

## NELLYE ELIZABETH THOMPSON

1903 – 1983

*A biographical sketch and some reminiscences of my mother and family follow.*

— NHA.

**M**y mother, Nellye Elizabeth Thompson, was born January 19, 1903 at her parents' ranch in Pine Canyon near King City, California. She was the only child born to them in King City, as all her siblings were born at the Thompson family home in Green Valley near Watsonville. She was named after her father's (Martin Thompson's) two deceased sisters, Nellie and Elizabeth Thompson, who are buried near the northern downslope of the Jolon grade near King City.

I was told that Mother, as girl, had beautiful auburn red hair, much like that of her mother, with lots of freckles. As a young girl she was small in stature, not really growing to her full size of 5 feet 2 inches until after she graduated from high school. Mother told me that when she went to get her diploma, she had to slide off her chair to the floor. She started to lose the red hair to gray early in her twenties and by the time she was in her late forties, though her hair was still red, it was tinted.



*Here is picture of my mother taken in 1921. This was her high school graduation picture.*

My earliest remembrance of my mother was when I was three years old, about the time of the birth of my brother, Loren. I remember that I was quite scared as mother fainted and fell to the kitchen floor. My dad rushed into the room, picked her up in his arms, carried her to the bed and tossed her on the bed like she was a mere feather. I can still see her limp figure lying on the bed. I remember that she was not a big woman, but small and frail. Mother changed physically after the birth of my sister, Mary, putting on weight and for the rest of her life she remained rather plump weighing about 210 pounds. Mother's physical appearance was more like her mother's side of the family (the Hushbecks) but her temperament was most definitely like her father, Martin Thompson.

The Thompsons moved back and forth between the King City ranch and the Watsonville ranch as circumstances dictated, so Nellye was schooled at King City, the Green Valley School near Watsonville, and finally graduated from Watsonville High School in 1921. (Note: Walter Coke Thompson also attended the Green Valley School.)



***This is a photo of my mother and her first husband, James Malcolm Atkins. It was taken at the beach in Santa Cruz shortly after they were married (1922) and is the only picture known to exist of the two of them together. There were other pictures but they were destroyed in a fire when my brother, Scotty's house burned about 30 years ago.***

Mother often talked about the moves between the two ranches (King City and Watsonville) as a youngster. Of particular notice were places she would point out as we drove on Highway 101 between Salinas and King City. There was the spot where the family would camp during the normal two-day trip. There was a small lake near Chular where a neighbor nearby would always let them camp, and then Martin Thompson would reciprocate by buying hay for his horses from the farmer. Just south of the Salinas River at Soledad, proceeding south toward King City, was an area she called "dusty flats". She said that as children, Eunice, Gene and she would always plead with their parents to let them out to run ahead of the horses pulling the wagons because there a three-mile stretch of dusty road. Running ahead of the teams and wagons, they didn't have to breathe in all the dust and only their shoes got dusty. She would also point out various points of interest such as Los Coches Rancho (formerly Los Cochinos, or "the pigs") which was once owned by her great aunt, Isabella Richardson Thompson and her family, the Soberanes of Soledad. There were various "Jacks Houses" scattered along the way, dotting various

places where the great Monterey entrepreneur, David Jacks, owned land. He apparently built houses for his tenant farmers, all the same style. Then as we left Greenfield and headed south toward King City along the bluffs of the Salinas River, she would point out where the "Last Chance" Stagecoach stop was located. The "Last Chance" stage stop was operated by her grandfather, Pleasant Thompson, near Thompson Canyon and the Salinas River. Thompson Canyon, itself was named after her grandfather as well as Thompson Gulch, the creek that drained Thompson Canyon.

I'm not sure how mother met James Atkins. The Thompson and Atkins families were not neighbors, but Watsonville was a small farming community so the families probably knew each other through social events or church functions. James Atkins was the son of Harry Atkins and Agnes Work. Both his parents came from the Shetland Islands, which lie north of Scotland in the North Sea. James and Nellye courted for a short period of time and were married on September 22, 1922 in San Jose, California. I believe that Andrew Atkins, James' brother, and his wife, Gladys, were best man and matron of honor.

It isn't clear just when James and Andrew Atkins bought adjoining farms in Larkin Valley near the present intersection of Larkin Valley Road and Buena Vista Road. Both houses, though remodeled, were still standing in October of 1998. It was here that mother and James settled after their marriage.

Mother and James Atkins had two children; Malcolm Lee Atkins (1923) and Barbara Jean Atkins (1926). Barbara was a little over six months old when her father, James Atkins, died suddenly on February 23, 1927 at his home in Larkin Valley. It is believed that James died of uremic poisoning due to a kidney infection. He was only 29 years old. Shortly thereafter, Mother lost the property and moved with her two children to her parents' home in Green Valley.

