



10-15-1987

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Recommended Citation

Sailors, Ava Snowden (1987) "Memories of Grandma - Genia Berry," *Westview*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 15.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol7/iss1/15>

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MEMORIES OF GRANDMA — GENIA BERRY

By Ava Snowden Sailors

We celebrated my grandmother's hundredth birthday in November of 1978, and on Valentine's Day she was gone. Her goal had been to reach the century mark; and as with other goals in her life, she not only reached it but also surpassed it.

Grandma had never been in a hospital until a few days before she died. Her eyes were still keen, though she had become quite deaf. We wrote notes to her on a tablet, and she would read eagerly, then answer us.

She had outlived her husband, several children, and most of her friends. Yet through all the tragedies she endured, she remained serene and optimistic — always able to look ahead and believe that things would get better.

My grandfather had deserted her for another woman, leaving her to struggle alone to feed all the children she had brought into the grim world. Undaunted, she made a home in a dugout in the red Western Oklahoma soil near the Washita River. She went to work in a laundry, arising at 4:00 in the morning in order to have time to kill, dress, and cook chickens for her children's breakfast.

In the early part of the twentieth century, a woman alone had a mighty struggle for survival, yet Grandma could always take time to nurse a sick neighbor, help another neighbor give birth, or take one of her famous cakes and some jelly to a family no needier than she herself was.

Grandma had to watch her son go to prison after he killed the woman for whom my grandfather had left his family. She saw that son, so tormented by guilt and by the loss of his family while he was in prison, that he spent most of his remaining years in a mental institution, dying broken and lonely.

Grandma was a forgiving and loyal person. When my grandfather came to

see her to ask her to take him back, she did so immediately, telling well-meaning but objecting friends, "I loved Henry when I married him years ago, and I still love him." He lived only about six weeks after coming home and then died of a heart attack. But Grandma had made his last days on earth happy ones.

Grandma's youngest son, crippled by a bout of what was then called infantile paralysis, died an untimely death from a blow to the head.

Another son had to be institutionalized and is living out his life in a mental institution. Grandma underwent the agony of seeing him committed several years before she died.

She also lived through watching a daughter suffer from terminal cancer. The daughter's death came not long after Grandma's.

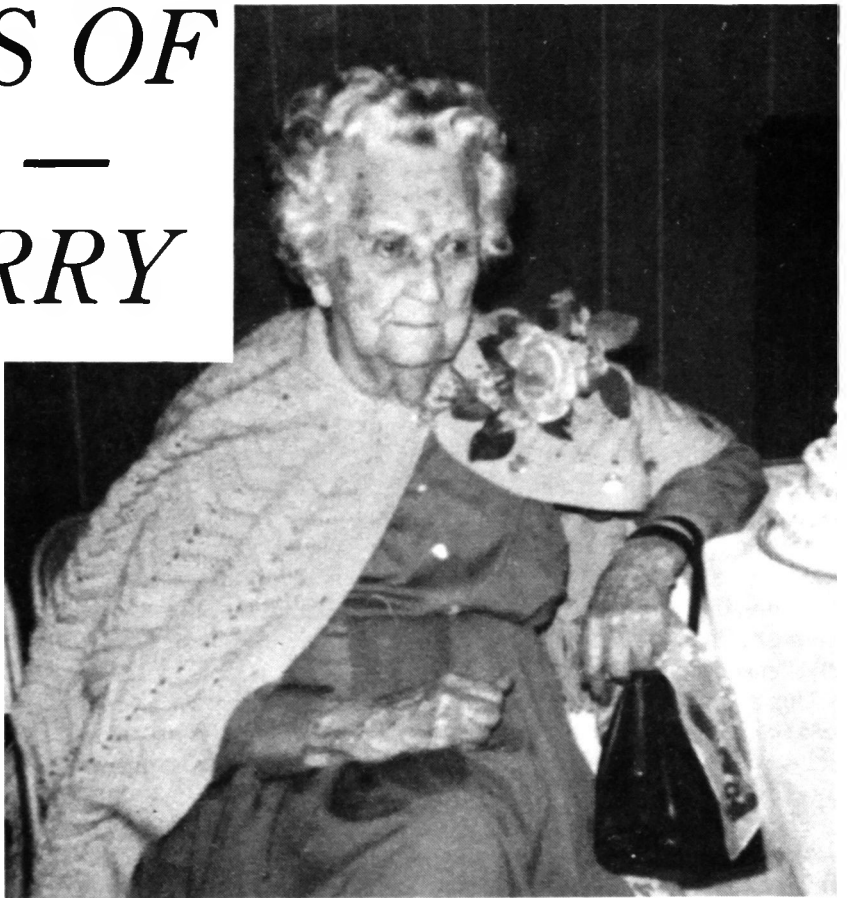
Surely she must have thought sometimes that life was too unjust to go on any longer. But she never complained about her hardships. She could always smile and say, "I'll be one hundred years old if I live until November of

1978."

From an early age, I was very impressed with the way she cared about her appearance — always keeping herself neat, a little make-up on, and a fresh apron, while she made her jelly, baked her cakes, and embroidered dresser scarves. Grandma was never idle.

In courage and faith, she shines as an example for us, her family, and for all who knew and loved her. The thirty-first chapter of PROVERBS describing the "worthy" woman was never more appropriately applied to any woman.

The passage from PROVERBS was read at her funeral service nine years ago, and all of us there could truly "rise up and call her blessed." We could be thankful for having her as an inspiration to our family and for being her descendants. Hopefully, some of her strength and many virtues will be passed on by us to our children and to our children's children. Perhaps in that way, Grandma will live forever. ❧



The author's grandma, age 100, November '78