

Amanda Zelpha Hancock Spencer Naegel wrote this story in a letter in the 1970's. She was my grandmother. I have typed this story and added the Italics and grammatical corrections.

Kathryn B. Bocker Madsen, December 5, 1998

The Life Story of Kathryn Belle Spencer Skouras

I have a desire to write as much as I know about Katie's life as was told to me about her by her mother, Grandma Spencer (*Mary Elizabeth Wright Spencer*). She was born April 20, 1892 in Dallas, Texas. Katie, as we all called her, was the third child of Edward Spencer and Mary Elizabeth Wright. When she was 12 years old, her mother disposed of their home in Dallas and moved to California. She bought a home in Hollywood, California and settled there with her children. The father, Edward Spencer, had come to California a year or so before and had not returned to Texas. Grandma had lost one baby, her second son by Edward, named Lawrence Eugene. He was only 3 ½ months old, and she seemed to be very sad every time she spoke of it. He died very suddenly.

I spent many of my evenings with Grandma, listening to her tell me of the many things of her life, and I knew she bore many burdens. We had a close relationship with each other that few mothers and daughter-in-laws have. She revealed to me her loves, her responsibilities and her losses. Grandma didn't open up to me much until after my children were born. Then she seemed to be seeing her little children all over again in mine and she loved them dearly. Oh! How she loved her children. They were her whole life. I could see the hurt in her eyes, so I listened with much sympathy. The reconciliation she had hoped for with her husband did not materialize, so she divorced him. She said she placed much responsibility upon Katie to help with the two younger boys, Frank and Raymond, and she and Charley (*her oldest son*) went to work.

Katie was a very pretty girl and was like a second mother to Raymond who was ten years younger than her. She helped her mother and she and Frank and Raymond looked after the "big house" as they called it in Hollywood, and went to school while their mother worked to support them. She worked as a cook and housekeeper in homes. She met a Mr. Dias, and had a boarding house enterprise going for awhile. She was to receive equal shares for her work and took care of all the cooking and kitchen details.

When this broke up, she had become a very good cook, so she decided to look for something bigger to do that would pay her more money. She had no help to support her family except the small amount Charley could give her. She had lived in California four years in the "big house" and was still trying to pay it off, so she answered an ad in the Los Angeles Examiner and took a job to cook for the Railroad out in the desert. She cooked at the roundhouse where the working men and passengers ate. Besides being able to support her family, and pay on her house, she was able to put money in the bank. After a few months she decided to pay a visit home, so she wrote to tell the children to meet her at the train depot. She said when she arrived there was Katie, Frank and Raymond all there to meet her, and a strange boy by the name of Joe (I can't recall his last name) and when she asked who he was, Katie answered that he was her husband. He

was Italian and a boxer. He was in training to become a fighter and Katie was only 16 years old. Grandma said she was broken hearted over Katie and decided to have the marriage annulled and take her children back with her, but Joe wouldn't let go, so she quit her job and moved back home to Hollywood. Joe moved in with them.

Work was hard to find, so she took a job in a laundry. She began to inquire where Charley was and the children told her Charley had moved out. She said she just knew he would come back as he had done before, but when a few weeks went by and she didn't hear from him, she started putting advertisements in the personal column and reported him to the Missing Persons Bureau. She answered every call about every boy that even looked like Charley. She said she constantly prayed and looked for him for years. She finally put her house up for sale. I could tell it hurt her very much to part with her home in Hollywood, she seemed to be so proud of it. After selling it, she speculated by buying lots here and there. She bought the lot in Compton to later build a house on. Grandma kept her job in the Peel Laundry and became very involved looking for her son, Charley. She let Raymond go to live with Katie and Joe in their little apartment in West Los Angeles. She had a small place in South Gate and traveled back and forth to Los Angeles to her work on the Red Car Line. After many sad encounters of trying to find Charley, she was about to give up all hope of finding him. She was about to conclude that he was dead somewhere. Then, one night after work she came through the Red Car Depot and saw a young man lying on one of the benches with a jacket pulled up over his head. She said she knew it was him when she saw his hands. She walked over, pulled down the jacket and there was Charley, her son. She said all she could do was cry and say, "Thank the Lord!" He was ill with a bad cold. She took him home and nursed him back to health. Then he went up to Kettleman Hills, California to work in the oil fields and soon after that Grandma went to Ajo, Arizona to cook for the men working in the copper mines. She told me Charley had left once soon after they came to Hollywood and although he had come back once after visiting his Dad, he had been gone for 7 years altogether. I use to wonder how a mother could stand to have her son go away like that, and I prayed it would never happen to my son, Raymond. I never told my son about this page of his Uncle Charley's life, until he was a grown man, as it was so dreadful to me. But instead, I prayed for him and his sons and I gave him a lot of love and protection in his growing years. But now I am sure Grandma wants all of us to know or she wouldn't have sat by the hours to talk to me about it.