Mother was well acquainted with the Atkins family. While married to James Atkins, she knew his cousin Harold Atkins, son of Andrew Atkins. James' father, Harry, owned a farm next to his older brother, Andrew Atkins. When Harry Atkins died, leaving Agnes Work Atkins a widow to raise her young family, Andrew Atkins stepped in to help. Elizabeth Atkins Hollingworth, sister of James, once told me that the family didn't make a decision without first seeking Uncle Andrew's council. "Uncle Andrew was a substitute father to our family," she told me.



*Malcolm Lee ("Scotty") Atkins and friend*



*This is a photo of (left to right) Malcom (Scotty) Atkins, Erna Ruth Gawhen, daughter of Eunice Thompson, and Barbara Atkins. Taken on the porch of the Thompson home in green Valley, about 1929/30.*

During the period from 1927 following James' death, Harold began to see mother. However, it was a secretive romance, since neither the Thompson nor the Atkins family would approve of mother seeing anyone, let alone Harold. Mother worked for Montgomery Ward and lived in Salinas for part of this period, so they could see each other without interference from family. In 1929 Nellye had an auto accident on Highway 101 south of Gonzales which demolished her car. Somehow she managed to call Harold, and he immediately left his job to go to her side. Thus, the romance between Harold and Nellye was discovered by both families. They married on October 12, 1929 in Nevada. Yet, for the most part, they lived apart and it wasn't until 1934 that they moved together into the home of Harold's mother, Jessie Atkins, in the Calabassas District north of Watsonville.

Mother and Dad had three children: Norman (1934), Loren (1937) and Mary Ellen (1938). Norman and Loren were born in Watsonville, and Mary Ellen was born at the Santa Cruz County Hospital. These were still Depression years; money was very hard to come by, and jobs were scarce. Harold managed to get occasional jobs and worked for Harold Pavey driving a taxi off and on for several years to supplement his income. Much of the food on the table was courtesy of Grandpa and Grandma Thompson.



**Norm in back, Loren and Mary seated in the wagon. About 1942 at the house in Watsonville.**

In 1939 Dad, through the efforts of Manuel Silva, a Watsonville City Alderman, and the influence of Martin and Joanna Thompson, was able to get a steady job with benefits with the Street Department of the City of Watsonville. A Mr. Angell had died in an auto accident, and as a result of his death a position opened up driving the city street sweeper part time and cleaning and repairing streets the rest of the time. Dad worked for the City Engineer, long time family friend, Bert Kitchen.

Shortly after Harold began to work for the City of Watsonville in 1938, I took ill with pneumonia and was left afflicted with a chronic lung condition. Doctors told my mother to move me to a drier climate. The air in Watsonville was too damp, being so close to the ocean. So, mother packed up the family including Barbara, Loren, Mary Ellen and me, and we moved to her parents' ranch in Pine Canyon near King City. My older brother, Malcolm, had already graduated from King City High School and was working for the Myenberg Milk Company in Paso Robles. Harold remained behind, renting a room with the Harold Pavey family.



**Norm, May 1941**

Conditions at the ranch were primitive, to say the least. There was no electricity or running water, no gas for cooking or heating. There was only a wood stove in the little two-room cabin located on what we called the "Davis Place". This parcel was not owned by the family, but was rented from Harold Davis of Santa Barbara. Soon our grandparents, Martin and Joanna Thompson, moved into the cabin too, and a tent was pitched outside where we children and our mother slept.

Water was a real problem, for the well on this property had long since gone dry. So, Grandpa would hitch up the two-horse team (Belle and Doc) to a sled on which he tied a large barrel. Off he would go to a well down the canyon to get water and haul it back up to us. I can remember taking the Saturday night bath in a galvanized tub. My mother would heat the water on the back of the wood stove. Mary and Barbara would go first, then Loren and finally, me! All in the same water! As an adult, I never, ever took a bath, remembering those Saturday night baths of my youth. I love the shower!

I pause here to give those who don't know an idea of how the sled worked. Most people think sleds were used only in climates of snow and ice, but that is not so. Sleds have been used for centuries and may even predate the wheel. Grandfather's

sled was a simple affair at best. Two large timbers lying side by side. These timbers were probably about 6" x 6" and about 4 feet long. A simple platform was made by nailing boards across between the two timbers. The fronts of the supporting timbers were cut at an angle so they would not dig into the earth as the sled moved along. On the bottom of these large timbers grandfather had nailed some iron or steel rails. These rails gave the sled the ability to slide easily and not wear out the timbers so fast. He had some hooks and chains coupled to the front to hitch up his team of horses who could easily pull a heavy load. Though not as efficient as a wagon, it was effective in moving small loads.

The other thing I remember well from that part of my life was washing clothes. Grandma and Grandpa had an "Easy Washing Machine"! I'm not sure it was very *easy* however! It consisted of a galvanized tub that stood on four spindly legs. It had a plug in the bottom so the water could be drained out of it. Attached to the rim on one side was a mechanical arm with a plunger hanging down. My mother or my grandfather would stand on one end of the handle and work it up and down, forcing the plunger up and down, in turn forcing the clothes to mix into the hot, soapy water. When the clothes had been sufficiently washed in that fashion, they would take each article and wring it out by hand, empty the dirty, soapy water, and add clean, hot rinse water. Then they'd repeat the process of pumping the handle up and down, emptying the water, and wringing out the clothes. Finally they hung the clothes on a line to dry. It was a major cooperative effort which would take my mother and grandparents all day to complete.

