

TIMELINE (#10) BARBARA HOPPS' ACCIDENT

Editor's Note:

After I prepared the original draft of this Timeline, I submitted it to Barbara Hopps, who was living in Portage, Michigan. Her February 2012 remembrances of the June 1955 accident are incorporated in the following account.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. During the summer of 1955, Bob and Mary Hopps lived at 710 N. Vermont, Royal Oak, Michigan. Their family included:
 - a. Three children: Craig Robert Hopps (born 10/12/50), Barbara Ann Hopps (born 4/2/53), and Gary Steven Hopps (born 5/27/54).
 - b. Barbara's grandmother: Bushia (whose real name was Antonina Bojnarowicz). She was born in Poland on 6/13/1885 and was 69 years old at the time of the accident.
2. I had started my second summer working for General Conveyors, located at 420 E. Ten Mile Road (0.5 miles east of Woodward) in Pleasant Ridge, Michigan.
3. I was renting a bedroom in a house at 1029 N. Pleasant St in Royal Oak. It was conveniently located 2.6 miles north of General Conveyors and 1.4 miles west of Hopps' home.

ACCIDENT

A terrible accident occurred at the Hopps' home on Wednesday, 6/29/55, when 2-year-old Barbara's arm was severely burned in an Ironrite Mangle Ironer. The following account combines excerpts lifted from **my 7/5/55 letter** to my parents and **Barbara's February 2012** remembrances. Both set of comments are copied verbatim from their sources:

- a. My 1955 comments are shown in regular type with no brackets.
 - b. Barbara's 2012 comments are shown as quotes and italics.
 - c. My current comments, enclosed in square brackets [xx...xx], are for clarification purposes.
1. Wednesday [6/29/55], Mary was using her [Ironrite Mangle] ironer to iron clothes. She shut the ironer off and went down the block or somewhere to buy something.
"Mom went to buy gas with Craig. Bushia was home with us (Gary and me)."

2. Anyway, little Barbara pushed a couple of the switches and started the ironer.

"I am sure that they never thought a 2-year-old would have any interest or ability, random or not, to do anything with this [ironer]."

3. She then stuck her right arm between the roller and the plate up to her shoulder and really burned herself. In trying to get out she also burned her other hand and her lips.

"Don't remember anyone saying anything about my lips or other hand being burned."

4. The best Bushia could do is pull out the cord.

"Bushia may or may not have pulled out the cord, but I was told she put a clean diaper under my elbow to pad it, since it was stuck to the roller or something, which actually pushed my arm further into the thing. I don't know."

5. But a woman who lived 5 doors away heard Barbara screaming and came and released her arm.

"Do remember that the neighbors called the police 'cos they thought I was being killed due to my screams. Mom says she drove home to find neighbors around and police cars on the lawn. They took me to Beaumont [Hospital] in a police car 'cos they thought my arm was going to fall off. Must've been awful to see. Poor Mom. Poor Bushia. Poor neighbors."

6. Her arm is now in a cast (it will be for awhile) and she has 3rd degree burns. They will know next week if they have to graft skin or not. Bob says that her arm is really a mess. It's really a shame. She and I [Tom] were getting along pretty well together. She doesn't talk too much but when she sees me, she says "Tom - shoot you." Thursday [6/30/55] she didn't complain much at all."

7. *"I do remember a few details about two different operations and once in one of the rooms. Weird since I was 2. Must've been impressive. One was putting the mask back on my face, another was watching them stitch the graft onto the upper portion of my arm. The room memory was seeing 1 or 2 other cribs, and mom and dad nearby. Dad told me that one of the kids in the room died during my stay. He also said that I would go up and down the halls mothering the other kids."*

IRONRITE MANGLE IRONER INFORMATION

To understand how formidable this ironer was, see the following websites and imagine a 2-year old girl doing battle with this monster when the ironing plate is very hot and the roller is turning!

a. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jn3Gle5ivOc> Ironrite Ironer

b. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKN_qNdxMls Similar Portable Ironer

Barbara Hopps additionally made the following comments in February, 2012:

a. *"Don't recall what this thing [Ironrite Mangle Ironer] looked like, but it was way before OSHA, so I'm sure it looked formidable."*

b. *"The video is scary. Amazing that people had those things in their homes. I saw a mangle iron/ironer in The Henry Ford Museum."*

AFTERMATH

As a result of this accident, all of us spent many hours visiting Barbara at the William Beaumont Hospital (13 Mile Rd at Woodward) in Royal Oak. Since Bob and Mary had only one car, my car and I were in constant demand to drive, pick-up, or borrow. The following excerpts were taken from my letters to my parents:

1. 7/12/55 (Tuesday) Letter

- a. Bob and Mary each go to the hospital once a day to see Barbara. Some days I go in the morning and pick up Mary, and she drives me back to work and uses the car. Some days (or nights, rather) I drive Bob up there, and once in a while he uses my car for business.
- b. Friday [7/15/55] is Mary's birthday. I keep asking Bob what I can get for her, but he always answers that they want Barbara back, and that the use of my car will be enough of a birthday present.

2. 7/25/55 (Monday) Letter

Last Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday I did the same thing. Mary took my car in the morning, then Bob and I went to the hospital after work until 7pm (visiting hours end). Went shopping Wednesday night with Mary.

3. 8/11/55 (Thursday) Letter

- a. I've been to the hospital 4 times over the last week and a half. When I go there at nights, we come back to Mary's house, eat supper and watch television until I get tired and go home (about 10:30 or so).
- b. Saturday afternoon we went to see Barbara. She was really jumping around. We went to N. Vermont and had lunch (Bob was working). Then I mowed their lawn and washed my car. After Bob came home, we had supper.
- c. Another skin graft on Barbara today. That won't be good enough. There isn't enough flesh on her elbow. She'll get out in a couple weeks and will have to go back in about 6 months and have her arm strapped to her side, until the flesh from the side grows onto her arm.

4. 8/17/55 (Wednesday) Letter

- a. Wednesday night after work, I went to the hospital and spent the rest of of the night at Mary's.
- b. Back to N. Vermont and we went visiting Barbara until 1:30. Came back and ate, and they went back to the hospital.

5. 8/25/55 (Thursday) Letter

Tuesday night & Wednesday night went to the hospital and spent the rest of the evening at Mary's. Barbara is feeling pretty good, and I guess she'll be getting out of the hospital in a week or so.

The 8/25/55 letter to my parents is my final recorded observation relative to Barbara Hopps' accident. Of course, this story continued on for years and has no end.