

May 1993

My Mother, Josephine Cottam Shaw  
by Karen Shaw Thomas

It is a beautiful sunny day here in the Northwest and I was able to mow my lawn today. The rain finally stopped!

As I was mowing the grass and out in the beautiful sunshine, I started thinking of Mom, knowing that I wanted to get my history of her written. The thoughts of her started flooding back in my memory. It was very appropriate that I should be mowing the grass, for I remember Mother as a person that wasn't afraid of doing good hard work. If she were living today (she would have been 101 years old this month), she would be one of the first one to be mowing her lawn or doing any other work that would be necessary to making a house a home.

Even though Mother was ill alot while I was growing up, she was cleaning the house or irrigating the pasture or butchering the chickens when she felt well.

I can remember her taking our bull by the chain on the ring of his nose down to the neighbors when they wanted to use him. She was one of the bravest persons that I've ever known. I cannot imagine even doing something like that of leading a mean bull around. She had made certain that Chyrl and I were in the house because the bull was very mean and she didn't want us to get hurt. There I was, watching out the window in fear and Mom showed no fear at all. It was a job that had to be done and Mom knew she had to do it.

My fondest, most precious memories of Mom involved hers and my love for music. I can remember Chyrl and I singing for the Townsend Club in Riverbank, California, or at Church. I'd look out in the audience and could always spot Mom right away, because she'd have her head tilted as if trying to absorb and hear every word that we sang. She would have the proudest look on her face and a big, big smile. When I sang at Church or at school, Mom and Dad were always there and the love would radiate from their faces to me.

There were many a day when Mom was ill and wouldn't be able to get out of bed. She'd often ask me to play the piano for her and sing some songs. Her favorites were Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes, The Lord is My Shepard, Abide with Me, How Gentle God's Command, Come Unto Jesus, We Thank Thee O God, for a Prophet, I need Thee Every Hour and Bless This House, O Lord We Pray, to name just a few. She found alot of solace and peace in music and the words of the songs.

We always attended Church as a family when I was growing up. This was very important to Mother. After getting home, we would have a Sunday afternoon dinner that was excellent. Mom was a very good cook and her fried chicken or pheasant was the best! The very first thing she taught me to bake was a custard pie. I'll always remember that day and also making fudge from scratch.

When we were growing up, they didn't have catchy sayings like "Don't be a Litter Bug" and yet Mom taught me to be careful with the earth and our environment and to enjoy the beauty of it. We'd be driving down the road and if she saw a board in the middle of the road or any other debris, she'd stop, walk back and pick it up and take it home to throw it away. Many a times, we'd come to a screeching stop in order for her to pick up something so it wouldn't be a hazard to the next car that came by or so that it wouldn't litter the ground. You could do that in those days, before fast moving cars on the streets and freeways.

When I was six years old, the Second World War broke out. Mom and Dad had the best Victory Garden in the area. Everyone was encouraged to plant a vegetable garden and ours was full of every vegetable imaginable.

Mom always kept very close tabs on Chyrl and I and yet she allowed me the freedom to chase the birds in the fields or to walk a mile or more down the road to another field to pick a big bouquet of bright orange California poppy wildflowers.

I can remember Beth taking care of Chyrl and I when Mom was very ill. Once, when she was in the hospital, we rode with Beth to the hospital and we took the "snarls" from Chyrl's hair to show Mom that she was being a good girl about getting her hair combed. Mom was interested in everything we did and paid alot of attention to Chyrl and I. The love that she showered on us while she was alive was enough to last even to this day.

As Mom was getting ready to leave on her trip back to Utah with Maxine and Walt before she passed away, I can remember standing by her in the kitchen in the home at Riverbank, California, and the last thing she said to me was, "If you ever want to talk to me, Karen, just pray". I think she had a premonition that she might not see me again. I'm thankful for her words to me as they have brought alot of peace to me down through the years and a closeness to my Mother that will be forever.

*Karen Shaw Thomas*