After living in such conditions for a while (especially the condition of not having enough water) my grandparents wanted to move into the main house at the bottom of the canyon where there was not only good well water, but also a larger house with two bedrooms, kitchen and dining room. This too was rented property. It was known as the Ulrey Place. Grandpa and Grandma had rented this property for several years prior to this time.

The house was rented to some people (my grandfather called them "The Indians") for some time, and they refused to move. My grandfather, being a man of short temperament, told them he was going to shoot them if they didn't move. Well, one thing led to another and suddenly, because of my grandfather's harassment of these people, the man would sneak up the canyon where we lived and cut some oak trees, laying one across the road so we couldn't drive through on the road by his house. This further infuriated my mother and grandfather. One day, Mother got all of us children, Grandma and Grandpa into the car, and we drove down the canyon to the Ulrey Place and parked in front of the house occupied by The Indians. We children, our mother, Aunt Ida Thompson (who was also staying with us), and Grandpa all got out and we marched around the house banging on pots and pans and yelling at the top of our lungs. It must have been a fearsome group! I still laugh at the absurdity of the whole thing when I look back on the incident. Especially since, as it turns out, the people weren't even home!

A couple of days later, while eating dinner, I noticed The Indian slipping past some trees near our cabin. Earlier that day my grandfather had come upon some more trees that he (The Indian) allegedly had cut in retribution. Grandfather, who was by this time in his mid 70s, was mad! He grabbed his shotgun and ran out the door, but he was way behind Mother and Aunt Ida. Mother took off running down the canyon and caught up with the man. Aunt Ida was right behind her. When Mother confronted the

man about cutting down the trees he hauled off and slapped her, knocking her to the ground. Well, Mother's "Thompson temper" flared, and she got up, grabbed the man by the straps of his coveralls and began to twist them until he was gasping for breath. Aunt Ida came up behind him and began kicking him in the seat of his pants. Grandpa saw what was happening and fired off a couple of rounds from the shotgun into the air. The Indian managed to get free of Mother and Ida and started running while Grandpa fired off another couple of rounds.

Well, that was the last we ever saw of The Indian and his family. A check of the main house the next day found it empty -- the family had moved out during the night.

We moved in, and though we were still without running water and electricity, there was a water well nearby and the house had two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and a large room we used for dining. It stood on top of a hill from which you could see the main road below with a small creek and a patch of land where Grandpa soon planted a garden with wonderful corn, melons, beans and tomatoes.

Grandma would sit with me by the hour on the front porch of the house watching the road. I sat quietly listening to stories about the family and how they crossed the plains in covered wagons. Or sometimes I was given lessons on how to read and write. And of course there were the many visitors who would congregate on the porch and talk. They talked about the old days or about what was happening to other members of the family, and sometimes there were heated arguments over politics. And then there was the disturbing news of the terrible problems in Europe, which we knew little about since we didn't have a radio and didn't take the newspapers.

Money was in short supply during those days. Grandpa came up with the idea that perhaps if he cut down some oak trees and used some of those the Indian had cut down, the trees might be chopped up and sold as firewood. Natural gas was available in most of the nearby towns, but many people still used wood stoves for cooking and heating. Grandpa got his old model T Ford and pulled it up into the yard. He jacked the car up so the rear wheels were off the ground and fashioned a belt affair to one of the rear wheels. He attached the other end some way to a large old circular saw blade. Then he dragged all those cut oaks down from the canyons on his sled, and he and Mother proceeded to saw the wood and stack it into cords for sale. I remember they sold a cord of wood for \$5.00. It would take them several days to cut a cord of wood and stack it.

Christmas came that year and Grandpa took his trusty sled up into one of the canyons, cut a large pine tree, put it on the sled and drove it back to the main house. He made some arrangement and we put the tree in the living room. We had no money for decorations, so Barbara and I cut strips of newspaper, made paste from flour and pasted the strips together, making rings of paper which we hung on the tree for decorations. Our mother wired some candles to the tree and on Christmas Eve. While Grandpa stood by with a bucket of water, she lit the candles for a couple of minutes. There were oohs and aahs and then the candles were blown out. Grandpa breathed a sigh of relief and put down the bucket of water. Then we bundled into the car and took a little ride to see the Christmas lights of those who lived in town (they had electricity there). When we came back home, Santa had arrived and had given Grandma our presents to put under the tree. There wasn't much, but there were some candy, oranges and a toy for the boys, a doll for Mary and a sweater for Barbara.

I remember that there was a lot of talk about a war and the terrible things that were happening, though at the time I really didn't comprehend it all. Then one day my father arrived unexpectedly with his nephew, Herschel Schuttich. Herschel, it seems, was a bit of an alcoholic and wanted to join the army, but they wouldn't take him because of his drinking. Dad brought him down to our ranch because he knew my grandparents wouldn't allow him to drink and be around them and us children. Herschel was great fun to have around, but he was nervous and edgy at first. Grandma hit upon a plan that, as they say, saved the day!

