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A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

# WESTVIEW

VOLUME 12

NUMBER 2

WINTER 1992

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WESTVIEW'S Editor- Dr. Leroy Thomas

WESTERN OKLAHOMA

# COLORFUL CHARACTERS

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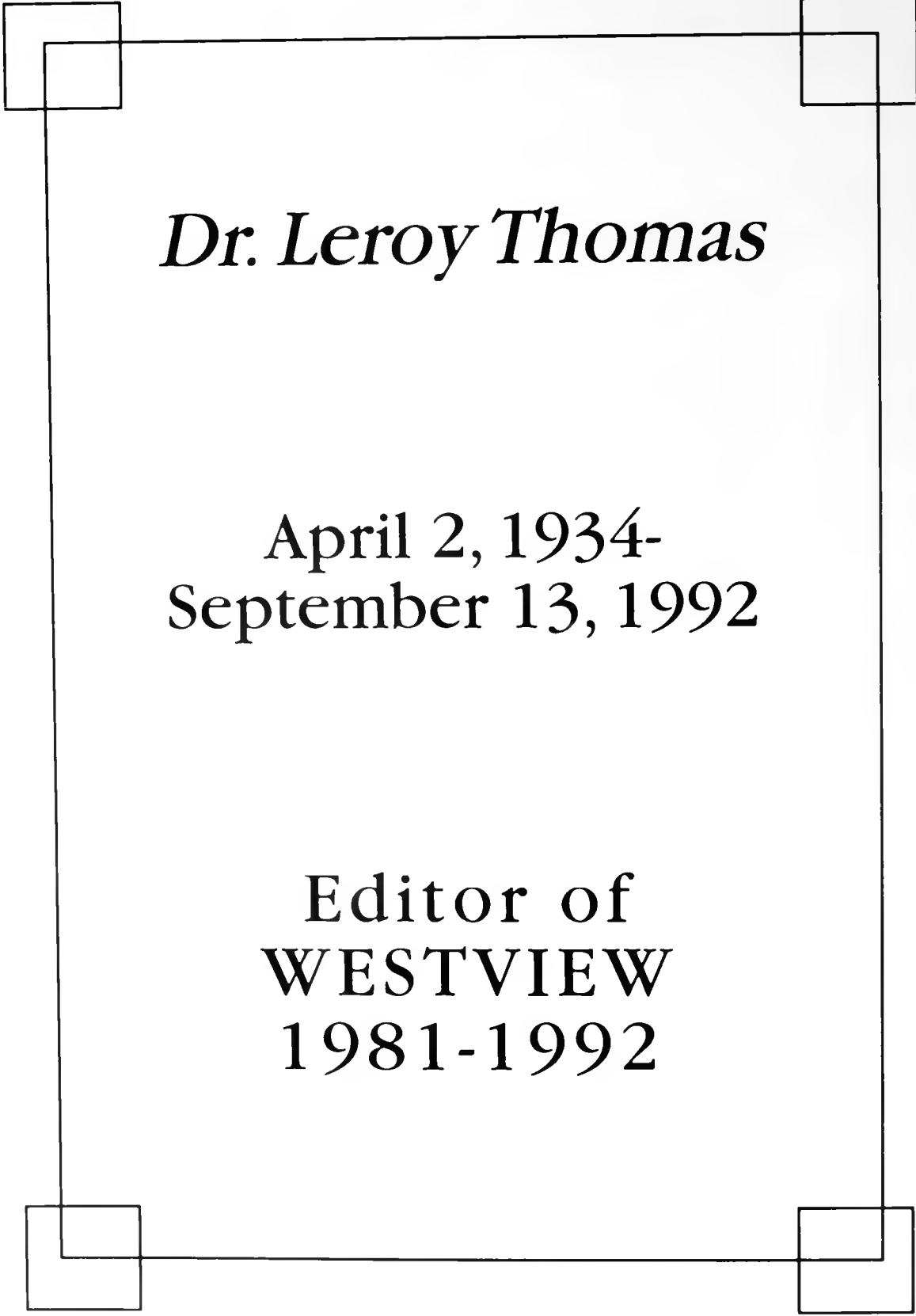
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*Dr. Leroy Thomas*

April 2, 1934-  
September 13, 1992

Editor of  
WESTVIEW  
1981-1992



# Leroy Thomas: *A Memorial*

by Joanna Thurston Roper

The problem of writing about Leroy Thomas is that of not knowing which facet of this multi-faceted man one should choose to write about. If things had gone as they usually do, he would be writing this memorial about me! After all, he wanted to teach until he was seventy and they had to carry him out. Despite the difference in our ages, he was my mentor—he nominated me to the faculty of SWOSU; he guided my first lesson plans there; he accepted all my submissions to Westview; and he confided “secrets” he thought I should know. And we often traded stories from home because we shared a home county—Greer. He never understood my love of baseball, but he accepted it with a “Leroy” twinkle in his eye.

As a parent Leroy has three strands to immortality; as a teacher he has thousands. His students have taught others, who in their turn have taught still others. His effect on people goes on and on like the ripples from a rock tossed into a pond. This year's crop of students will surely miss a unique experience. A former student of his and later close friend recalls watching him walk the halls hand in hand with his daughter Shila. At the time she marveled that this kind, loving father brought such terror to students in the classroom. But as it usually did, the terror turned to respect.

That contrast of nature was evident in other ways. His highly sentimental nature was often back to back with his basic analytical nature, and his energy level made him always interesting. Leroy was paralyzed on the left side from the stroke he suffered at Christmas in 1973; his sense of humor, however, must have been on the right side, for it was hale and hearty to the end.

There was a story for every occasion about Leroy Thomas, and he loved it. In fact, he could always top it with another. One of his favorites was the student who wanted to write a paper about the hardships endured by a young girl and her family when they were held prisoner by the Nazis. He commented that it was a good idea, but he thought Anne Frank had already covered it. She replied,

“Shoot! I might have known Anne Frank was one of your students.”

Friends all knew that he preferred his name to be pronounced LehROY, and we all did. But a jokester (like Gladys Bellamy) could occasionally get away with a resounding LEE Roy.

Leroy was one of the founders of the local writing club called Weatherford Wordhandlers. That was when he first became interested in writing poetry, and his first poetry was dreadful. I can say that with authority because he told us so. But the recent Golden Poet Award didn't come from that early poetry. Those of us in Wordhandlers witnessed the change and the struggle as his expertise grew.

Leroy taught at Southwestern for thirty-six years, longer than anyone in the English department; indeed, only two others on campus have been there longer than Leroy. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1971, which, incidentally, was the first Ph.D. in English ever granted by OSU. Then in July of 1971 he was made full professor. As its first editor, he put out the premiere edition of Westview in 1981. In April of 1984 he received an honorary life membership in Oklahoma Writers Federation, Incorporated, and in 1989 he earned the Distinguished Editorial Award for the Preservation of State and Local History. He said at the time that all his editorial awards must be shared with all those who contributed to Westview. In 1990 he was inducted into the Western Oklahoma Historical Society.

Over the years he remained in touch with all the faculty who came and moved on as well as his former students. One could always go to Leroy for an accurate address.

So Leroy is gone, and a long chapter of SWOSU is finished. But thus far I have not conquered the need to call Leroy when a problem comes up. The urge comes swiftly, and before it's finished, the knowledge is there. But one thing is sure. If Leroy were there, he would have known the answer. ■

# In Memory Of Dr. Leroy Thomas

by his student  
Priscilla Johnson

I wish I could hear you say,  
like your favorite author Mark Twain  
"The news of my death has been greatly exaggerated,"  
then I would know you weren't gone.

Memories of you wash over me,  
filling my eyes with selfish unshed tears.  
The things I remember,  
such vivid memories.  
I must write.  
I must write.

The first day in class.  
"I see you're from Erick?"  
"Yes."  
"Well, have you read Margie Snowden North's book,  
To Chase a Dream?"  
My smart answer,  
"Yes, and by the way have you?"

You laughed.  
A friendship formed right away.  
Mutual respect.

You said,  
"Go home and write a poem."  
I eventually wrote more than fifty.

You said, "Submit."  
I did.  
You published.

Your laughter created my laughter.  
It rang out of me; bubbled over both of us.  
Your courage shaming me,  
when I thought I couldn't do.

You let me serve you,  
because you knew it was not out of pity.

When I embarrassed myself by fixing your collar,  
You told me a funny story  
of a friend who cut your meat.

Naively,  
I thought we'd share years of writing.  
Student to teacher,  
Editor to author,  
Author to author,  
Friend to friend.

Your time here was too short for me,  
maybe too long for you.  
My tears fall.

Because you believed  
in me,  
I must write.  
I must write.

# *Dr. Daddy*

by Tifani Thomas

**O**n December 24, approximately one month before my birth, my father had a massive stroke. The result of this stroke caused him paralysis on the left side of his body. This left him unable to walk or use his left arm. He became helpless.

My dad says he doesn't mind walking a little bit when he sees all the handicapped parking places occupied. What angers me the most is when I see a perfectly capable person jump out of the car and run into the store. If that person can jump and run, then they have no business using the special parking places meant for people like my dad. I just want to hit them. At times I wonder why we have those parking places when most of the time handicapped people cannot use them. This is one way my father's and all disabled people's rights are abused.

When I go places with my dad, people stare and condemn not only him, but me for walking with him. I do not know why people have feelings like this. Growing up with a disabled person has made me sensitive to the reactions of others to him. I see the able staring with looks of disapproval upon the handicapped. My dad may not be able to run and swim anymore, but at one time he could. People do not realize that handicapped people, especially those not born handicapped, have to overcome many obstacles such as relearning to walk, talk, and accept their

situation. We should not separate the able from the disabled; equality matters. Physical ability should not stand in the way.

Even though some people are inconsiderately unaware of the troubles that handicapped people have, aware people have come up with simple solutions. Wide doors, ramps, special cars, and elevators make it possible for people in wheelchairs and with leg problems to get around more easily. This calms my mind to know that different possibilities make handicapped people's lives easier.

The people born handicapped or those handicapped as the result of an accident should have the feeling that we as a community will not condemn them. Like my dad, all other handicapped people in the world hurt when scorned or laughed at. It often hurts me too.

Through the years I have seen my father get worse and then get better again. Jealousy often hits me when I see other fathers who can participate in sports, mow lawns, and even fix cars. Also through the years I have seen myself grow closer to my dad and love him even more. I learned to walk with my dad and a special bond formed between us, so when I look at him, and I see all the pain that unsympathetic people place on him, I suffer too. ■

*(Note: Ms. Thomas wrote "Dr. Daddy" in October 1991.)*

# She Was A Colorful Teacher

by C.K. 'Ken' Shroyer

My favorite teacher was something special. She was my aunt on my Mother's side and the very first teacher I ever had. I really believe that I got more from Aunt Eula than I ever did from any 10 books I've read. You know, to be a real good teacher one must first be a good human being.

Actually, Aunt Eula was a diplomat, a practical nurse, a decorator, a fight referee and a politician all rolled up into one neat, pretty person. She was really a psychiatrist without a couch, a babysitter to us beginners, a nurse for all our aches and pains and a quiz program expert to eight different grades in a western country school.

Her days were filled with school bells—young chatter—chalk dust—waving hands—questions—and worried parents. No, really, my parents didn't worry when we were in that rural school some 60 years ago. They knew we were safe and would get the best instruction and Christian foundation any kid could ever possibly get, back then.

Aunt Eula had to know how to blow small noses, teach in fractions, put on galoshes, find lost mittens in dark cloak rooms—and make parents feel good at parent / teacher meetings. She could quickly stoke up that old pot belly coal burning stove located in the center of our one room classroom, and she could fix the hinge on the front door when it banged loose on a windy day.