It was while Grandma was cooking at the copper mines that Katie came over to see her. She was disillusioned and very unhappy, and she was frightened of Joe. She told her mother she had run away from Joe and that she was leaving him. He had become mean and he was whipping Raymond all the time. I heard Ray say many times that Joe beat him and even hit him with a 2 by 4 once when he came home from school with grades lower than he thought he should have. Katie reported Joe to the school. This provoked the quarreling, and Raymond ran away from home. He went up to where Charley was at Kettleman Hills. Charley notified his mother that Raymond was with him, but he had told him he couldn't stay with him. He wanted to get him back in school. So his mother came to California and took Raymond down to South Gate to stay with Mrs. Samuel Smock, who had been her neighbor. She had a son named Lawrence ("Larry" for short)

the same age as Raymond, and they went to school together and became very good friends. It was a friendship that lasted many years.

Katie stayed with her mother in Ajo and when school was out for the summer, Raymond would go over to Ajo to stay with them. While they were there, Katie sued Joe for a divorce. When Joe knew Katie was really leaving him, he became infuriated and went to Ajo determined to bring her back. Mother told me Joe was so unreasonable and jealous of Katie that he threatened to take her life unless she came back to him. She told me it was terrible, and she believed if she hadn't been there, he really would have carried out his threat. They stayed in Ajo and Raymond came back each year to go to school with Larry and stay with the Smocks. They (*the Smocks*) moved to Huntington Park while Ray was there.

Ray rode always on the train and many times with his mother. Grandma worked for many years in Ajo, and had a small house built on the lot in Compton. She said she had that built first so she could live there while a house was being built on the front of the lot. Katie wanted to go back to Hollywood to get a job. So they returned to California. Grandma went back to work at the Peel Laundry where she worked long hours and became their head presser. She was there until she retired at around 62 with twisted arthritic feet and hands.

When the 1st World War broke out and our country declared war on Germany in 1918, both Charley and Frank enlisted. Charley joined the Army and was sent over to France where he fought in the Argonne Forest and "no man's land". He was hurt, and suffered from shell shock and mustard gas. He was picked up on the field and spent some time in an Army hospital before he was shipped home. Frank enlisted in the Navy and also went over to France. The flu broke out on the ships and many sailors were lost at sea. However, Frank survived.

Grandma told me that one of the nicest things the boys ever did for her was when Charley and Frank bought a ticket for her to go by ship from Los Angeles Harbor all the way up the coast past San Francisco to Canada. She stayed a few days in Vancouver, Washington and returned to Los Angeles by train. They told her it would soften the blow of them both leaving for the war at the same time. The two boys returned about the same time from the war. Raymond was to stay home and help his mother. (*He was only 15 or 16 about the time they left for France*).

Grandma borrowed \$2800.00 from the Great Western Savings and Loan to build the house on the front of the lot to be built while she lived in the little house in the back. The loan was to be paid back at \$26.00 a month. Frank got married to Viola (*Sherratt*). Katie was in Hollywood where she met Pete Skouras. Katie had some photos made of her and she had made a screen test when she was younger which Grandma was very proud of. Katie married Pete, who was the youngest son of the Skouras family, called the Motion Picture Magnet. They were Greek and Katie told us their dinners and picnics where big occasions where all the families got together to celebrate holidays and birthdays. I was at 2 of those dinners at Katie's home in Los Angeles. One was a birthday dinner for Pete's

sister, and the other was for a Christmas party. There were three brothers and one sister, all married and several children and Mr. Skouras. They were a fun loving family. They were all big people, and loved going to the fights, "boxing," which was a very popular sport at that time. They also loved eating.

I was married to Raymond Whitfield Spencer just five years after Katie married Pete. We were married on the 22nd of June 1926 and they were married 16th of June 1921. I noticed when I was going with Ray, that Katie as well as we, were going out to see Mother Spencer a lot through the week and on Sundays. Grandma cried a lot and I was concerned for her. Charley had died the previous November. There was a lot of hush-hush and quietness about his death. Katie came out one time to our little apartment where we were living on 42nd Street (*in Los Angeles*). She brought a clock with candlesticks and 2 pretty crystal dishes from her and Mother Spencer for our wedding gift. They had not come to our wedding and I couldn't understand why they hadn't come. She said Ray had not left the address of where we were to be married in Lenox (*California*). She wanted to see my wedding dress which I showed her. I made a lunch and we had a nice visit together. Frank and Viola had 2 children, Yvonne, from her first marriage and Leroy, their son. They were not around much, as Vi spent most of their time with her parents. I knew Mother Spencer was lonesome.