The old main house was so cold in winter it was hard to heat. The kitchen was in a room by itself and there was no other heat in the house. Grandma knew that Herschel was a mason so she asked him if he could build a fireplace in the large area we called the dining room. He consented to do the work but he needed materials. Well, the plan was that we children would haul rocks up out of the creek bed below the house in our wagons, with Grandpa using his sled for the rocks we couldn't handle. Money somehow was found to buy the other materials, such as cement and flashing material for around the fireplace and the roof. Total cost for building the fireplace was \$13.00. Within two weeks the fireplace was built. Unfortunately, Herschel left before we had our first big fire. Later, Herschel would be killed in the Philippines during the war and we would never see him again. But the memory of cousin Herschel and his fireplace remains forever emblazoned in our memories. Many an evening was spent around that fireplace. We'd wonder where Herschel was and pray for him. Many years later the house was torn down, but the fireplace remained for a long time before being knocked down.

We hadn't had the fireplace very long when, one evening after dinner, Mother decided it was getting cold and a roaring fire would be just the thing to take the chill off the house. She marched out to the wood pile and brought in a stack of wood and proceeded to build a roaring fire. After the fire had started going really well, she then threw on a big old log that grandfather had brought in from one of the canyons. After a couple of moments there was a stirring within the fire ... and suddenly out of the big old log came several baby rattle snakes writhing their way out of the ash and onto the floor. Mother screamed and yelled at us children to hop up on the chairs. We promptly obeyed that order! She and grandfather were a sight as they jumped about trying to kill the snakes. Their venom was as deadly as that of any full grown rattler. After that episode, grandfather was a little more selective with the wood he picked up and brought to the house. Mother was visibly shaken by the whole affair, but in later years we often looked back and laughed at how mother and grandfather had danced around the room that evening. It was a once in a lifetime performance and most entertaining, but certainly not funny at the time.

I'm not really sure just when the family moved back to Watsonville, but it must have been about late 1940. We moved to a house that was next to the last house on lower Lincoln Street, two houses away from the Pajaro River. Our neighbors across the street were a Mexican family by the name of Rodriquez. Later, after the war, my brother, Malcolm (Scotty) would marry Angela Rodriquez, the eldest daughter. We didn't live there very long before we moved to a house at 202 Stanford Street, and we lived there for at least a year or two. We lived there when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and I think we moved shortly after June of 1942 when Grandfather Martin Thompson came to live with us after the death of Grandma Joanna Thompson.

I also started school at Mintie White Primary School while we lived at that house on Stanford Street. Miss Loretta Allison was the principal of the school and had been one of my mother's teachers when she attended school. Mintie White School was named after a long-time schoolteacher in the Pajaro Valley, Arminta Allison White. She had been a friend of my grandmother's family and started teaching about the same time as my grandmother, Joanna Hushbeck Thompson, and her sister, Mary Hushbeck Silliman, and their cousin, Mary Brown — back in the 1880s. Miss Allison was Mintie White's niece. So, with Miss Allison at the helm, I was watched carefully and reports were sent home regarding my demeanor. In other words, I couldn't get away with anything!

While we lived at the Stanford Street house I remember that my dad became an air raid warden for the neighborhood. There was a simulated air raid one night when everything was to be blacked out. I remember that my younger brother, Loren, was ill and my mother was very worried about him and had asked our family friend, Major Phillips from the Salvation Army, to come up and pray for him. He drove up from downtown without headlights. All mother had in the house for light was a single kerosene lamp. I assume since we had electric lights that she used the kerosene lamp because it wasn't very bright. She had put blankets up to all the windows to keep light from shining outside. Curious as child, I managed to sneak outside to see what was happening. I remember how black and dark it was. Suddenly I could hear an airplane flying overhead, and I just knew it was a Japanese aircraft. I yelled at my father who was a few doors down the street. He reassured me that we would all be safe, so I returned to safety inside of the house.

We then moved to 1308 Lincoln Street, a big, old rambling house with five bedrooms, dining room, living room, and a huge kitchen. The house lay on a large lot encompassing nearly half a city block. After Grandma died, Mother inherited almost all of Grandma's furniture. Our house on Stanford Street was too small, so a larger house was needed. The big house on Lincoln Street provided all the room needed for the family, Grandpa, and the furniture. Years later my cousin, Dolores Bosley Rackley, and her husband, Orville, bought the house and operated a rest home for seniors for some years.

Not long after we moved to the big house on Lincoln Street, Aunt Edna Wheelock and her daughter, Ina Bosley, came to mother and asked her if she could give them a hand with their restaurant in Salinas. The war was in full swing, and reliable help was hard to find. Mother had some experience at cooking for large groups, having worked at Watsonville Hospital as a dietitian for some time. So she took me along with her and we moved in with Ina and her daughter, Dolores, in Salinas.