Yep! Aunt Eula was the future of the world with a ruler in her hand—she was progress with a pencil in back of her ear—she was underpaid, unappreciated at times,

harried and truly overworked. But she gained her pay in special satisfaction. Secretly she admitted, "I have the greatest job of all."

She knew all about baseball—grasshoppers—little boys—snakes—young love—and how to live three months of the year without a paycheck. She could be found after school taking aspirin, picking up spitballs, cleaning the blackboards, rehearsing plays and just sitting at her desk waiting for strength to get home.

Aunt Eula held the history of the world in the palm of her hands those first four years out there in that little one room school. Too bad she's not still teaching. We don't have schools like that any more to turn this world back around. She's retired now, in her 90's and lives in the big city. May God continue to watch over her and keep her. Thanks, Aunt Eula, for all the things and lessons you gave to us. ■

*(C.K. 'Ken' Shroyer is an Oklahoma University graduate, School of Business Administration, and a retired senior citizen. He made his debut in the Fall 1990 issue of Westview. He received his second Golden Poet Award recently. He and his wife Reta make their home in Weatherford, OK.)*



illustration by Augusta Metcalf

# Augusta Metcalfe

by Elva Howard Deeds

In 1956, I accompanied a writer-friend when she went to Cheyenne for an interview with Augusta Metcalfe, famous sagebrush artist. We drove to her ranch near Durham and there I met a woman who impressed me so much that I have remembered her with great admiration and affection; there seemed to be a natural affinity between us.

During our visit, she introduced her son, Howard, who sat quietly in his comfortable chair while his mother was involved with the interview in another area of the room. He showed me a souvenir artillery shell that he had brought home when he returned from a tour of duty in the Air Corps in World War II. Later, I recalled his name easily, because my maiden name was Howard.

While my friend left the room for a few minutes, Augusta turned to me with a twinkle and warm smile. She "furtively" opened a large trunk and took out some of her stored treasures. She handed me some sheets of stationery and an envelope which she had personalized with some clever sketches and signed with her "brand". Then she quickly closed the trunk lid and got ready to resume the interview. I still have my fond remembrances of our visit. I later learned that Augusta had sketched familiar ranch scenes on letters that she wrote to Howard while he was in Europe. One of the airplanes was dubbed "The Black Cat" in honor of the feline often appearing in her sketches.

When Augusta Corson Metcalfe died on Sunday, May 9, 1971, The Cheyenne Star aptly and warmly announced her passing: **Brush of Pioneer Stilled By Death**. Augusta was pictured riding her horse in a parade at the Old Timers' Reunion in Cheyenne in 1957.

Augusta's services were held in the auditorium at Durham Wednesday afternoon at 2:30, with Leland Burch of Durham, assisted by Raymond Duncan, directing the services. Augusta was buried in Silent Home Cemetery, near Roll.

Some information about the famous artist has been taken from The Star and the Durham newspaper:

DURHAM—Mrs. Augusta Metcalfe, 89, nationally known western Oklahoma artist and member of a pioneer ranch family, moved to Roger Mills County in 1893. Her fame brought national attention, beginning when she won a blue ribbon at the Oklahoma State Fair in 1911. There was a one-woman art show for her at Municipal Auditorium in Oklahoma City in 1949. A year later, she was featured in Life Magazine, which brought her works national attention, with some displayed in New York and cities across the nation. Many of her paintings have become collector's items. "Recognized as one of America's best painters of prairie grasslands, of horses and the men and women who rode them, and of the rugged pioneer way of life, Mrs. Metcalfe was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, November 17, 1968." (Durham newspaper)

A picture of Mrs. Metcalfe, painted by John Metcalf (no relation), hangs in the Black Kettle Museum in Cheyenne. ■

(Elva Howard Deeds, a retired schoolteacher, lives in Sentinel, OK.)



# Augusta Corson Metcalfe

—1881-1971—

## A Memorial Tribute To Oklahoma's Sagebrush Artist

by Elva Howard Deeds

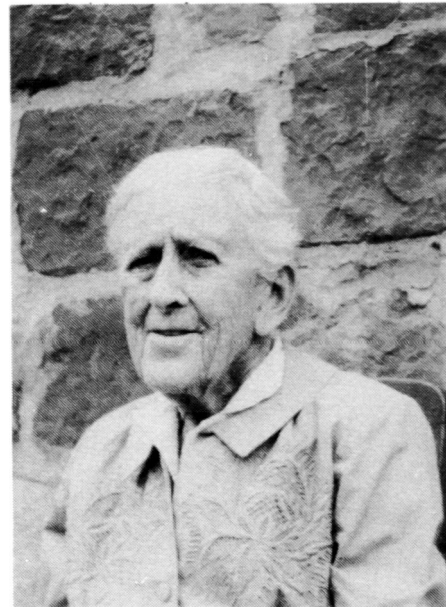
### AUGUSTA:

Deserving of greatness  
Lacking in arrogant vanity  
Strong in self-confident determination  
Gentle in spirit

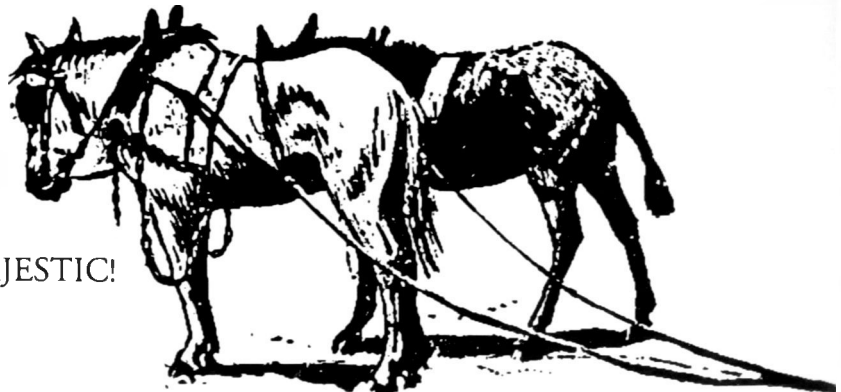
Generous in loving and caring  
for her sagebrush environment  
Cognizant of its unique beauty  
Accepting of its limitations  
Protecting its spirit from exploitation

Bequeathing her all to a beloved son,  
Facets of a great personality  
And the riches of her expressions in ART  
For all the world to share

MEMORIES of his mother, Augusta,  
Tutored by a Philadelphia teacher - mother,  
Wisely named AUGUSTA  
Which means STATELY and NOBLE, MAJESTIC!



*Photography provided by author.*



*Illustrated by Augusta Corson Metcalfe*

# Woman on a Bench

by (Author unknown)

I saw her sitting on a bench today  
in front of Puckett's Food Store.  
Her hair was wound in a scarf,  
her clothes colorful, mismatched,  
her eyes watery and pensive.  
I remembered the first time I saw her  
back in the forties  
riding by our tarpaper shack with her family  
in the grey-weathered, creaky wagon  
pulled by plodding horses.  
We stared and they stared back  
and this took place weekly when they went  
grocery-buying over in Erick.

One day they stopped  
and we learned who they were  
and where they lived and not much else.  
In later years we heard she ran visitors  
(and her husband) off with a double-barrel shotgun  
and plenty of hollers. Didn't like people much.  
But I decided she needed a friend  
and I went fearfully  
to find her not much more than skin and bones,  
covered with sores  
and writhing in pain on her rumpled bed.  
She asked that someone pray  
and I did (fervently)  
and the writhing stopped and a friendship—of sorts—  
was formed. I did her laundry and cooked pancakes,  
took her to church until she decided  
that was enough of that church business  
and gradually we lost touch  
except to nod and speak on the streets.

When I saw her today for the first time  
in a long while  
I began remembering her past.  
Oh, she had a past alright—  
as colorful as anybody's past.  
But as I looked into that somewhat  
vacant stare and smiled and inquired of her health  
I realized it was a future—and even a present—  
that she was lacking.

*(Editor's note: We could find no record of the author's name; he / she was identified only as "MASN" on the submitted manuscript.)*

# A Mother's Story

by Judy Haught

Just outside the tiny southwestern Oklahoma town of Gould lies a small windswept cemetery. It is the kind of cemetery typical of rural western Oklahoma prairie, well tended but lacking a truly manicured look. There are no trees to speak of, only a few scrubby cedar bushes. The grass covering the graves, though usually neatly mowed, is not the lush bermuda of more urban cemeteries. Rather it is a mixture of bermuda, native grasses and a few goatheads. Purple irises and pinkish blue larkspurs, lovingly planted by family members many years ago, bloom in the spring. Graves range in age from the turn of the century to the present day.

Somewhere in the northwestern quadrant near the front of the cemetery lies the Atchley family plot. Eight graves with modest identical markers form two neat rows. A father, a mother, and six children were laid to rest here. This in itself is not unusual except for the fact that upon examination of the grave markers, it becomes evident that all six children preceded their parents in death at an early age.

What about the mother of these children? Who was this woman who was so bereaved? Did she live a life of unending grief? Rassie Shelby Atchley, born September 4, 1895, did bear an extra burden of grief, but hers is a story of an unfailing spirit and of an acceptance of life on any terms.

Rassie grew up near Sheridan, Arkansas, where tragedy found her at an early age. In 1907 when Rassie was about six years old, her younger brother died. At

that time laundry was done outdoors. A large pot of water would be placed over a fire to boil for washing clothes. On one particular wash day Foster, who was a toddler at the time, fell into the boiling wash pot. Tragically, he did not die immediately but lingered in agony for 27 days. No hospital being available, he was cared for at home. Rassie, his small surrogate mother, suffered with him. A child was lost, and a young girl's heart was broken.

The pain of this loss stayed with Rassie to the end of her life. She related this story to her grandson when she was in her eighties and living in a nursing home. She said, "I just thought I would never stop hurting."

In 1909 at age 14, Rassie moved with her family to Bluff Land, a community no longer in existence in what was once Greer County, Texas. Her father filed a claim on 160 acres of land. It was mostly prairie, and Rassie attended school in a half dugout.

On December 7, 1913, when she was 18, Rassie married Littleton Harrison "Pete" Atchley, the son of friends of the family who had also migrated from Arkansas. They lived on a succession of rented farms and were basically sharecroppers until they managed to buy a farm in the 1920's.

In August 1914 their son Laverne, the first of their 12 children, was born. Over the next several years, they would bring eight more sons and three daughters into the world. And they would become intimately acquainted with grief.

The first of their children to die was a tiny premature son in 1915. There was no funeral, and the grave marker simply reads, "Infant Son, August 27, 1915."

Another son followed in death in 1921. Lester Abraham was a lively toddler playing with his

older brother one day and dead the next from something known as summer complaint, a severe form of diarrhea. Again there was no funeral. A casket was constructed out of new lumber by a neighbor. The small body of Lester Abraham Atchley was carried in a wagon to the nearby town of Gould for gravesite rites.

Tragedy struck again in 1925 when Lloyd Lynn, a small sickly baby, died. Again there was no funeral, only graveside rites.

The loss of the babies was difficult, but in those days the infant mortality rate was high, and people almost expected some babies to die. It was the unexpected deaths of the older children that shook people's faith and made them condemn their lot in life.

In 1933 Rassie lost her oldest child, Laverne, at age 18 to spinal meningitis. He took sick during the night and was taken 15 miles to the hospital at Hollis the next morning with a high fever. A spinal tap was done, and the doctor said there was a new drug in the form of an injection that could be given. The drug was not available in Hollis but could be gotten at Vernon, Texas, approximately 75 miles away. A group of men, some family members and some friends of the family, went to Vernon for the medicine.

When the medicine arrived, Laverne had begun to feel better. He could talk and joke, and he requested a pillow from home and a jar of cistern water to drink because the hospital water did not taste good to him. The doctor gave the shot anyway. Laverne died 30 minutes later screaming in pain. The doctor's only explanation was that he gave the shot in the wrong place.