We moved from Los Angeles over to San Fernando where Ray's work was. While we were there, Mother and Frank and Vi came over to tell us Katie was ill, and they had taken her to the hospital. Ray went with them to go see her. He came back and told me she was very sick. They moved her up to San Bernardino for treatment. Katie had a beautiful home completely furnished with expensive furnishings and I was feeling so sorry that she had to be so sick. She hadn't had any children. I kept thinking she had such a lonely life. She didn't work and spent all her time in that house. I was not feeling good when we were in San Fernando. I was going to be a mother, but I didn't know it yet. I just knew I was sick every day. We moved up to Lake Elsinore to where another one of Ray's jobs was. On our first visit home to see my mother (*Marium Dalton Hancock*) in Inglewood, she told Ray to take me to a doctor. She said she believed I was going to have a baby. We went and sure enough, I was pregnant. I had high-heeled shoes on, and mother told Ray to go buy me some low heeled shoes. They cost \$6.00 and we went back to Elsinore with \$12.00 left till payday.

Katie was in the hospital 2 months. Grandma went up and signed her out to take her home. She believed she could get her well if she just had her with her. Katie was moved to the little house on the back of the lot (*in Compton*) where Grandma looked after her. The house in the front was finished, but no one was living in it as yet, and I presumed it was because it was not furnished. There was only a small heating plate in the kitchen and a built in bench and small table. Ray and I came down every week to see his mother and Katie continued to get worse. We would stay an hour or so and drive back to Elsinore late at night. While at Grandma's I was asked to sit out in the car, while Ray went in to see his sister and mother. His mother had told him it wouldn't be good for me to see her. Although I wasn't allowed to see her, I could hear her suffering and so could all the neighbors. The doctors had told Grandma, Katie wouldn't live. But Grandma couldn't

be reconciled to losing her. She had paid to have Katie moved to her home by ambulance and believed her faith in God could heal her daughter. She would come out to the car to see me for a few minutes every night before we drove back. She would tell me what she made for her to eat and that she read to her from the Bible. One day we received a call from Grandma that Katie was passing away. I called Ray at his job and when we arrived, Katie didn't know Ray. She died that night at 10:30 in her mother's arms. Mother said she rocked her to sleep. It was the 26th of October 1926, just four months after we were married and less than a year after Charley died. They told me it was a nervous breakdown. Grandma told me she thanked the dear Lord for taking her out of her sorrow. Katie never knew about the baby we were expecting. They all kept saying how she would have loved to see Ray's children. The next day I fixed some warm creamed tomato soup and tea for Grandma and Grandpa (*Edward Spencer*), who had come down from Beaumont, and I served it in the little house in the front. When Ray came in, he told me it was the first time he had seen his father and mother sitting down at a table together in a long, long time. He said he hoped we could get them back together. Katie had been their bond, and now it looked like it would be me. Katie was laid away in the Inglewood cemetery. Grandma wanted her to have a pink dress, so I went with her and Ray to find one. I saw Pete at the funeral and his sister. They were the only 2 from his family that came. I couldn't understand. I cried to see my mother and she came with Lavora, my sister. I knew Ray had helped his mother and Katie and I was glad he could. I never knew how much, and I never asked. But I did know we all had to share to even get by.

I saw Grandpa take Ray and Frank and go up to the cemetery office while we were there, and the next day Grandpa told me he had purchased Katie's grave and the rest of the 4 lots by her for the rest of his family. He said he had paid \$500.00 for all of them. They were to be for Frank and Ray and their mother and whoever may need the other one. When he (*Edward*) passed away, I insisted they lay him away by Ray's mother. Before he went back to Beaumont that day he said to me that he had often wondered if Charley had a girl who had hurt his feelings. No one ever knew.

We moved into the house at Grandma's in the front and paid her rent so we could be near her and help her. Our children Raymond and June were born while we were living there. The house was very small but new and cute. We built a fence around the lot to protect the children and planted lots of garden. We had to move a few (13) times, because of Ray's work. The Depression was on and money was very scarce. Grandma went back to work, and I found someone to watch my babies and I went to work. There were days and weeks that we had almost nothing to eat and no money. Our little garden that I tended helped us a lot. When the house next door at 127 East Cocoa St. was for sale, Grandma rushed to town and borrowed \$150.00 to make a down payment on the house for us to move into. She arranged a loan with Great Western for us to buy the house for \$2800.00 to be paid back at \$27.00 a month. We were sure happy to move in, especially the kids. We had a big lot, and chickens and dogs and cats and lots of garden. I kept on working, and rode into town on the Red Car Line. It was while we were living there that Mary Ann was born. She was such a joy to all of us. I knew we had both signed for the place and we had to pay for it so I kept working. With the children and house and chickens and garden and my work every day I was getting very tired. Grandma retired as soon as her

20 years were up and she had no pension. She said as she watched me, I made her think of herself, raising her family. I shared everything with her. She grieved always for Charley and Katie. One day when I returned from work, she was out in the yard and I heard her say, "I believe now Charley had the right idea." I answered her by saying, "Oh, Mother, the Lord takes very good care of the dead, and he sure expects us to take care of the living. We have these darling little children to love. Let's try to forget and make the most of it." I was upset and I could tell by the look on her face that I had hurt her. I right away told her I was sorry. I was forever telling her I was sorry for everything and taking care of her.