Ina's husband, Jack Bosley, was away at Stanford University at the time. Later, Jack became one of the heads of the Office of Price Administration (OPA) in San Francisco. The OPA controlled prices on things, like the food in grocery stores and restaurants, during World War II. Mother remained for some months and then returned to Watsonville and the family. I stayed in Salinas with Ina, Dolores, and Aunt Edna and Uncle Stillman Wheelock; and even though I didn't live with them continuously, I became a part of this family for the rest of my life. Aunt Edna and Ina became like second mothers to me and Dolores became like my sister. We even fought, just like normal siblings would.

After mother returned to Watsonville, she went to work for a frozen food processor and eventually became a foreman or forelady. She worked there for a



number of years. About 1948 she was offered a job cooking in a little cafe called the Tip Top near the intersection of Lincoln Street and Freedom Boulevard. This was a real treat for mother, as the little cafe was only a block from where we lived on Lincoln Street. One of the frequent customers was Doctor Gilman, an old school chum and a lifelong friend of Mother's. When the little cafe came up for sale, Dr. Gilman and several of his associate doctors urged mother to buy the place. She eventually did, in late 1949.

Aunt Edna had left Santa Cruz and was living with her daughter, Ina, in Placerville, California. She worked for Noah Keith, who owned a small restaurant there. Mother convinced Aunt Edna to come back to Watsonville and help her in the Tip Top Cafe venture. Aunt Edna became the pastry cook and Mother's restaurant became quite famous for her pies and cakes. Mother cooked most of the regular food served with some assistance from Aunt Edna. Soon the whole cafe became a family affair. My brother, Scotty (Malcolm), and my sister, Barbara, (both of whom were married and had families) worked for her. I washed dishes after school, eventually waited on customers and, as they say, jerked sodas. On occasion my younger brother and sister were also pressed into service to wash dishes or run errands. My younger brother, Loren, managed to escape helping much, since he and Dad were always taking Grandfather Martin to the ranch in King City.

***Mother (on the right)  
and Aunt Edna  
Thompson Wheelock at  
the opening of my  
mother's first  
restaurant, The Tip Top  
Cafe in Watsonville in  
1948. The flowers were  
from all her friends at a  
medical group nearby  
who urged her to buy  
the restaurant.***

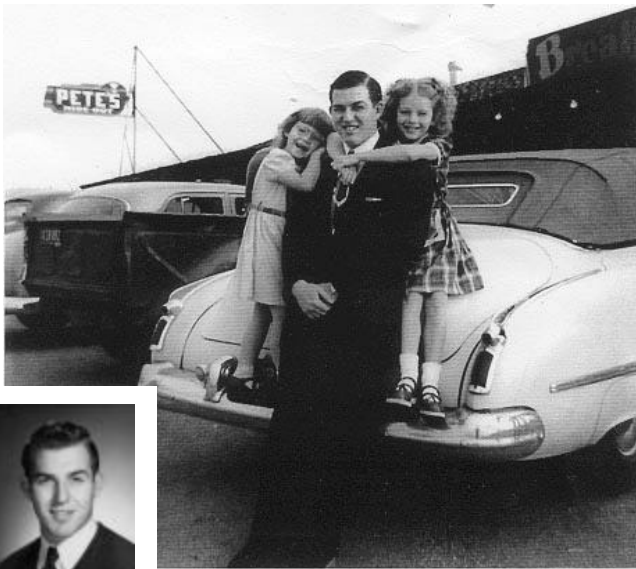


The Tip Top Cafe was a smashing success. It was not at all uncommon to see people lined up waiting for a seat. In 1951 mother added on to the Tip Top, but there was increasing difficulty with the owners of the building. Finally, in late 1951 she was able to sell the business back to the original owners, and she moved to a new operation at the Town and County Shopping Center. The Tip Top Cafe had 14 stools and 2 small tables with a total seating capacity of about 18 people. The new location had a capacity to handle about 50 people. There was a dining room and coffee shop. The Dining room was connected to a bar, called Pete's Hide Out. Mother was able to get the new place because Pete Lettenich was the property owner, and he wanted to be able to have some food available for his very successful bar operation.

Mother opened the Town and Country Cafe in late 1951. The coffee shop was a success, just like the Tip Top earlier. She tried the dining room but it was never successful, and so she closed it after a short period and used those facilities only for large parties booked in advance. Again, Aunt Edna made the pastries, Ina, who by this time had moved back to Watsonville, was one of the waitresses along with her daughter, Dolores, my sister Barbara and myself. Once again it was something of a family operation. There were, of course, other waitresses that mother hired, but it remained pretty much a family affair.

From those days of the restaurant operation, I remember well that the regular Saturday special was a homemade enchilada (meat, cheese, onions and olives) with homemade beans, a small tossed salad, and a slice of garlic bread for only fifty cents. Often, the restaurant closed early on Saturdays because we would run out of food. Once again, like the Tip Top earlier, people would be lined up waiting to get a seat in the place.