Rassie, who was within two weeks of delivering her eleventh child, did not go to the

hospital. In this day and age, it is hard for people to understand this, but the Atchleys were very poor. Rassie was so large with child that she had no clothes to wear. Maternity clothes simply were not available or affordable. And, of course, she did not expect Laverne to die.

The baby was born two weeks later, and Rassie withdrew into a shell. Her mother cared for the family for about two weeks. For the first time in her life Rassie wanted to die herself. As she put it, she wanted to go to heaven and take care of Laverne and the babies. Finally she was brought back to reality by the comment of her oldest daughter. She asked her mother, "Do you think Laverne and the babies need you more than we do?" From that point on, Rassie bore her burden with dignity.

In 1939 Rassie was again to know sorrow. A twenty-two year-old son by the name of Carl drowned in the river that now forms Lake Altus. He was working in a CCC camp and was in a hurry to get home to his new bride. The river was up, and he should have gone around to the bridge, but he elected to swim. It took three days to find the body. Rassie walked the river bank searching for him those three days. When the body was found, Rassie was not allowed to see it because of the deteriorated condition. As an old woman, she was heard to lament, "If only I had seen him."

The final loss of a child came in 1943. Another son, Leon, died at age of 13 of appendicitis. The frustration and sorrow was compounded by the fact that this death could have been prevented if Leon had seen the doctor in time. But times were always hard for the Atchleys, and they never owned a



car that would start readily. The delay in getting Leon to the hospital was caused by a car that wouldn't start.

One would expect a broken, bitter spirit as a result of so much tragedy. But that was not the case. What all who knew her remember of Rassie was a sweet, loving nature. She had a ready smile and a gift for gab. She loved to talk, and trips to town were a delight for her. With a headscarf tightly knotted under her chin and a purse as big as a suitcase on her arm, she would shop and visit to her heart's content.

Her home was open to family and friends. Hospitality was second nature to her. There were always enough beans to go around. Her grandchildren adored her, and if the word grandmother is mentioned, her image pops into their minds.

Rassie outlived her husband by thirteen years and spent her remaining nine years in a nursing home where she was a delight to everyone. She busied herself visiting the other residents,

seeing to their needs and cheering them up. If a visitor came to see her, Rassie would not be in her room. She could be found making her rounds among the other residents. For someone who loved people as she did, the nursing home was a haven.

Probably the trait that is remembered by most people who knew her and what made Rassie unique was her acceptance of life and its sorrows and responsibilities. She did not shirk her responsibilities or complain about her lot. She was just an uneducated housewife bearing more than her share of sorrow. When asked why she did the things she did, her reply was, "You just do what you have to do."

A series of strokes left Rassie bedfast and seemingly mindless for the last three years of her life. Some say her body just outlived her mind, but one grandson disagreed. He felt there was always something there hanging on to life. She had endured so much that her condition was just another hardship to be gotten through.

And she did come through her final ordeal on September 14, 1986. At the age of 91, she passed on. She had not responded to anyone in three years, but when her daughter said, "You're going to heaven, Mama," she smiled. Perhaps she was thinking of Laverne and the others.

Standing before her grave, one realizes what a truly remarkable life she led. In a day and age when many people shirk responsibility and don't do what is expected, someone who just did what she had to do without complaint was a genuine hero. ■

*Judy Haught is a graduate of Southwestern Oklahoma State University. She is presently an instructor at SWOSU-Sayre where she teaches English composition.)*

# The Man from Ducktown

by Gwen Jackson

Our family always laughed when Dad told us his birthplace was Ducktown, Tennessee. Who would name a place Ducktown? This summer I discovered who named Ducktown when my husband W.L. and I journeyed to the southeast corner of Tennessee.

The narrow, winding road around the mountains was like an Indian path. We came first to Turtletown, Dogtown, and finally Ducktown.

The Ducktown Basin Museum, located in this neat little copper mining town, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. After watching a twenty-minute slide show, we knew that we had traveled an old Cherokee Indian trail through the Cherokee National Forest to get to Ducktown. The entire area is rich in Cherokee Indian history. Ducktown was originally named Hiwassee by the Indians. It was from this area that the Cherokee were forced westward to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears."

Dad told the story of how his mother

worried about cave-ins at the copper mine or black lung disease that could leave her with five small children to raise. Dad's father saved enough money to buy train tickets. In 1918 that seemed like a fortune, because there were five children and two grand-parents, besides the parents, Robert and Meg Nola Brown, who arrived in Olustee, Oklahoma. Like the Cherokee, they migrated west, but for health reasons.

Ducktown was like finding a hidden treasure. To see where Dad was born and played as a child and to walk where grandparents and great-grandparents once lived was a thrill. To see beautiful forests and streams where the Cherokee lived, fished, and hunted was an honor.

There is an old Indian saying, "Not to know your ancestors is like blowing in the wind."

Dad died this June 5, 1992, but he left his family with so many memories.

*(Gwen Brown Jackson of Amber, Oklahoma, is an active free-lance writer and editor of the Grady County Genealogical Newsletter.)*



# By The Light of The Western Moon

by Priscilla Johnson

Ma and Pa went down to the breaks  
one moon bright summer night taking the LTD.  
It was a big ol' car, a low riding car,  
rumbling over the cattle guard.

On the trail as Pa was searching and counting,  
the tires on that low riding big ol' car  
slowly bogged down near the creek.  
Pa got out and surveyed the damage.  
Ma got ready to walk by tying her floppies  
with strips cut from one of her endless supply of head scarves.  
They both knew that ol' LTD was sunk up to its hubcaps.

Shadowed by a lovers light,  
old enough to know better but too old to care,  
they walked hand in hand down Highway 30.  
"Gee pa," Ma said, "Isn't this romantic?"  
But Pa was put out.  
"Hell," he said, "I'm just glad we can see the rattlesnakes."

By the light of the western moon, two lonely people, who were not  
really alone, walked a familiar lonely road.

*( Priscilla Johnson, a graduate of Southwestern Oklahoma  
State University, lives in Red River, New Mexico.)*

# Gramps

by Greg Garrett

I guess I finally realized how serious it was when I walked through those automatic doors—as slow as the ones we had in the grocery store—and saw a nurse pushing him down the hall in one of those shiny metal hospital wheelchairs. Gramps seemed embarrassed that I had caught him sitting down. When he first saw me coming his way, he looked like he wanted a hat to hide under, like he didn't want me to see him like this; it was all a mistake.

Or at least, that's what it seemed like to me. I grew up thinking that John Stringer was larger-than-life, a combination of Gary Cooper, John Wayne, maybe Sam Shepard in *The River*, strong and silent and capable of making crops grow in a desert or defending the honor of his family against a band of outlaws. He rode without a wasted motion, drove his pick-up truck like it was an extension of his body, and he was one of those people who somehow don't look complete without a greasy Co-op cap or a cowboy hat perched atop their heads.

I called him "Gramps," and he called me "Scout," after a character in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, although he must have gotten that from the movie, since I don't remember Gramps ever cracking the cover on anything besides Louis L'Amour westerns. When I was a kid, I guess I was that kind of tomboy, but "Scout" didn't really fit me anymore: on that day in the hospital in Oklahoma City, I was sixteen, going steady with a senior on the wrestling team, and I hadn't climbed a tree in years.

When images of Gramps

came into my head, I saw him tossing hay bales into the back of the pick-up while Granma drove, or doctoring a sick calf while he held it still with his mixture of strength and gentleness, and although the idea had never entered my mind, I guess I figured that if he ever had to die, that he would die in the saddle, if not in a gunfight at the OK Corral.

I never thought I'd see a nurse pushing him down a hospital corridor like a weak old man.

"It's just for a few days," my grandmother had said the first time he went to the hospital, with a stern edge to her voice that dared anyone to contradict her. She looked at us around the cafeteria table. "They want to run some tests. There's some things they're not clear on. Then we can take him right back home."

My mother sat next to her, quiet for maybe the first time in her life as she stared into her coffee, and my father too looked very small and very tired.

"Gram," I said, "can I go in and see him?"

She shook her head. "It'll be a while, honey," she said. "They said it would take all afternoon."

I was supposed to go to work at four. There was no way I could get back to Watonga in time, not even if I left now, but I thought I could call my boss and explain. She would understand. The store could probably get along without me for one night. "I have to go use the phone," I told them. "I'll be right back."

As I walked through the cafeteria, I looked around at all the other people there. Some wore crisp white uniforms, but most were regular people, families, maybe, sitting quietly around the tables. The atmosphere was edged with tension. These people

were eating in the hospital because someone they loved was sick, maybe dying. I felt lucky; we were only in for tests. Gramps didn't belong here.

When Mom came home and told me the test result, told me that the cancer had spread so far that nothing could be done, I told her not to talk like that.

"There's nothing wrong with him," I insisted. "It's all a mistake. A mistake."

I kept saying it until Gram took me by the arms and pulled me close, and said, "It's all right, honey. It's all right."

I didn't feel all right. I didn't think I would ever be all right again. But if Gram could act this way—Gram, who had more reason to cry than anyone did—then what could I do? "Doctors make mistakes," I said. "Everybody does."

But nobody said anything; they just looked down at the floor.

When I saw them pushing Gramps down that shiny hallway a few weeks later, dressed in one of those blue hospital gowns and his favorite pair of slippers, I knew it must be true. He should have been pushing that nurse—he still made two of her. But his face was drawn and gray and his shoulders were slumped, and his hair had already begun thinning out from the treatments they were giving him. *Before he came to this hospital, I thought angrily, he was fine*, but that didn't hold up. He was sick before he came here; he just didn't know about it.

And learning about it seemed to have hit him hard, taken some of the grit out of him. Why wouldn't it? This was something he couldn't lift out of the way or fix with baling wire.

For the first time in my life, I realized that Gramps was a flesh and blood man, that

somewhere behind the granite face, he thought, and hoped, and felt.

And that right now, what he felt was fear.

Until he saw me. Once he saw me, what he felt was embarrassed. They had him, like I said, in a hospital gown, and he probably didn't have much on underneath it, so he put his legs together and smoothed his skirt like I might when I was trying to look refined and grown up, and I saw the one quick dart of his eyes as he looked to see if there was any way he could escape.

But there wasn't. "Hey," I said. He raised a hand from the armrest in greeting. He didn't know what to say, maybe, although he was never much of a talker.

"How do you feel?" I asked.

"Okay," he said. He scratched his head, then looked quizzically at his hand, as though

"Sure. Just don't tell them where you got it."

it was to blame for the state of his hair. "I thought you was supposed to be in school."

"We got out last week," I told him. "I'm free for three whole months."

The nurse had stopped the wheelchair to wait for us. Gramps looked over his shoulder and said, "Annie, darlin', do you suppose Scout here could push me back to the room?"

She was a tiny woman who probably welcomed the break. "Sure thing, Mr. Stringer, if you'd like. I'll be in later to check on you." She left us, and Gramps and I were alone there in the hallway.

"So, Scout," Gramps said, "did you do real good in school this year?"

"Pretty good," I said. I didn't want to talk about school. "Algebra was tough. I made a 'C' and I was lucky to get that." I went around to the back of the wheelchair, let my hands rest on the black plastic handles, but I didn't see how I could possibly

"Doctors make mistakes," I said everybody does."

move the chair. Gramps was too big.

He understood my hesitation, reached back over his shoulder, took my hand in his—swallowed it up—and said quietly, "It's okay, Scout. You just give 'er a shove. The two of us will get there."

He helped a little with his hands on the wheels, and we made our slow way down the hall in silence. When we came to a big picture window, he held up a hand and asked me to stop. From here, we could look out over a

stretch of wheat pasture in the distance. It reminded me of when we used to stop in his truck at the top of a hill looking out over the pasture and the farmhouse. He would just park it there, where we could watch the white-faced cattle graze below us, and he would roll down his window and smoke Winston after Winston while he pointed out to me different things he had done or was going to do around the place.

