodman Swift (Sally's father), Sally and Agnes

I think I must have been one determined little child. I remember one time (I must have been pretty small) coming downstairs, after being upstairs with my mother, and saying with great glee to my father, who was in his work room, "panked again." My poor mother had to give up spanking me – it wasn't doing any good. One time, she put me in the coat closet with the door kept slightly open by her fingers so it would not close tightly and I wouldn't get scared. I had to say I was sorry to get out. I would sit there for a while before finally saying to her that I was sorry - just to get out. To myself, however, I would stubbornly say "but I'm not."

My family lived in an area that was not close to many people, so Agnes and I spent a lot of time together – each doing our own thing. Five years is a big difference at that age – but she was very wonderful about letting me tag along with her. I think she helped keep me out of trouble!

When Agnes was in high school, she used to have three or four friends over for a weekend. Our house was located on a wharf and down along the shore a little way was an outcropping of rocks upon which you could climb. This particular time that I remember, Agnes and her four friends went down to the rock to play, and I tagged along. Little sister was a nuisance, but they allowed me to come anyway. When we got over there, at the bottom of the rock was a shelf just about the level of the water. They were hanging out on that shelf to play pirates. The question was - what to do with little sister? Higher up on the same rock, there was another outcropping, three feet across at the most. It was level and looked over the edge of the harbor. So while Agnes and her friends were down on the lower platform, they cunningly put me on the upper platform as the "lookout." I was very proud of the position. What a tricky way to get rid of little sister!

My earliest childhood memory is traveling on the train to California with my mother to visit her parents when I was about four. I can remember parts of the train. I also have a vivid and wonderful memory of sitting on my mother's lap in the living room and her teaching me to sing. We would do this while waiting for my father to come home from work. My father travelled back and forth to Boston by train and then rode his bicycle home from the train station, which was about a mile from our home.

My mother was always involved in reading or writing. She wrote "A History of woman" over the course of the years. My mom had a very involved way of writing, which I found difficult to read when I was growing up. Unfortunately, my mother never succeeded in getting her book published.

My father spent a lot of time with us doing such things as building snow forts, throwing snow in the front yard and of course, taking us on his boats. My father had no sons, so he treated us like sons – we learned all the things he would have taught a boy. We learned how to carpenter; each of us having our own tool chest. I still have the tool chest my father made for his mother after whom I was named. When she died, my father gave the handmade tool chest to me. It has "SRS" carved on it - the initials which I and my grandmother shared for our name, Sarah Rodman Swift. In the summer, my father had a month's vacation and Agnes, then in High School would go cruising with him on the Tyke. I was five

years younger and so stayed with my mother. Mom and I would mostly visit her friends and I had a good time with the daughters of her friends.

As a child, my favorite thing to do was ride horses – at first sitting on back of the garbage man’s horse when I was two or three. Then, when I was a little older, my mother, who was horse crazy, rented a horse for a month in the summer (we rented the same horse every summer for several summers). Mom loved horses and she was having a great time sharing her love of horses with us. She would have been very excited by my creating Centered Riding. Unfortunately she didn’t live long enough to share any of it with me. It’s a shame as it would have been very exciting to her.

The name of the horse we rented was Helen Kingbolt. We kept her up on the hill above us at our neighbor’s barn where we rented a standing stall. Down the road a bit, there was a side road called Martin’s Lane with no traffic on it, and we would take Helen Kingbolt on this road. Agnes had taken ten lessons; therefore she “knew how to ride”. The horse would be skittish with Agnes, but with me, she was always good. I would be led from the house up the road down Martin’s Lane while Agnes walked along. Once we arrived, Agnes would get on Helen Kingbolt and my mother would let me play on the stone walls with cemented tops – they were wonderful to walk on. Agnes would ride down the end of Martin’s Lane where there was a private farm, owned by a widow, that had dirt roads on which Agnes would ride. When Agnes was done riding, she would come back; I would be put on the horse, and we walked home.

Along the main road where we walked home ran a trolley line. Of course trolleys are noisy and they would have a bell to warn people that they were coming. We would usually time it so we would not be on the road when trolley came through. One day, we timed it wrong and the trolley came along while we were on the side walk between trolley and the stone walls that ran along the private property behind the side walk. We heard the “bing bing bing” as the trolley came up behind us. My mother was leading Helen Kingbolt and I was on her. There was nowhere for us to get away. The trolley went close to us and it was very scary. As the trolley noisily went by, Helen Kingbolt stood still, trembling, but she never moved. She was a saint! If Agnes had been on Helen Kingbolt, it probably would have been a very different story, but for some reason, Helen Kingbolt always took care of me.

It was the early days of cars when I was growing up. My father had a Model T Ford which he had to stand in front of and crank by hand to start. His second car, a Model A Ford had a self-starter which was a great addition!

My sister and I were home-schooled by our mother until the 7th grade. This was perhaps unusual for the time period in which we lived, however my parents made the decision that we would be home-schooled because they felt that the schools in Hingham, Massachusetts, a small town along the coast on the south shore about 20 miles outside of Boston, weren’t really good schools . From 7th grade through 12th grade, I attended Milton Academy, an esteemed private school located in Milton, Massachusetts. My father had gone to Milton as a boarder and that’s probably why that school was chosen. It was and still is a very good school.

Milton Academy was about ten miles from our home and we had to get there on our own. My father would drive me to school on his way to work and drop me off, but I always got there too soon and had to wait about an hour before school started. When Agnes and I were going to school together, the two of us waited outside until school started. Once Agnes graduated, however, I was alone, and my parents didn’t want me to wait alone, so I had to find someone else to with whom to stay until school opened. The adjustment to going to a formal schooling institution after being home schooled for so many years was not as bad as you would think it would have been. I think this was because even then, I was a very flexible person. I enjoyed school and was glad to be going to school. I had a wonderful friend named Elizabeth Firth. Her mother was divorced but had plenty of money, which we didn’t have. When I first knew her, she had climbed out the window during an episode of sleep-walking, walked along the gutter, fell off and hurt herself. Because of this incident, she was using crutches in school. One day, we were both going down the stairs between classes. There were a lot stairs, and they were slippery. I heard something rattling down the stairs. I looked back - it was Elizabeth and all the books she was carrying. I

went back to help her pick up the books and get her on her feet. This was the beginning of a very close friendship between me and “Zibbs” (as we called her) that lasted all the way through school. We went our separate ways through adulthood, but later in life, when we were in our sixties or seventies, she got in contact with me again. At that time, she was living in Florida. I went down to Florida for several years to visit her until the time she died.

Most of you know that I was diagnosed with scoliosis, lateral curvature of the spine at the age of 7. From the ages of 7 through my early 20’s, I worked with a physical therapist named Mabel Ellsworth Todd. In the next issue, I will tell you more about my work with Mabel and how I feel this led me to Centered Riding.