

NOTICE TO MEMBERS:

Several people have asked about obtaining a membership list. We will send the list with the next newsletter to those who have renewed or joined by that time. The list will only be in those newsletters that go to members (not exchanges or prospective members). If you want any or all of your information withheld from this list, you must let us know by May 1, 2008. Write a note to Box 151 or e-mail hallross@aol.com

Willa Jean Grissom (1923-2008)

some things we can learn from her life

by Marieta Grissom

Willa Jean was a unique lady. As we have gone through her house, we have discovered over and over that God didn't use a mold to create her.

Willa was a saver, a trait typical of genealogists. She saved letters and photos, mementos and travel brochures, cancelled checks and tax papers. Eventually, Willa realized the old letters had old stamps on the envelopes, so she started a stamp collection; she saved postcards she received, after a while she started a postcard collection. Thus, she extended her genealogy interests to other areas.

Willa was a labeler, a trait not so automatic for genealogists, but one we probably should adopt. She labeled her boxes of memorabilia, along with all the other contact-paper-covered boxes in her closets. For the items in her china cupboard she drew pictures of the items and next to the sketches she described the item and explained its history. This information is invaluable now to her children. While not everything was identified, many of her treasures were.

Willa was a detailed organizer. She had saved Christmas letters from nearly everyone since the beginning of time. As she worked on photo albums, she searched through the old Christmas letters and when the senders had included their family pictures, she organized the pictures of that family together in her photo albums.

Willa was thrifty, a trait often associated with those who lived through the 1930s. She saved everything in case she could reuse it. Her photo albums contain sheet protectors of various sizes and shapes because she used the photo pages at hand. And, you cannot imagine how many pens and pencils we have found. We have concluded it is not necessary to save every pen and pencil you ever had.

Willa was colorful. Besides her hats, in earlier years, and her more recent "signature" hair bows, she used color throughout her photo albums. She often labeled her pictures by placing a sheet of colored archival paper behind the photo, so she could use the colored paper border for labeling the pictures—this became her method of scrap booking. While she did not get every picture labeled and placed into albums, the vast majority are done.

Willa was an artist, though in reality probably a "frustrated" sketch artist. We found sketch after sketch throughout the house and garage. However, the artistry displayed on the quilts she stitched for her grandsons is something to behold and treasure; her sense of color, fine needlework, and artistry effectively combined.

Fortunately, Willa wrote her own life story. She included tidbits we didn't know, but she also omitted some sad and some eye-opening stories we have since learned. No one knows our story better than we do. However, we know our story from the inside out, we don't know our story from the outside looking in—as others see us—interesting food for thought.

Willa had her priorities. It is very obvious that in the last five years she worked hard and played hard. She worked diligently organizing her pictures and finishing the quilts for her grandsons, but she also enjoyed traveling, seeing and learning. She climbed aboard nearly as often as the bank's tour bus left Indianola.

Most of all, Willa was a people person. Willa didn't know one flower from another or which plant was a weed and didn't care about sitting outside to soak up a warm spring evening, but she enjoyed her walks around the neighborhood and conversations with the people along the way. She could have been a bit of a socialite, but we think that mostly she simply enjoyed people. The comment we heard over and over when we called the other relatives was "she was the person who held the family together." She sent every niece and nephew a birthday card. Since she had four siblings and her husband Pete had five siblings, this added up to quite a number of cards each year. What a legacy! Many of these people rarely visited her house or ate her sugar cookies, several hadn't seen her in years, but they remember that she remembered them!

Save, label, organize, write, share, enjoy, be thrifty, be colorful, be yourself, and remember others—all represent the unique lady we knew as Willa Jean.