"Scout," he said now, as he gazed out that hospital window, "I need a favor. I need something out of the truck."

I was still thinking of those days at the top of the hill, I guess. I told him, without hesitation, "No, Gramps. No cigarettes. Those things are bad for you."

He looked at me in surprise; I'd never stood up to him like that in my life. But he just smiled and shook his head gently and said, "Now, Scout, don't get in an uproar. I don't want a smoke. But I'd be much obliged if you could get the keys

from that wife of mine and fetch my cap off the dash." He patted his thinning scalp sheepishly. Gramps wanted his John Deere cap—it was green and coated with grime and the nurses would probably pitch a fit about bringing that thing into their nice clean hospital—but I nodded and we went on down the hall.

"Sure. Just don't tell them where you got it."

We had gotten to his room, and the nurse stood by to help Gramps climb into bed. "Don't forget," he said.

I kissed him on the cheek. "I won't forget," I said.

His head sank back into the pillow. He looked very tired, but I had seen him tired before; every day of his life he had gotten up at dawn, worked until suppertime.

Maybe this was just one last job he had to do.

"Bye, Gramps," I said, leaning in close.

"So long, Scout," he said. He slowly raised a hand to pat me on the cheek, gave me the first tiny smile I had seen since I got there, and then he closed his eyes.

I stepped back to take one last look at him before I went downstairs to get the keys, and right away, I knew it was true. Even flat on his back, he still looked like Gary Cooper to me. ■

(Greg Garrett is a member of the English department at Baylor University.)



# Nora In Care of Pop Hicks

by Sharon Blagowsky-Cost

**F**or 100 miles east or west of Clinton, Oklahoma on Route 66, you could see the signs. They simply stated—"Pop Hicks On 66." That was all that was needed.

Everyone knew of Pop Hicks, and the ones who didn't soon would.

Pop Hicks Restaurant was the biggest and fanciest restaurant between Oklahoma City to the east and Amarillo, Texas to the west; and it was on Route 66. Everyone stopped, including my mother. She began to work there as a waitress right after her divorce when I was seven years old. My mom had really landed a peach of a job, in her mind anyway. She made 50 cents an hour plus tips. Her boss, Pop Hicks, was a big, burly man who liked to lean over the counter and spit tobacco into a can behind the counter. He

scared me to death. In my opinion he had more rules than school; but that's what made it the best restaurant for hundreds of miles. If an employee broke one of his rules, that person was out. He didn't ask questions and he didn't take explanations.

Mom wore the traditional white uniform dress with a crisp, starched red and white apron, and one of those stupid little caps on her head. Each apron cost one dollar, but she wore one or she didn't come to work. Every waitress wore a name tag nestled in a handkerchief, starched and folded into a flower, pinned on her shoulder where her left pocket would have been. During an eight hour shift his waitresses never sat down. Their lunch was eaten standing up in the kitchen. If their meal got cold or they

didn't get to eat, that was just "tough". Mr. Hicks wasn't paying anyone to eat; he was paying them to wait on customers. Waitresses always looked busy, even if they weren't, if they wanted to keep their job. To say it simply, he ruled with an iron hand. One of his rules was that no employee could have personal phone calls during working hours. That was my first encounter with Mr. Hicks. I knew I wasn't supposed to call Mom at work. But, to a seven year old, this was an emergency. I needed to ask her something. Minutes marched by as I finally built up the courage to call. Now, you must understand that I was such a shy child that anyone talking to me could make me want to crawl into a hole and disappear. I gave the operator the number and

held my breath. He answered! There was silence. What was I to do? Should I hang up, or would I be in even more trouble if I hung up on an adult? My heart was pounding so hard I was sure

he handed the phone to Mom. "You better call your little girl back. I think I scared her. She hung up." From that day on, she and Mr. Hicks had a mutual respect.  
Pop Hicks Restaurant

## " Nora in care of Pop Hicks, on 66, Clinton, Oklahoma."

he could hear it right through the phone. In a very timid voice I asked if I could speak to Nora.

He roared, "Who?" I wanted to die. I couldn't hang up now, I had already told him her name. What would he do to my mom? I was trapped. I quietly said, "May I speak to Nora?" And then, as if it could work magic, I added, "Please?"

Now the man had a very subtle but great sense of humor that I didn't know about, and neither did my mom, until that day. He was motioning Mom to the phone, but to me he said in a very loud and gruff voice, "Nora who?" At the age of seven I had a name even I had trouble pronouncing. As clearly as I could, I said, "Nora Blagowsky". There was silence...endless seconds passed.

"Is that a *name* or a disease?" That was it! Consequences or no, I hung up! My mom was going to be fired, and I was in big trouble.

Mr. Hicks laughed as

and Nora became almost synonymous during the 26 years that followed. This was a lady who had given up a job at a newspaper to be a waitress. She loved people, all kinds of people. She had wanted to be a waitress all her life, and she made it an art in an age when being a waitress was the bottom of

## " Is that a name or a disease ?"

the barrel in jobs. "Slinging hash" was the term used, but she didn't care. She could balance four hot plates of food on one arm, leaving the other to carry four steaming cups of coffee. The standard tip was five cents for a cup of coffee and 25 cents for dinner. Tips were given then, not because it was required or expected, but because the waitress did a good job or went out of her way to make your meal a bit extra special. Mom could, on a good day, make as much as four dollars in tips. The day a cattleman left her one dollar

for a tip we celebrated and thought God had smiled on us.

She had to make tips to make ends meet, so she was loud, brassy and loved to joke with anyone. On most days her laughter filled the whole place. She thought nothing of calling someone's name clear across the room to greet them as they came in the door. Nora's antics got wilder as the years passed.

One afternoon she was talking to a coffee drinker and he bet her one dollar she would not hit him in the face with a cream pie. He even offered to pay for the pie. She went to get the pie with everyone watching, including her boss. As she got in front

of him and positioned the pie, it slipped and fell face down on the counter in front of the man. The man laughed along with everyone at the counter, paid for his coffee and left. She didn't get the dollar and had to pay for the pie.

Or, there was the time a coffee drinker continued to flirt with her until it was more of a hassle than an innocent flirtation. He said he was going to follow her home. She began to joke with him and got him to place his hands palms down on the table. She then placed



a filled glass of water on the top of each hand and said if he could get them off without help or spilling the water he could follow her home. As he was sitting there trying to figure out the trick, she walked out the door and went home. Just how long he sat there no one remembers.

One of her habits was calling all male customers "George" whether she knew them or not. This caused a man and woman to actually get into an argument in the restaurant for all to hear. It seems she came to take their order and greeted them as she always did with "What'll you have, George?"

He answered with, "We'll each have a cup of coffee, Nora." As she was leaving the table, she heard the lady ask how he knew the name of the waitress. He replied that it was on her name tag.

"How did *she* know *your* name, Dear?" And the fight was on. As the discussion got more heated, Nora tried to explain that she did not know the man and called everyone George. To no avail. They left fighting and she got no tip. Needless to say she stopped calling everyone George.

Over the years, people have sent her postcards or Christmas cards from almost every state in the United States, and a few foreign countries. They were simply



Nora Blagowsky first on left.

*Photo provided by author*

address to "Nora in care of Pop Hicks on 66, Clinton, Oklahoma". I'm grown up now with a child of my own. Nora is no longer working at Pop Hicks, but from time to time she still takes out her aprons and cards to reminisce. Mr. Hicks has passed on. Pop Hicks Restaurant is still there, although somewhat faded from its heyday. The glorious hand-crafted floor tiles he brought back from Mexico are now covered by carpet, and there are fewer cars

parked around the building. But somewhere in the building, a painting of Mr. Hicks still hangs on the wall. Sometimes people still drive by on the old Route 66 and remember. ■

*(Sharon Blagowsky-Cost grew up in Clinton, Oklahoma and attended SOSU majoring in Art with a minor in Theater. She now resides in Amarillo, Texas with her husband Steven and son Chris. She owns her own school of dance and is the director of The Amarillo Dance Connection, a non-profit performing company for young dancers. She enjoys free-lance writing in her spare time. This is her first publication in Westview.)*

# Cowboy John and the City Slicker

by Priscilla Johnson

The cowboy's eyes twinkled  
As he talked to the man.  
His tilted and sweat stained  
Hat resting on his wrinkled brow.  
His chambray shirt was partially unbuttoned  
Where I could see tufts of silvery hair, and  
An old fashioned undershirt beneath.  
As he talked, his right hand  
Mechanically reached into his left shirt pocket,  
And he pulled out a Bull Durham tobacco bag.  
To my delighted eyes, in true cowboy movie style,  
He rolled his own cigarette.  
I asked him to please show me  
How he did such a thing again.  
His answer—  
Well mam,  
I ain't smoked this one yet.

# *Crazy Like a Fox*

Carl Stanislaus

Grandpa thinks he is the boy  
He was in younger days.  
Of course he's lost his hair and teeth,  
And changed in other ways.

He still likes being Santa Claus,  
And playing the Easter Bunny.  
He frolics at the beach  
When the days are sunny!

But he joined the Senior Citizens,  
When they called him on the phone,  
And he didn't kick and scream  
When we put him in the Home.

He says, "Don't call me crazy,  
If I start acting funny,  
Just treat me kind and gentle,  
Or you won't inherit my money!"

*(Carl Stanislaus of Chickasha,  
retired career employee of  
OTASCO, contributes regularly to  
Westview.)*

# Good Friday

by Suzanne Thomson

*And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time."*

The enormity of everything crowded in on Zach: the dinner the University President had just hosted to welcome him, their new faculty member, the astonishingly bright stars which pulled his gaze heavenward as he stepped into the night air, and the belly on his wife Beth, which recaptured his dutiful attention, as the President's wife took her hand at the door, and murmured, "If there's anything we can do..."

They walked with well-fed contentment down the dirt road which meandered by the President's house to the small campus, and then to their home. After a few minutes of blissful silence, Beth took up the conversation they had left off before the dinner.

"OK, so why did they all end up here?" she asked. They stepped with extra care on the dark, uneven sidewalk, which the old elm trees had pushed and puckered into treacherous cracks.

"Look at Paul. He got his PhD from Yale. Old Testament."

"So did Marjorie," said Zach.

"Which one is she?"

"Philosophy teacher,  
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married to that quiet guy, who sat in the corner all night, under the bonsai tree."

"The one with cowboy boots," Beth mused. "No, I know what the real reason is. They couldn't hack it in the fast lane, and they ended up in this little Oklahoma backwater, and they like being big fish in a little pond so much, they don't want to move. You see? They'd never get so much respect in a larger college."

Was Beth including him in this assessment? Or speaking on his behalf as an observer who was just passing through, en route to something loftier? Zach glanced at his wife, suspicious, but not able to believe she had it in her to insult him. Beth was between the glowing flush of pregnancy, which lit up her narrow face with a beauty hitherto disguised, and the inward-turned discomfort of the last few weeks, which threatened to undo the fragile brush of nature's reprieve.

They came to a crossroad. Zach held Beth's arm as she stepped off the curb and started across. An elderly man Zach recognized from the neighborhood was walking his

wife's dog - a nervous miniature schnauzer which had woken them up on occasion.

"Evening, folks," the old man said.

"Hey, Elmer," said Zach. "Nice night, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh." To their dismay, Elmer stopped. He could weave a net of chatter from which it was difficult to escape. "Have you all settled in? How are you liking Enid?"

They had been asked this same question about twelve times already that evening at the faculty dinner. Zach did not really know how he felt. It was too soon. But Beth was under no illusions.

"It's a change from Philadelphia, shall we say?" she said. "Different."