Aunt Edna's famous strawberry cream pies were one of the best sellers, for 25 cents a slice or \$1.25 for a whole pie! Topped, of course, with real fresh whipped cream. During this time there were two young men who were customers at the Tip Top and later at the Town and Country who grew strawberries, and they were experimenting with different varieties. They would bring in berries for Aunt Edna to try and then get her opinion. These two boys were the Driscoll brothers whose operation went on to become one of the largest berry growers and distributors in the Pajaro Valley.



***Charlene, Norm and Diane taken about Easter 1952 at Town and Country Shopping Center in Watsonville, just outside the kitchen of mother's restaurant. Note "Pete's Hideout" sign which was the bar room attached to the restaurant. The car we are leaning on belonged to Bob and Barbara Angell. They bought it when they went on their honeymoon, a yellow Oldsmobile convertible. Believe Charlene was about 5, I was 17 and Diane was about 9 years old.***

***Inset: Norm as college freshman, 1952***

Late in 1954 mother had lease problems with Pete Lettunich over the Town and Country. Basically he wanted her to reopen the dining room. She had all she could handle with the coffee shop and felt the kitchen was too small to handle the operation of both facilities. So Pete would not renew the lease. Undaunted, mother moved to a downtown location near the State Theater and opened Nell's Spanish Kitchen. But this

venture was a failure, as it was not the family operation that the other places had been and the location was not a good one. My brother, Scott, had a family and had gone to work for the post office; my sister, Barbara, had divorced her first husband, "Woody" Wilson, and had married Robert Angell and moved to Burbank, California. I had joined the Air Force and was stationed in Tokyo, Japan. Cousin Ina had gone to work for Noah Keith (later her husband), Dolores married Orville Rackley and started her family, and Aunt Edna went to work for Noah Keith in his restaurant called the Dutch Oven on Freedom Boulevard. Oddly enough, the Dutch Oven was across the street from Mother's first place, The Tip Top, which had long since ceased operation. This left only my brother, Loren, and my sister, Mary, living at home with Grandfather Martin Thompson still there too. Loren and Mary helped mother as they could, but bad location, loss of family support, and bad advice from a partner (Margie) made her last venture end in failure. After the business failed, Mother worked for various restaurants in both Watsonville and Santa Cruz. While working at one place in Watsonville she slipped, fell and injured her back. It bothered her for the rest of her life.

In the summer 1954, there was an altercation with my uncle, Gene Thompson, and my mother and father. Grandpa Thompson had been living with my parents since Grandma Thompson died in 1942. Grandpa was now approaching his 89th year, and he was extremely difficult to deal with due to senility and his generally poor health. Mother had hired a lady to come in and look after Grandpa, fix his meals, and clean the house. Martin Thompson was a man of few words, as has been noted before, but as he grew older he became more and more vocal about his dislike of my father. Mother was carrying the financial burden of caring for her father.

While I was home on leave, Mother told me she was having some financial problems, my father was not well, and she was worried about him. I approached Aunt Edna about assisting my mother, and she felt that she and her brothers (Ray, Will and Gene) would also be willing to contribute something toward his care. I telephoned Uncle Gene in Watsonville to sound him out regarding the situation. He exploded (the infamous Thompson temper) and within a few minutes was at my parents' house ranting and raging about how my mother didn't care for his father and wanted to toss him out of the house and onto the street. Gene was totally irrational. My father came home about then, walked into the room, and asked Gene to calm down. Gene hauled off and hit Dad with his fist, knocking him to his knees. We were all dumbfounded by Gene's actions. My sister, Mary, saw all this, ran to my brother's room, got a baseball bat and came out carrying it. She told Gene to get out or she would hit him over the head with it! Gene left, still yelling and hollering irrationally.

The next day, while everyone was gone except Grandpa and the lady hired to take care of him, Uncle Gene came in, took Grandpa and all his belongings, and moved him into his home several blocks away. Grandpa lived with Gene and his wife, Ida, until he died in January of 1955. My younger brother and sister never saw their grandfather alive after that, and my mother and Gene didn't speak for nearly thirty years after this incident. And though Mother and Gene eventually did reconcile, Gene never spoke to me again, even though I made attempts at conversation. Somehow, I became the one guilty of throwing his father out into the street.

One thing most people noticed about the personality of my grandfather was a "temperament" and a failure to recognize that he might be wrong about something. My mother also had this trait to some extent, but it seemed to come out more in the personality of Gene. In our family we often joke about The Thompson Temper. Another

trait that was apparent to all, in both Martin Thompson and Mother, was depression. I've seen this trait filter down into the following generations including my sister, Mary, and myself, as well as my daughter, Joanna.

One trait about my mother and dad of which I am most proud was their generosity. When people visited the house they almost never left without taking something with them, a jar of jam or jelly or some fresh vegetables from the garden.

I remember once during World War II while we were living at the big house on Lincoln Street, Mrs. Pavey drove up in the taxi and rushed to the door. Mother answered the door. Mrs. Pavey told Mother that she had a young soldier and his new wife in the car and they needed a place to stay. They had just married and there were no hotels or rooms available in town. The young couple was ushered into the house, the bed linen changed and they were soon in the master bedroom, behind closed doors. We children were ordered to the back of the house until the next day. The next morning Mother gave the couple breakfast. They wanted to pay, but Mother wouldn't take any money from them. She just wished them well as they left.