We were both upset over Ray's drinking and how he was changing. She asked me to go back to her house with her for she had something to tell me. She said she couldn't stand what Ray was doing and she and I were both becoming very nervous about the situation. Then she told me that Charley had never been well after the war. That he was unhappy to see her go to work. He was sick when she left that morning and she had asked him to stay in bed all day. When she came home, Katie was there all wet and hysterical. She had found Charley in the back yard of the little house, lying on his face. She had called the doctor and in running around for help, she was all wet and muddy. The doctor said he had been dead an hour and a half before they arrived. Grandma said he had asked her not to go to work that morning, and she kept blaming herself. Charley left a note on the table under his plate, with a will leaving a few things to the family. His insurance policy and money to go to Mother, a lot in Long Beach and his watch to go to his dad, Frank to have one dollar and Ray to have ten dollars. He didn't want a funeral. He went into detail of wanting his ashes scattered on the ocean. When Grandma finally told me Charley had taken his own life, she seemed to have a great burden lifted off her shoulders. She could speak of him after that as being alive somewhere. She told me then that Katie had never recovered from seeing Charley there, and the nightmares and worry over it had brought on depressions, plus an estrangement from Pete. All of it had finally taken its toll and caused Katie to have her breakdown. She told me she had a funeral for Charley and he was laid away in the Inglewood Cemetery. Charley's name was Clarence Edward Spencer. I read the note later that Charley left. I asked Ray why he hadn't told me and he said he couldn't. They were all hurt so very much. I was hurt too, because I began to realize my children too would never get to know their Uncle Charley and Aunt Katie. A few days after Katie was laid away I went with Ray and his mother over to Katie's home. Pete had let them go over and Ray had his key to the house. Pete had told them they could have any of Katie's personal belongings. They went through a drawer in the bedroom and found her rings and some broaches. Grandma took some purses, then reached up in the closet and took down Katie's favorite straw hat, then a summer dress, some suits and coats. Those things were put in the car. Then I saw Ray come back to get her little Mexican toy collie, black and white dog. Grandma wanted to care for Katie's dog. That was the last time we ever went over to the house, and I don't remember Pete ever coming out to Compton to see Mother. Ray had lived with Katie and Pete for four years and was living there when I met him. Charley had left the pearl handled six shooter with his mother. She kept it in a bag under her bed. After Grandma was gone, Frank and Vi came out and took the gun and Katie's rings and costume jewelry and a few other things.

My dear children, I have told you this story of Katie as much as I knew of her for I too have carried a great burden because of their loss and ours. Katie was only 34 years old when she died. I vowed then and there that I would do everything I could to take good care of myself. That I would not let anyone or anything destroy my health or me if I could help it. I promised I would do everything I could to take good care of my children so they could have a good and wholesome life. I prayed to my Father in Heaven every day to help me raise them so they would not suffer. We went through the earthquakes, the Depression, strikes and 1st and 2nd world wars. Sometimes there were long times between jobs and slack times. Both Ray and our son, Raymond, enlisted in the service for their country. The girls, June and Mary Ann and myself took care of our home and work while they were away. I had a good background of being raised in the church and I had good parents. This I could give to my children. I believe if one is loved, they can give this love to their children and family. I tried very hard, and now I have seen the results of 3 children raised to respectable men and women, all of whom I am very proud and happy for.

I have a granddaughter, Katie who was named after her great Aunt Katie. She has asked me for this story. I dedicate this to her and to all of you my children and grandchildren. As you read this may you find something that will help you better understand our family. Please do not judge us, but rather forgive and love each other, and try to be kind to one another, and try to build on this the Spencer Family as we did. Faith, Love, Hope and Charity and the need to understand one another are the things Jesus taught. We must never place ourselves above Him or seek to understand without Him. He asked us to stay away from the mysteries. Then He gave us love as our tool to guide and direct our lives and our families. You are having children now, and more children will come. Keep your arms and hearts wide open ready to accept all for the sake of each other and you will be blessed. No matter what our children do, we will always love them. This is the making of a good mother and good father. Keep praying, hoping and teaching. Sometimes they listen, sometimes they don't. Don't be discouraged, but rather see the good side, and count your blessings every day. I love all of you dearly, from your mother and grandmother,

Amanda Z. Naegel.