"Elmer," said Zach, to get them off the contentious subject. "Who lives in the house two doors down from us? That one." He pointed across the small park.

Elmer, guileless, followed his gaze and considered for a moment. "Oh, that's old Jake Bullock. You know, he raised oxen, a long time ago. That's kinda unusual around here. Used them in historic parades, to pull covered

wagons, that kinda thing. Maybe, with a name like his, it was destiny."

Zach watched the small dog tangle the lead around Elmer's legs again. Then it stopped, clipped ears at attention, looking with rigid concentration towards Bullock's house. Beth gasped.

"What is it?" Zach took

grandkids, they live in California. Stockton. We see them maybe once a year, if we're lucky."

"A sign of the times, I'm afraid," said Zach.

Beth moved away.

"Thank your wife for the blueberry pie. It was delicious."

Zach stepped after her.

"Night," he called to Elmer.

Elmer's voice followed

## "Ella, the priest can't save your grandfather's life, but the doctors might."

her arm.

"The baby; it just turned completely over."

Zach was about to ask if she was all right, though he wasn't sure if that was appropriate, and if it wasn't, if he was supposed to coo with delight instead of concern, Beth would give him a well practiced look of withering scorn. But then the front door he had just pointed out opened. A girl stepped out of Bullock's house. The light from the room behind framed her slender body. The door shut, and she almost disappeared in the darkness. They could see her dark form moving like a wraith across the old man's unkempt lawn.

"That's Ella, his granddaughter," Elmer said. "She comes in every day to look after him."

"We wondered who she was," said Zach.

"He's a tough old farmer. Widowed. Won't go to the nursing home for nothing." Elmer chirped to his dog, then sighed. "I swear, she's an angel. Sweet as they come. Not like most kids these days. Now, my

them. "If you folks need any help, or anything, just give us a holler!"

They were in the little park now, almost home.

"I can't believe we are living in the middle of wheat fields and cows. I mean, if you want to do a simple thing, like go for a walk away from houses and people, you can't. It's a cultural desert."

"It's only for a year, Beth. You can survive that long."

"Zach, why is a year a

## "A sign of the times, I'm afraid,"

magic time? And how can you not be pissed off when you can't even teach your own subject? And speaking of that, I just don't think, from what I hear, Zach, that a man is going to get a decent position in Latin American studies, when there are plenty of bright women and minorities applying, who have spent years doing research there."

She never called him by his name as much as when arguing.

"Will you slow down? I can't understand you. For God

sakes, I have to go where there's a position. I thought you liked the idea of not having to work when the baby comes. I thought you liked being able to rent a house on my measly salary, instead of huddling in a tiny apartment, and commuting two hours every day. Is that what you want to go back to?"

A figure stepped in front of them. Zach caught his breath in surprise. It was the girl from Jake Bullock's house.

"Hi," she said in a soft voice. "I'm glad you're home. Can I use your phone?"

The girl was slender and delicate. She was dressed in blue jeans and a white sweatshirt. She seemed almost ethereal, elusive, next to his substantial wife. Startled out of his anger, Zach fought down the impulse to touch the abundant waves of her light hair.

"Sure," Zach said. He led the way up the drive and unlocked the front door, then stepped back to let the girl enter. Beth followed her, brushing past him, to take

charge.

"The phone's over here," she said, and pointed to the kitchen door. "Doesn't your grandfather have a phone? We just saw you leave his house."

"Oh, no." The girl seemed amused by the idea. She went into the kitchen.

"You're Ella, right?" Beth said, standing at the kitchen door. "I'm Beth, and this is Zach."

Ella smiled. "I know," she said. There was no pretense in her words, but from the way

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Beth frowned, Zach could see that she was stung. She shrugged and went back into the living room to take her coat off. Zach moved to help her, when they heard the girl's words.

"Yes, I need to talk to Father McMann. I know it's late, I'm sorry, Sister. Yes, this is Gabriella."

Beth and Zach looked at each other. "Father McMann?" said Beth.

silence. "I'm sorry. I don't make the connection," said Zach. "Shall I call an ambulance?"

"No, that's OK, the priest is coming."

"Ella, the priest can't save your grandfather's life, but the doctors might." Beth moved towards the phone.

"No, please, you don't understand. He wants to die in his home, quietly."

door frame. The front of her sweatshirt had 'Carpe Deum' written in large blue letters over her small breasts. Zach blinked through his wire-rim glasses, and read it again. Wasn't it supposed to be 'diem'?

"Please," she said. "You don't understand. If you wait until Father McMann gets here, he'll explain."

Zach could not believe the girl was blocking his way.

Her voice and expression were soft and beautifully enticing, but her body immovable. He would actually have to pick her up

## "Shouldn't you be walking around when the contractions come?"

"Must be a pocket of Polish settles or something," Zach said.

"Father," said Ella. "Yes, It's happened. I'm pretty sure he'll die tonight. Thank you. I'll be there. 'Bye."

A suspicion began to grow in Zach, which deepened when Ella came back into the living room and smiled at them. Neither the smile nor her dark eyes held any expression he was familiar with. Was it possible that she was mentally unbalanced? In the light her blonde hair was a golden halo framing her striking features. Her face was just long enough, her nose and lips pronounced enough, that she could have as easily been a boy. She looked about sixteen years old, but it was difficult to tell.

Zach bent over slightly, not sure how to address her in his revelation of her mental state, and said, "Did we just hear you tell someone that your grandfather is dying?"

"Yes," said Ella. "This is Good Friday."

There was a moment of WESTVIEW, WINTER 1992

"Ella," Zach explained.

"Nobody wants to die, quietly or not, and he might be in a great deal of pain, which the hospital can ease."

Beth gasped. "Oh, there, it did it again!" Her hands moved over her stomach.

"What, what?" demanded Zach.

She took his hand and placed it on the hard lump of the baby's head. It moved again.

"Doesn't that hurt?" asked Zach.

For a second they had forgotten about Ella. Her words again brought them up short. "Wouldn't it be nice if the baby was born when my Grandfather died?"

"Why would that be nice, Ella?" Zach said.

"Well, you know, there's such a big gap when somebody dies, all of a sudden, and a new baby would fill it up again."

"You seem to be a very unusual person, Ella. Now, I really think I ought to call an ambulance." He moved to the kitchen door. Ella stood in his way, arms and legs braced in the

or push her out of the way in order to reach the phone. He was at a complete loss.

"Ella," he began, but another gasp from Beth turned his attention again. She was looking down at her feet. A dark stain was growing on the carpet.

"My water. It's broken."

"But it's not time yet," said Zach.

"Tell the baby that!" Beth's eyes glazed over. "The labor's starting! Oh!"

Zach helped Beth to the bedroom. He eased her down on the bed, but she stood up and told him to put a towel down so she wouldn't stain the blankets. Zach couldn't see how that would help, but he did as she asked, then hovered over his groaning wife, wringing his hands. He was baffled. Was she in real pain, or not? She lay and writhed, then sat up and asked him, in clear, uninhabited speech, to phone the hospital, then, as if remembering, lay back down and gasped some more.

"Shouldn't you be walking around when the contractions come?" he asked,

but she sent him off to get a glass of water. As he scuttled down the hall he saw Ella slip out the front door. Well, he could only do one thing at a time, and duty to his family came first.

Half an hour later Zach stood at the front window. The hospital had suggested they bring Beth in—no rush, but as soon as they could get her things together. The labor would probably take a while, you never knew with the first baby, but since the water had broken, they needed her to be there, just in case of infection.

Two doors down, an unfamiliar car was in the drive. After a moment's absent-minded thought, he guessed it must be this Father McMann's car. Unease assailed him, but he dismissed it. It was not his business.

Another car drove up, and two figures got out. They looked as if they were going to a costume party, until Zach realized they were nuns. These must be the old-fashioned habits, with wimple and veil, and full-length skirt. Surely nobody wore them anymore. The western world had received enlightenment four centuries ago. How could people cling to these archaic, superstitious beliefs? The nuns flowed up the path to Bullock's front door. Zach glimpsed the flash of a heel as they entered the house. The women were barefoot.

"For God sakes, Zach. Rub my back! Is the car out of the garage? Oh, God. What if the baby comes right now? Zach? Zach!"

The car. "I'll be right back," he called, and bolted out to the garage. He bent over to lift the heavy garage door, and pulled. It came up with

reluctance. A stabbing pain shot down his back. He gasped and fell across the car's trunk. His glasses fell, bounced off the bumper, and shattered on the floor. The pain clamped down like teeth springing shut. If he moved, it would surely overwhelm him, and he might lose consciousness.

"Oh, God," he said.  
"Not now." As he rested on the cold metal, his breath misting

the metallic blue under his mouth, he heard a sound. He stopped breathing and listened. It was a chant. Voices were rising and falling in an ancient litany. It sounded as if a choir were singing in the distance, but Zach had seen only two women going into Bullock's house. It was impossible. But what beautiful music. He listened. He had no choice. The voices surrounded him, lifted him in a soothing caress. It was as if he were a child again, and his mother's cool hand was moving over his forehead, and under her caress there was nothing in the world that could trouble him. He had forgotten that mother long ago. How could he have forgotten? The warmth of her bosom, the delicate scent of her, the love she enveloped him with; how keenly he felt it now, and how empty his loss in the years between. The burdens of responsibility he had taken up since then, a lifetime past, seemed a dreadful mistake; a choosing of the wrong road, which led only to heavier burdens and alienation from some vital link he had forgotten.

"Mom," Zach whispered.  
"I'm sorry, Mom! Ah, God." Under his eyes little rivulets of tears made curious patterns through the condensation on

the car.

And then Beth was there, holding her suitcase, gasping. She waddled over.

"What the hell are you doing? You left forty minutes ago. I don't believe this. I thought you'd forgotten to take me. Have you lost it completely, Zach? Come on!" She got into the front seat. Zach tried to move, and found he could, if he concentrated and went slowly. The sweat ran off his forehead, but he managed to ease himself down behind the steering wheel. As his foot depressed the clutch peddle, he cried out, but Beth was in her own trance, and didn't notice.

They backed out, leaving the garage door open. As they drove past Jake Bullock's house, both groaning and hissing with pain, Zach noticed again how the stars blazed, even with the pregnant moon at her zenith. There were flowers everywhere, in all the front lawns, in the parks they passed, standing out in the moonlight like little dim beacons, void of color in the night, but full of promise for the morning. ■

*(Suzanne Thomson lives in Enid, Oklahoma. Her work has appeared in Byline Magazine, The Anglican Theological Review, and elsewhere.)*

# The Guardian of Southwest Mall

by Carl Stanislaus

This is a story of a labor of love,  
of old Grandpa and some help from the Lord.  
It was a great surprise when he took on the duty  
as unofficial guardian of Southwest Mall.

There was plenty of security around the center,  
but Dad had a need to be of service.  
He found a uniform, we never knew where,  
but it looked official and he wore it proudly!

He was an expert at his various jobs;  
for general information he was a wizard.  
He gladly helped parents with lost children,  
and cleaned up after the arts and crafts mess.

Grandpa became a man for all seasons,  
filling in for a Santa or Bunny replacement,  
and when they had an old car show  
there wasn't a model Pa didn't know.

All the merchants became dependent on him  
to bring the news and the latest forecast.  
Whatever the weather Grandpa was there  
as unofficial guardian of Southwest Mall.

# Old Bill and Lemon Pie

by Nina Q. Barnes

Out in the Garber-Covington Oil Field of 1928 we were all family. "Old Bill" was a name of respect to separate father and son easily, the son being "Young Bill".