There was a Mexican family who lived in our neighborhood, and I played frequently at their house. I was invited into the house one day and found that they had no food. The family worked in the fields, but for some reason there was no work and no money. This was before the age of welfare as we know it today. When I mentioned this to my folks, mother went down to the store and bought a 100 pound sack of flour, beans, bacon, lard, milk and cereals and brought them to their house. Mrs. Jiminez cried saying she had no way to pay, but Mother told her payment wasn't necessary. She just didn't want them to do without food.

Another time, when Mother was in the restaurant business, a bus filled with soldiers stopped and came into the restaurant. They ordered, mostly donuts and coffee, but she would not take any money from them. In later years, after Mother retired, she was always crocheting and making craft items, most of which she gave away to people who mentioned the slightest interest.

Mother had not been wrong to worry about my father, as I mentioned earlier. In 1955 Dad started having serious trouble with his foot and ended up in the hospital, where they finally amputated his toes because of gangrene. Then, because they hadn't gotten it all, they took his left leg at the knee. Of course this meant he was not working, and it was a time of extreme financial difficulty while he recuperated. Dad was eventually fitted with a prosthesis and had learned to walk by the summer of 1956. He eventually returned to work for the City of Watsonville.

But things at the City of Watsonville had taken a turn and Dad had a new boss. His old boss, Bert Kitchen, had retired, and the new boss had a different approach to everything, leaving Dad frustrated, anxious and unsure how to please. The anxiety created by his job and the frustration of being disabled left Dad nervous and irritable.



*Nellye and Harold Atkins  
about 1965 on a trip to Mexico.*

That was totally unlike Dad, who was, for most of his life, pretty “laid back” as they say.

In 1960, Dad decided to retire after 31 years with the City of Watsonville. He retired with a pension of \$98 a month, which was hardly enough to live on. And he was never able to collect Social Security because at that time the City of Watsonville didn't collect or contribute to Social Security. Because money was so tight, Mother, Dad, and my sister Mary, who was still living at home, moved to King City where Mother went to work as a cook at the “Little Corner Cafe,” and my sister was a waitress at a couple of different cafes.

In 1963 Mary married Earl Bramhall of King City, thus setting my parents free. They lived for awhile on the ranch out in Pince Canyon, but facilities hadn't really improved much since we lived there back in the late 1930s. They moved around to several different places in King City. Finally, in 1965, mother retired due to some heart problems. She and Dad moved to Capitola, near Santa Cruz, where they rented a little house not far from the beach. They lived there until Dad died in June of 1973. Mother and Dad were never very far from my sister and her family, so it was no surprise when Mother moved back to King City and lived with Mary after my Dad's death. For a while she lived in a little one-room studio apartment at the rear of their garage.



*Taken at the ranch in King City about 1963. We all got together frequently for barbecues and camping out at the cabin. Pictured here: front row, left to right; Kevin Atkins, James Angell, Darrel Bramhall, Harold Atkins, and James Atkins. Standing back row, left to right, Mary Atkins Bramhall holding son Blaine Bramhall, Earl Bramhall, Nellye Atkins, Norman Atkins, Charlene Wilson (barely visible behind Norman), Malcolm “Scott” Atkins, Patricia Starbird Atkins holding daughter Tammara Atkins, Angie Rodriguez Atkins and Loren Atkins. My sister Barbara Atkins Wilson Angell is missing from the picture but this shows the rest of my mother's children and most of the grandchildren at the time.*

*Mother cooking on the old wood stove at the cabin at our King City Ranch. This is the inside of the cabin where we once lived when I was a little kid. Mother cooked many a meal on this old wood stove, which not only served to cook food but to heat the cabin in the winter.*



In 1975 Uncle Ray Thompson returned to California from Illinois after the death of his wife, Emily. He and Mother thought they could live together, so they made arrangements to do so. Uncle Ray would pay for most everything and mother would be the housekeeper and cook. It would have been a good arrangement, but that Thompson stubbornness and temper got in the way! Uncle Ray decided that Mother was doing too much, so he selected a retirement home for them in the Carmel Valley where everything was done for them. They had a nice two-bedroom apartment, but they had to take their meals in the main dining hall. That dining room proved the undoing for Mother. She called me one evening crying and asked me to come and get her (right then), as she could take it no longer. Later, she explained that in the dining hall she had to sit with elderly people who could not even feed themselves. She would try to help some of them and then they would spit up food or be obnoxious. Mother just couldn't handle this situation. She tried to explain to Uncle Ray, but it didn't bother him and he didn't see why it should bother her. So, Mother left and went back to live with my sister.