I don't know when I first really saw him; his wife, "Mate", was midwife at my birth; for sure, he knew the first time he saw me. He relished reminding me how often he had heard me. Nothing but a hog-wire fence, an old faded wooden gate, and twenty feet of air stood between our oilfield houses. The picture of him I have in my mind is sharp and clear today: Old Bill is leaning on that old gray gate, his twisted crippled hands lightly resting on the framework, dark blue dusty overalls, farmer's workshirt, and above the orneriest blue twinkling eyes you ever saw, the inevitable sweat-stained blue and white striped railroader's cap riding at a jaunty air.

"Oh! Nina May! Oh! Nina May!" he says. I run to see what's up; I really like Old Bill.

Sure enough, he's leaning on the gate, grinning. "Tell Addie them dogs is in her 'weeds', says he.

"Where?" I say.

"Out back of the brooder house," he answers. He waits.

Old Bill is a kindly neighbor. He often yells from the gate, "Oh! Addie! Them snowy white sheets is on the ground, soon be on their way to Kansas.

"Oh! Addie! One of 'them kids' has got a foot hung in the crotch of a peach tree."

The path to their privy adjoins our back flower beds near the wash lines; he can see to our welfare just in the course of his daily business. There is a foundation of trust between him and me; quite often the dogs are 'in the weeds'. But his devilish grin puts me on guard; I grin back at him; I know he's up to sumptin' when he refers to mama's famous gardens as "Addie's weeds".

I yell at mama, "Mama! Mr. Tanner says

tell you the dogs are in your weeds out by the brooder house."

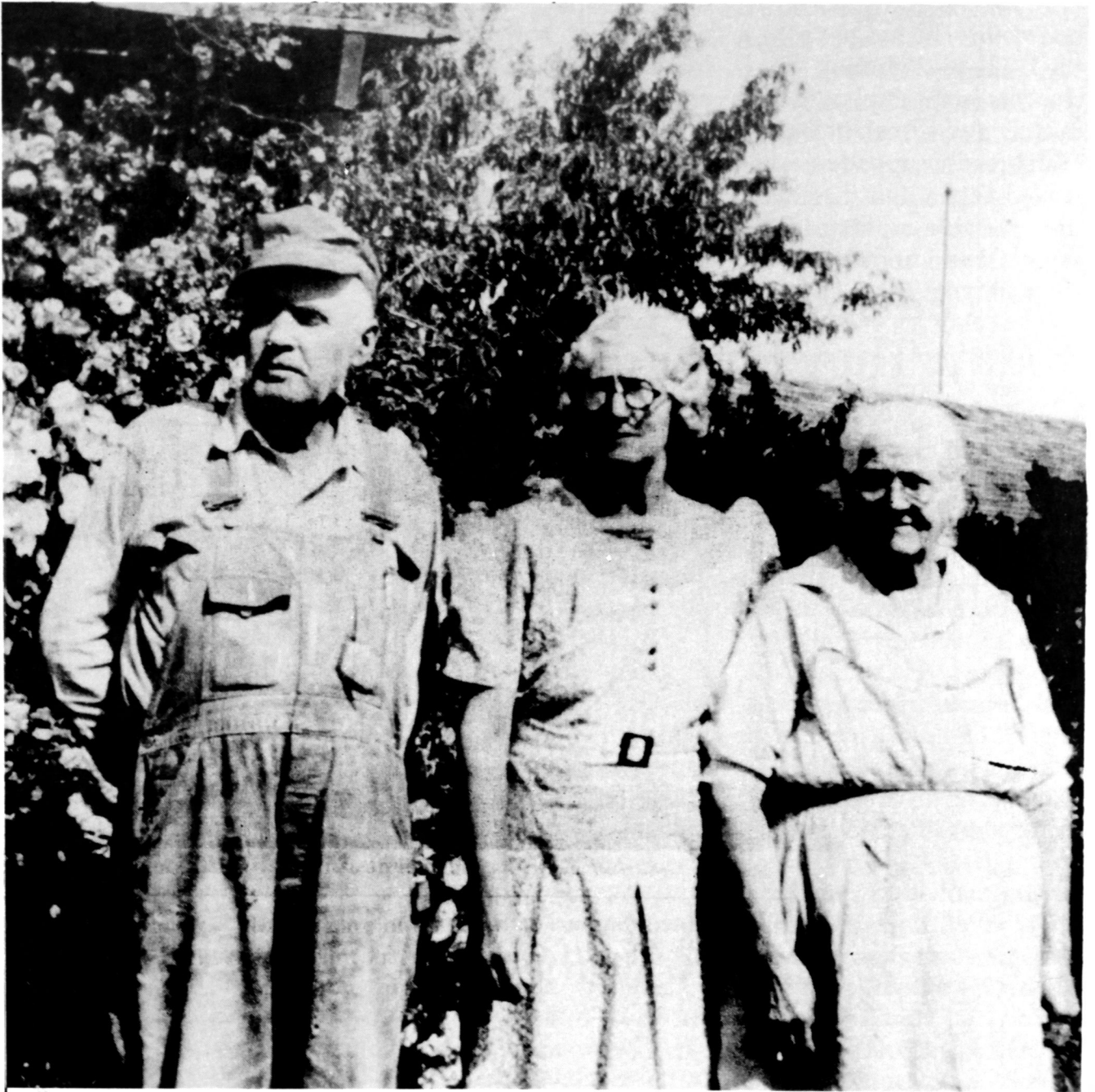
Mama is busy with a sewing project. "What!" she shouts. She jumps up, pincushions, scissors, yard goods, flying every which away. She grabs the first weapon, a broom, and is halfway to the brooder before the screen slams behind her.

The old man is careful he doesn't swallow his bakkerchaw as he chuckles at the sound of all the commotion. Mama is poised to flail the dogs out of the nasturtium beds; she rounds the corner with the broom at the ready, yelling as she goes, "Get out of my flowers, you baadd....." Silence.

I'm wonderin', what happened? I run to catch up; I'm looking for the collie. Nowhere in sight. The nasturtiums are picture perfect.

"Why that Old Man..." she says.

I run back to the gate, "Those dogs are not in that flower bed," I say, panting



(Old Bill, his "Mate", Mary Tanner and her mother Mary Coress Carpenter.)

photo provided by author

He grins. Softly, "Tell your maw, 'April Fools'." Then he's outta there, FAST.

Mama is steamed. "That old man got me again," she says. "Every year, he pulls something on me." Then she realizes—he is listening! So she clamps it

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down a notch or two.

Next door, we hear Mary Tanner chiding Old Bill. "Bill, you shouldn't keep on at Addie like that."

Her voice is barely a murmur, but Old Bill busts out laughing again, "You shoulda' seen Addie grab

that broom...." Mama is fit to be tied.

Brother and I aren't sure if we should be standing too close to Mama. We are careful to tread easy for a while. "You kids help me think of something we can do to that Old Man," she says.

She is going like a house afire, he has her so riled. She is slamming drawers in the cupboard, putting away fresh-baked Irish bread wrapped in waxed paper. It is the old time portable cupboard on wheels, has a roll top spice

## "The boys are coming in today. They love Addie's pie."

compartment, a tilt-out flour bin with sifter, and a full size pull-out enamel tray for a work area.

"I KNOW," she murmurs. Her eyes get a lightning look, you know what I mean, bright, shiny, dangerous. She grins. "We'll make him a lemon pie! "YES," she exclaims, "he loves my lemon pie." The word "loves" rolls off her tongue like a feather falling from a tick and settling slowly to the floor.

Well, we are thinking Mama has cracked up for sure. Old Bill loves mama's lemon pie. How's that going to play April Fool's? Get even?

"Just you wait and see," she says. "It's going to be a very special lemon pie. Nina May, you run in there and find us a nice piece of that soft cotton batt. Cecil, you run in there and get me those sharp scissors. I'll make the crust."

Boy, her adrenaline is pumping. She's got the

dough board pulled out, wood dough bowl with a lump of pure white Crisco, and whirlin' that flour sifter 'til a cloud of fine white flour dust is settling on everything. She sets the oven at 450; with two knives, she atomizes the

Crisco into the flour, zish, zish; puts in a dab of ice water and cleans out the bowl. She grabs the rolling pin. In two winks of a snake's eye she has a perfect crust draped over the sides of the pie tin, pricks it with a fork and into the oven for 12 minutes. She separates three eggs for her fabulous meringue; Mama does not scrimp when she is creating one of her masterpiece pies.

She has us kids cutting cotton batt to size. She checks us out, being

## "Well, they gotcha this time, paw!"

sure it is "just so".

Mama takes out the hot, perfectly golden crust, turns the oven back to 325; we arrange the cotton. "Not too high," she whispers, "we don't want the cotton to show. The meringue has to cover it all perfectly." We conspirators trim.

Mama grabs the wire whisk; she's grinning while she spansks the whites into a froth. "Nina May, pour this

sugar in a thin stream; the secret is to add the sugar slowly; add a spoon of vanilla and a smell of almond."

She uses the flat side of a table knife, pulling up The Alps, Pike's Peak.

"Look here, Mama, the cotton's peeping out."

When she pulls up the ridge of the Himalayas in shimmering glory, we three agree—it's perfect. Into the oven it goes.

Brother remembers, once mama had two lemon pies siting on the windowsill to cool. Smelling mama's pies would drive a man to desperation. So Old Bill set his wily charms onto little Cecil.

"Your maw baked a lemon pie today, didn't she? If you would slip up there and get it, why, you and I could eat it now, couldn't we," he proposed. "See, it's sittin' there on the

winderskill. I suppose, though, you aren't big enough to reach it."

"Yes, I am, too," said Cecil. "I am too big enough to get it."

"That pie sure will taste good, won't it?" said Old Bill.

Old Bill watched close, that "yore maw don't ketch you." Cec sprang up, snatched the pie, and crept back down the side of the

house. They hid out behind some of mama's shrubs.

"Why, Addie's weeds are good for sumptin' after all," said he.

There was some screechin' when mama found the pie gone and a trace of meringue on little Cec's lip, and the rest on his shirt sleeve, where he had dragged it across his mouth. "I'll teach YOU to steal my pie! Get me that switch."

Old Bill hadn't counted on that. His conscience got to him. "Oh! Addie!" he yelled over Cec's howls. Mama appeared with the green peach tree switch in her hand.

A tear gleamed in his eye. "Don't whup the boy, Addie. I put him up to it. I helped him eat the pie."

Mama's jaw dropped in disbelief. "A grown man..." Mama saw a trace of meringue smeared on his shirt sleeve. Old Bill felt even worse, but the damage was done.

Well, now is the time of reckoning, and mama is savoring it. REVENGE! Revenge-at-last, how sweet!

Mama sends me over to warn Miz Tanner. Mama says, "Give her this message: 'We have made a lemon pie for Mr. Tanner for dinner. It's in the oven now, and we'll bring it over when it's ready. It's a surprise.'"

Miz Tanner says, "The boys are coming in  
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today. They love Addie's pie."

Mama's stunt will come off in front of all the boys and "the wimmen". Mama is jubilant.

The cars bounce past our house in clouds of dust and circle into Tanner's yard. We hear them laughing,



joking with each other and the Old Man. Young Bill, Ben and Laura, Homer, Avis. Can't be better.

That magnificent pie seems to know its destiny. Mama exults that they all can smell it while it bakes. When it comes hot out of the oven, that pie can be sold at auction.

"Mama, let me take it, let me, pleeezze," I beg.

"All right," Mama says. "Let me set it on these folded towels so it won't burn your hands. Be careful going through that gate. Cecil, you help her."

We brazenly eavesdrop on the conversation next door; they

are drooling, waiting on Addie's Pie.

Even the elements are on our side. I appear at their kitchen door, the south wind fat with the fragrance of that wonderful, elegant pie, whirling the vapors through the screen door and across the noses of the impatient diners. They sit, knives upright, ready for the attack.

Miz Tanner waits table from her wood powered black iron cook stove, her silky white hair damp on her brow, her hands turned into her apron, eyes smiling behind her small, round gold spectacles. She alone knows of the "Surprise"; if she suspects something amiss, she reveals not a clue. "Here's Nina May with the pie," she says.

They all sit on benches on either side of a plank table on the porch, the Old Man is at the head. One of them leans back to hold open the screen door and I squeeze in behind them, presenting the pie like offerings to the Gods; I hold it just a few inches above the level of the table until they all have a chance to admire its perfection. "Ooh, Aah, look at that pie." I take my time setting it down, letting them yearn for it.

Carefully, and respectfully, I explain the rules. "Mama baked this lemon pie for Mr. Tanner. No one but him is to cut it."



I push the pie right up in front of Old Bill. Mate hands him the carving knife. I beat it for home, savoring their happy voices, cheering for the pie!

"OK paw, here's my plate. Put some on here." They all talk at once.

Mama beams. Mama shines. Mama has died and gone to Heaven.

Silence. "I can't cut this pie," the Old Man's voice.

"What-the-Hell? I never knowed Addie to make a bad pie."

Silence. "One of you boys cut this pie for me."

"No, paw, that's your pie. Addie made it for you. You cut it."

Silence.

I imagined the Old Man, struggling with his crippled hands, not able to cut through the pie. For a second there, I feel sorrow for him. Almost. I don't want him to be in actual pain.

Old Bill lets out an oath of extreme exasperation, to rephrase it mildly. We can hear them murmuring, wondering why the old man can't cut through Addie's tender crust.

One of the boys lets out a shout, a whoop, a hollar. "Turn the pie around, paw. Look at it

there, where you been sawin' through that meringue."

I can see him leaping up, pointing to it.

The meringue is separated from the crust and the cotton is peeping out. "I'll beeee...." Sudden silence. He knows we are listening, so he listens—he hears us rolling in the floor, laughing.

"Well, they've gotcha this time, paw!"

"Boy, oh boy. That's a good one."

They are all laughing, until there is one symphony of merriment as the laughter blends, radiating from the two little houses. We watch them passing the pie around so everyone can appreciate Mama's efforts. Nobody refers to 'the dogs in the weeds.'

Sounds are muted in the cottage next door. Quiet conversations, blurred, soft; sounds women make cleaning up the kitchen after a meal: kettles scraping on the wood stove, water splashing, dishes tinkling. Time passes.

Finally, he comes. "Oh! Addie! Oh! Nina May!"

Old Bill leans on the old gray gate, the shiny pie tin in his twisted, crippled hands, a gleam in his bright, blue eyes, a grin on the

generous mouth, his railroader's cap tilted at a rakish air.

He carefully moves his bakkerchaw around, so's he won't choke on it.

"Thank your maw for that wonderful pie," he says.

Postlog: Mama reminisced in Spring, 1992. "If I had it to do over again, I wouldn't be mean to that dear old man. I would bake him TWO pies, butterscotch and lemon. I would say, 'Mr. Tanner, here are two pies for you, and have yourself a Happy April Fool's Day.'"

The spry 87 year-old woman paused at her quilting, a soft smile shining in her eyes at the fond memories of days gone by, when doors were unlocked, and helping hands were only a shout away. ■

*(Nina Q. Barnes of Tulsa is retired. She was a businesswoman, teacher, aerospace worker, and news-woman, born and educated in Garfield county. The official magazine of the Oklahoma Cherokee Strip Centennial contains a short-short story authored by Nina; she makes her debut in short-story in the*



# *A Reformer In Western Oklahoma: The Struggles and Successes of Dr. Michael*

## *Shadid*

by Alvena Bieri

**G**ood health care for everyone is a hot subject in the early 1990's as political parties and politicians struggle to come up with a workable plan. With millions of Americans unable to afford health insurance, with babies going unvaccinated against common and preventable diseases, and with middle income people declaring bankruptcy trying to pay for a single, expensive illness, the topic is timely. The life and work of an extraordinary physician who practiced what he called "cooperative medicine" in western Oklahoma in the 1930's and 40's provides a rich study in how excellent health care was delivered to families on low incomes.

His name was Michael Shadid, and his book, Crusading Doctor: My Fight for Cooperative Medicine, one among many he wrote, has recently been re-issued by the University of Oklahoma Press, with a

forward by Ralph Nader. In 1929, Shadid, after 22 years of medical practice in small western Oklahoma towns, started the first cooperative hospital in the United States in Elk City, Oklahoma. Patient owned, it offered an inexpensive prepayment plan which provided comprehensive care, including dentistry. It was staffed by a group of well-qualified physicians, all of whom worked for a salary. Legally, it was a non-profit, non-dividend paying organization. By 1935, the Community Hospital, as it was called, employed several internists, an ear, eye, nose and throat specialist, and the only urologist in western Oklahoma. A group practice, Shadid was fond of pointing out, was the very concept that had made the Mayo Clinic (which, of course, the poor could hardly afford) so successful.

Shadid called himself "the doctor for the people." His anti-elitist, anti-

monopolistic philosophy was one with his concern for the welfare of his patients, especially the farmers of western Oklahoma. "Wholistic" medicine as he practiced and preached it included cost control, prevention of serious health problems by early treatment, expert diagnosis by several doctors conferring together, all resulting in maximum efficiency in delivery of care. He explained, "It is estimated that one-third of the deaths in the United States every year are preventable. But under the present setup, the patient doesn't go to the doctor for a slight illness—he can't afford to...Why this tragic failure? Because under our system, the doctor is a private tradesman with services to sell—and only sick people will buy them."

By the time he wrote these words he had been practicing medicine for a

"If only I could have been here sooner!"

generation, all the while evolving his approach to medical costs. Shadid was born into a very poor but strict Greek Orthodox family in Lebanon. Impressed by his short stay at the American University of Beirut, at age sixteen he immigrated to the United States and immediately started trying to earn enough money to put himself through medical school. The swift and thorough Americanization of Michael Shadid included peddling trinkets door to door, for a good profit by the way, and giving inspirational talks at churches on the Holy Land, with which he was most familiar. Other members of his family immigrated too, and his brother pioneered—of all places—in Greer County. He married the girl to whom he had been promised at an early age. After graduating from George Washington University Medical School in St. Louis, he first practiced at Stecker in

Caddo County, then in Carter, south of Elk City, spent a few months in Mangum, and finally settled permanently in Elk City.

"a right not a privilege."

Early in his career he had his first glimmerings of possible benefits of cooperative medicine. In those days he was treating typhoid, tuberculosis, and many preventable childhood diseases. Realizing that even simple preventive medicine was a luxury the poor could not afford, he came to believe that basic care with a strong emphasis on prevention of disease is "a right and not a privilege." This last phrase

is his own, though it sounds strikingly contemporary. Shadid compared much medical

treatment to an autopsy where the doctor says sadly to himself, "If only I could have been here sooner!" He came to encourage his patients to be conscious of "ways of helping themselves as consumers." Soon the competent young doctor began to attract patients from Texas as well as western Oklahoma—from Hereford, Quannah, Wichita Falls, and some from as far away as Tucumcari, New Mexico.

Shadid spent eleven years in Carter. Despite the rigors of providing for a wife and family of six children, two of whom became doctors and his colleagues, he worked hard to increase his medical skills by taking special courses when and where he could. Still, his thinking turned more and more toward what he referred to as "the economics and sociology of my profession." He theorized that the majority

of people who "cannot afford to pay for high medical care and hospitalization on a fee-for-service basis can afford to pay for it if permitted to pay a given sum periodically when well." It was like saying they could afford the wholesale, but not the retail, price of medicine. The Shadid idea was not a health insurance scheme which provides at best only partial coverage and is a record keeping, claim filing, inefficiency ridden nightmare. The Shadid system required a sum paid one time for membership in the organization and a yearly fee. These payments covered everything.

As he was getting the plan underway in Elk City, he would often invite twenty or so people over to eat and after dinner would give them a convincing and entertaining sales pitch. He always stressed communication and when the hospital was operative, he put out a monthly newsletter. Shadid knew that many of his farmer constituency were sold on the farm cooperative idea. Owning a grain elevator or a cotton gin cooperatively and hiring a director to manage it were practical and widely accepted as a desirable business arrangement. So Shadid was fortunate that all over the Great Plains many others years before had helped lay the philosophical foundation for this idea of cooperation. He took comfort too in his observation that the socialist-leaning farmers of western Oklahoma were better read, better informed, and more open to new ideas than many townspeople.

His concern for patients was matched by his genuine belief that a cooperative hospital would benefit doctors as well. "Cooperative medicine," he maintained, "will improve the condition of doctors by freeing them from the uncertainties of private practice, the charity cases, the burden of uncollectible debts, the overhead

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of office and equipment, the waste of time. It will give the doctors a chance for regular office hours, the use of all essential facilities, and freedom from economic pressures.

But...it seems that lurking in all idealistic plans is always a big "but". When doctors in Beckham County saw that Shadid was beginning to succeed with his cooperative hospital, they started to fight him. It would be more accurate to say that a thorough, unrelenting campaign against

## "a peddler of rugs."

Shadid was mounted by the established medical community beginning in that county and spreading all over the state. The Beckham County Medical Association excluded him from membership by disbanding for a year and a half. Then when they started the group again, he was not invited to join. Next the Oklahoma State Board of Medical Examiners quit certifying young doctors they suspected were headed for the Community Hospital. In 1936 the Oklahoma Medical Association accused him of "steerage" and tried to revoke his license to practice medicine. Their charge was that he was "sending out agents to solicit members." The real concern was that Shadid was threatening the system, and the doctors feared competition and loss of what they perceived to be the economic right to charge patients whatever they pleased.

Had it not been for the Farmers' Union, headed at the time by John Simpson, the support of Governor Bill Murray, and the legal backing of Oklahoma City attorney, Gomer Smith, the Community Hospital might not have been able to hang on. Even the usually conservative Daily

Oklahoman came out in Shadid's favor when the threat to him became statewide news. R. M. McClintock of that paper wrote, "From the political standpoint, it would seem to be the worst of times for the doctors to seek to punish one of their number, unless they have more serious charges against him than that he has been relatively successful in putting into operation a plan of cooperative hospitalization."

In order to spread his idea of cooperative medicine Shadid became even more active. In 1940 he ran for Congress and lost, claiming the election was stolen. His campaign made him the target of epithets that questioned his loyalty to this country and generally slurred him as a bizarre and dangerous quack. As usual Shadid reported these slurs in a rather matter of fact way in the book. The Vici Beacon called him "a peddler of rugs." At Cordell he was called a Communist, at Hollis, an enemy spy, at Hobart, "a millionaire". Some in Altus said New York Communists (undoubtedly the most vicious type) had contributed \$8,000 to his campaign. Some folks at Cheyenne said they thought a Nazi was his campaign manager.

Even after the election was lost, he continued his efforts to spread the gospel of cooperative medicine. He spoke widely in both the United States and Canada. Details are lacking as to the demise of the Community Hospital in Elk City, except that Shadid's son Fred headed it for a while till he decided to enter solo practice in 1953. The hospital closed for good in 1955.

It's striking that in Shadid's language there was a dearth of ideological talk. There was no sloganeering, no incendiary references to "oppression of the masses," no

call to the workers of the world—or the poor people of western Oklahoma, for that matter—to rise up and cast off their chains. Neither was there real rancor as he reported the antics of his enemies. I suspect that Shadid was very conservative in most ways. He was virulently opposed to abortion, he thought chiropractors were bogus, and he certainly didn't aim to overthrow institutions. Still, it must have seemed more than a little ironic to him that the very ideas of his adopted country, ideals he spent his life trying to put into practice, were so often repudiated by so many of those he was trying to help. ■

(*Alvena Bieri* lives and writes in Stillwater. Her work has appeared in Westview previously.)