About 1978 Grandma Kelsey died. She was the grandmother to Patricia Starbird Atkins, who was married to my younger brother Loren. Grandma Kelsey had a small mobile home located in a Mobile Home Park in Santa Cruz. Mother called Uncle Ray and asked him if he would buy the mobile home and she could then pay him rent. He bought the mobile home and mother was moved in by my brother Loren and his family shortly thereafter. Ray came to Santa Cruz and stayed with Mother for a while, but he began looking for a place of his own.

While living there, Uncle Ray met a widow named Vera (don't remember her last name), and after a short period of time they married and moved in together, leaving Mother in the mobile home alone. Mother, for the most part, was happy living there and was able to care for everything with some additional help from my two brothers who lived in nearby Watsonville. She usually took one meal a day at a senior center located just a short distance from her mobile home. Mother was always crazy about eating donuts, and there was a donut shop across the street from her mobile home park. I always suspected that the location of this donut shop was the main purpose that she lived there!

Uncle Ray and Vera were married for about three years, and Mother remained in the mobile home during that period. Mother and Ray were on friendly terms, but Mother had suspicions about Vera marrying him for his money. Though friendly enough, Mother remained distant from Vera. Vera left suddenly and went to live with her granddaughter in Washington, I think, and then began asking Ray for money. It came to light that the granddaughter was into the drug scene, and Vera was trying to help her. In doing so, she had used up all her money. Ray, being a keen man of finance, went to a lawyer and had the marriage annulled, saying that the marriage had never been consummated.

Mother seemed to become increasingly depressed and irritable (a regrettable Thompson trait, I fear) and, I think, a little forgetful. One day while Mary, and her husband, Earl, were visiting, they discovered Mother had a small fire over her stove. She'd forgotten to turn off a burner and burned up a teapot which, in turn, caught fire and burned some of the woodwork above the range. Mother wasn't even aware it had happened. Mary and Earl talked her into going to King City with them, and she left her little mobile home. She lived with Mary and Earl for the remainder of her life.

With Mother gone from Santa Cruz, Uncle Ray sold the mobile home and moved into a hotel for seniors at the beach across from the Boardwalk. He didn't stay there too long. He decided to return to his former home in Illinois near Murphysboro. Uncle Ray died there about two years later.

Mother moved in with Mary and Earl the summer of 1981. They cared for her but she always wanted to contribute and did a lot of the cooking for the family. Mother was always happy cooking something. All of us children took turns having her come visit with us at various times. The stays were usually very short, lasting no more than 2 or 3 days. But she always seemed to like to come and visit.

In October of 1982, my daughter, Joanna, became seriously ill due to a reaction to the measles. She had a low platelet count, and my wife and I were advised to take her out of school until she built herself up. As it was, any injury, even slight, could let her bleed to death. Since Sharon and I were both working, I called Mother and asked if she would consider coming over and staying with Joanna while we were at work. She consented and came and stayed for about a month.

That was one of the most wonderful periods of time I ever spent with my mother. She was an absolute delight. She took care of Joanna, playing with her, reading to her, and helping her with her schoolwork. In addition, Mother would cook dinner for the family. As long as we would take her out somewhere every day, her mood remained very upbeat. When I say "out somewhere", I mean if we only took her to the grocery store, she was content, but she had to get *out* every day for a few minutes. She asked me to buy some apples so she could bake some apple pies. She baked several, and I took some to work; everyone raved about them. She put several in the freezer for us along with several other dishes she prepared for later use. At the first part of November, Joanna was feeling well enough to resume school, so we reluctantly took Mother home to King City.

We anxiously awaited her return and I drove over and picked her up about three weeks before Christmas in 1982. But Mother was a terror, and after three days I called my sister and asked if she could meet me, as I was sending Mother home. Mother was irritable, obviously depressed, and very hostile to my wife, Sharon, and to me, for no apparent reason. I tried talking to her but there was no reasoning with her;

again, her Thompson temperament reared its ugly head. Looking back now, I realize that she was not feeling well and had just a few weeks left to live.

For mother's 80th birthday on January 19, 1983, we had a wonderful party at Mary's place in King City. Friends and family gathered and a good time was had by all. Mother did have a little "spell" during the party, but we thought she had just overdone. As usual she was trying to do some cooking and run the show. And at 80, it was too much.

The morning of February 19, 1983 Mother and Mary were sitting at the dining room table discussing the separation of Mary from her husband, Earl, which had occurred a few days earlier. The telephone rang and Mary got up to answer the phone. Mother said she would get a grocery list started and she got up. As Mary was talking on the telephone she looked across the room and across the hall into mother's room and saw mother standing by the bed. Mother yelled to her "Mary, I'm going..." and Mother fell onto the bed. Mary was on the telephone with her son, Darrell, who rushed to the house from his home only a couple of blocks away. As soon as he arrived he started CPR. In the meantime, Mary dialed 911 and the ambulance arrived. Mother revived and was a bit flustered about what was going on and then had another attack. She died in the ambulance on the way to King City hospital, one month past her 80th birthday. She had a massive heart attack.

Mother is buried beside her second husband, Harold Atkins, in the cemetery at King City, a mere stone's throw from the graves of her grandparents, Pleasant and Sarah Ann Thompson.