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# To Each His Own. . . .

## *Memories*

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by Irene Easley

My childhood was spent in a wagon yard! Not the most glamorous place, but interesting. I have many happy memories of those years. My friends tell me I should write about them while I can still remember them.

When we left Illinois in 1907, and came to western Oklahoma, we weren't just poor, we were REAL poor. Papa thought he could make a fortune, since Oklahoma was a new state. It should have lots of opportunities just waiting for us. With five children, three old enough to work, he decided to try farming. He rented a farm in the Cedar community. After a few years, my two sisters married local farm boys and started farming on their own. That is when life began in the wagon yard in Hydro, Oklahoma.

In those days, people took great pride in their horses and buggies. Some of the buggies were as shiny as the new cars today, and with

the tasseled buggy whips and all of the decorations on the harness, the young men made quite an impression on the girls.

The yard covered half a block. It had stalls with mangers for feed and hay. For the high strung animals, there were box stalls. The water had to be pumped by hand, so my brothers and I had to pump a tank of water before going to school each morning. There were very few automobiles around, which made business very good for a while. The horses could be fed and watered for twenty-five cents.

Papa also met the trains twice a day, driving an old stage coach and taking the passengers to the hotel (we had two hotels in). Everyone traveled by train, if the trip was over twenty-five miles.

I don't recall that life was ever dull. The kids in our neighborhood would gather after school and play until dark. Some of our

favorite games were "Hide and Seek" and "Follow the Leader". Mama spent a lot of time doctoring our injuries, as someone was always falling out of the hay loft. We played "Shinny" with tin cans, a game that had a slight resemblance to hockey.

After a hard rain, we would all go down to Deer Creek Bridge to see how high the creek was. The farmers would stand around and speculate whether the bridge would hold. Then we would wade home in the ditch that ran along the road.

On Saturday afternoon the picture show was a must. We saved our pennies all week for that. The picture was sure to be a thriller. It was always continued right at the moment when the train was about to run over the girl, who was tied to the track by the villain. Clara Willis, whom I admired a lot, played suitable music for the



*Left to right ( John McFarlin, Mearl McFarlin, Mrs. J.D. McFarlin, Charles Mc Farlin, Jess Spain, Minnie Spain, and Irene Easley) photo provided by author*

film. I planned to someday learn to play the piano and take her place playing for the theater. However, all I learned to play was "Beulah Land" with one hand on an old second hand organ.

On Sunday morning, Mama didn't send us to Sunday School and Church, she went with us. In her Sunday waist and skirt, me in my pink china silk dress and the boys in their knee pants and starched shirts, we could have posed for Norman Rockwell. Mama always prepared dinner before leaving for church, then she would invite

friends for Sunday dinner. The memory of her fried chicken and butterscotch pie still flashes through my mind, especially when I am served the "brought on" kind in some fancy restaurant.

The Hydro Fair was a highlight in our lives. The wagon yard would be full, and most of the families brought baskets of food and ate their meal right there before going to the fair. Sometimes they would invite us children to eat with them.

At least once a month a family would come in a

covered wagon, and stay a few days. They usually had children our ages, so many friendships were formed that lasted for years. Papa had a camphouse fixed up with a stove and table, and if they were tired of cooking and eating in the wagon, they could use it.

Once in a while we had the excitement of coming home from school to find an encampment of Indians in the vacant lot across the road from us. They would pitch their tents and stay for days. They had such beautiful spotted horses, and bright colored

blankets and shawls. We spent hours watching their activities. They cooked over a campfire. Late in the evening they would dance around the fire and have some kind of ceremonies.

When I think of horses, I remember an experience I had with a pony. My brothers each had a pony, "Skip" and "Buck". Skip was rather skittish and Buck was real gentle. Someone left Buck tied in our yard. I thought it would be fun to ride around the block. After all, he was gentle and I was nine years old. I knew I could ride as well as the boys. When I

climbed on, I missed the stirrup with one foot and sort of put my foot in his flank. That was a no-no! Off we went. I stayed on for two jumps, and fell off. My foot catching in the reins and my head bumping the ground with every jump. I heard Mama scream as we went by. After a few more jumps, Old Buck, gentle soul, stopped and I was rescued. Mama didn't have to tell me not to do that again.

When automobiles became plentiful, the wagon yard died. Not a trace of it is left, except the old iron pump, which stands in my

yard, a memento of the days that used to be (more than eighty years ago).

Papa found a job in a creamery, picking up cream and eggs from the farmers. Mama cleaned house and did the washing for the more affluent families in town. My girlfriend and I made a play house of the old stage coach and life went on.

Papa didn't make his fortune, but we children managed to get an average education. We had a happy childhood, and made many good memories. I am the last of the McFarlin clan, and I often think life in that old wagon yard:

Sometimes in the evening  
when cool breezes blow  
I find myself dreaming  
as I rock to and fro.

And old friends seem to beckon  
from memory lane  
to join them once more  
but it would not be the same.

Old father time seems to have  
the right knack  
of pushing us forward,  
we can never go back.

So Benji, our pet,  
his master and I  
will look to the future  
and to the old says....good bye.... ■

*(Irene Easley came to Oklahoma with her parents, J. D. and Minnie McFarlin, when she was two years old. She has spent the greater part of her life in western Oklahoma. Out of a family of two boys and three girls, she is the only member left. She and her husband, Arthur, are members of the First Baptist Church. She is a member of the Hydro Garden Club. Irene enjoys painting, ceramics, and other crafts.)*

# *You Couldn't Tell Him "No"*

Wagon wheels whirled angrily and hoof beats thudded like trip hammers as the team took off in a cloud of dust down the road and away into the open prairie space. Dad, kneeling behind the boards at the front of the heavy farm wagon box, his hair blown by the wind, the reins tight in his hands, was gone.

Elmer and I looked at each other in horror. He had done it again. Dad always thought he could do things he couldn't do. You couldn't tell him "No!" In spite of our worried protests as we'd held the team, he had hollered, "Let 'em go!"

We ran to our horses. With hurried hands, we pushed bridles over the horses' heads, then leapt to their backs and took off after the wagon.

Anytime you had to snare down a horse's head to get a bridle on it, and have a throat strap on the bridle so she couldn't throw it off her head, a person ought to know that horse wasn't ready to pull a wagon. The horse was pretty—fairly tall, lean, soft, mild-looking brown, a blaze face—but when you looked in her eyes, they said, "Watch out!"

Dad had bought her from some wild-horse catchers in the

by Edith Grabeal Wilson Maxwell as  
told to Anita Heistand

Colorado mountains, and she was supposed to be broke to pull wagons. Seems like those wild horses never became truly broke, but Dad was bound to try.

He had decided the way to do it was to team her up with a gentle horse that had pulled the wagon when we came as homesteaders to the Oklahoma Panhandle. Old Bess would tame her down. He forgot that Old Bess still had spirit enough to enjoy a good run if she had the right urging. The Wild Horse had renewed Old Bess.

Uncle Clarence, who lived two miles down the long, straight road, saw the dust cloud coming. Soon he could tell it was the banner of runaway horses.

"George!" he yelled to his son. "Get out here! We've got to flag those horses into the yard and against the corral fence!"

Clarence and George managed to run the team off to a standstill. The horses, heaving and sweating, fidgeted out the aftermath of their excitement. Dad was quivering from tension and

exhaustion. He talked with Uncle Clarence while he and the horses recovered.

Gradually the horses quieted down. "I think they'll be safe now, Clarence," Dad said. "You and George get them turned around and head them toward home. I'll drive them back and finish the job I set out to do."

Elmer and I were just getting in sight of Uncle Clarence's when we saw Dad on the way back. We cleared the road as the horses drummed toward us, full speed. Dad was definitely concentrating on holding the reins, looking neither to the left or right. I don't know if he even saw us. As soon as they passed us, we whirled our horses around and took off after them again.

As we neared our farm, we saw its tall windmill tower rising from the flat Oklahoma prairie. Our water tank, beside it, was made of staves on top of the ground, set around a thirty-foot diameter circle with about three feet of each board left sticking up. Dirt was banked against the outside so cattle and horses could walk up and drink out of the elevated pond.



The horses thundered by the house and up the windmill-tank bank. They couldn't have stopped if they'd wanted to. Over the edge and into the cold water went horses, Dad, and the front half of the wagon. It's a wonder it didn't kill them all, them being so hot.

Elmer and I jumped off our horses and up the bank. That part of the bank was ruined. Dad was climbing out over the tailgate of the wagon, and went a ways and sat down.

After he kind of came to himself, we all went into the water and unhitched the wagon. After lots of heavy work, we got it out. The horses, after they were unhitched, had managed to clamber out.

I wish I could say the ending of that trip caused the wild horse to be tractable, or my Dad to give thought to his ideas, but neither happened.

The next time I remember him getting overwhelmed by a bright idea was the time he decided to take a shortcut across the skating pond. Come to think of it, shortcuts were the cause of most of his troubles.

We milked about 25 cows by hand, night and morning. We sold the cream at the store and used the money for groceries. We raised pigs on the skim milk. The pigs weighed 60 pounds or so, and ran free — while the hogs, 300-350 pounds, were shut up.

That evening, Elmer and I had separated the milk, and went out to shut things up for the night.

Usually we carried the skim milk out to the pigs as we went, but this time we forgot. Dad came by and saw where we had left the two big buckets of milk setting, and decided to take them out.

Just below the windmill tank was a shallow overflow pond. Ducks and pigs used it in summer, and we skated on it in winter. It was frozen over at this time. Dad could have gone around it, but he decided to cut across. The pigs saw him coming, and knew what he had. They ran in a herd to meet him. One hit him in the legs, and down he sprawled. Pigs and milk everywhere. He couldn't get up, at all.

Elmer and I saw him fall, and knew we were in trouble. There was nothing to do, though, but to go help him up and walk him to the house.

Soon it was time to butcher a hog. When we butchered one, we hung it on the windmill tower overnight to cool out, its two hind legs hung from a single tree. Next day, we cut the hog up and cured some of the meat in the smoke house.

Usually, we got a rope on the hog and got it out of the pen, where Dad killed it. He didn't believe in shooting a hog; he hit it on the head with a sledgehammer.

This time he decided he'd just kill the hog in the pen, and we'd throw it over the fence. ("Throw" a 350 pound hog over the fence — Dad, Elmer, Mary and me.) There were about fifteen hogs in the pen together. We managed to get one separated,

and Dad gave me a short board and told me to keep the rest of the hogs back.

Usually Dad was accurate with his hits, but maybe because of the other hogs making him nervous, he hit this hog a glancing blow down across its ear. It began to squeal.

The minute the other hog began to hear that squealing, they headed toward it. I held them off as long as I could, then bailed over the fence. Elmer and Mary went over their fences, too. Dad stood the hogs off with his sledgehammer 'til he got them under control.

I'll never forget his angry, reproachful cry to me — "Did you want them to kill us all?"

Nobody could get in bigger jams than my Dad, or distribute blame more unfairly. But he was lovable in spite of his obstinacy — or maybe because of it. ■

*(Anita Heistand is a nonfiction writer and her works have been published regionally and nationally. She likes to interview older people and write their best stories.)*

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1. Mail submissions flat in a 9x12 envelope. Include a SASE for possible rejection.
2. Submissions should be typed; prose double spaced and poetry single spaced on 8 1/2" x 11" white paper. Artwork: graphics- pen and ink on white paper; photos- 5" x 7" or 8" x 10" black and white. Send copies of photos since they may not be returned.
3. Material should be about western Oklahoma, or should be written by someone from western Oklahoma.
4. We both accept and enjoy free verse and formal poetry.
5. Please limit prose submissions to 10 double-spaced typed pages.
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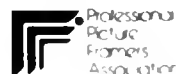
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