

11. Birthday Parties

In 1986 the July 4th weekend became a cause for celebration of the 80th anniversary of the birth of Helen Josephine Osborne Shaeffer—July 7, 1906. By this time she had been a widow 8 ½ years and had certainly set a standard that was an inspiration to all who knew her in coping with her loss.

The birthday celebration was held at the Tres Amigos fishing camp near Pagosa Springs, Colorado, high in the Rockies. It was a grand celebration. Family came from near and far to honor Jo and everyone had a wonderful time, including the family of E.C.'s sister Jane Toronto, who was very ill with cancer at the time.

There were hikes, picnics, airplane rides and a narrow-gauge train ride from Durango to Silverton. On party day each guest was given a candle to put on "Nanny's" cake and make a wish for her. The cutest one was from little Monica Hilton who said, "Nanny, I wish you a new bicycle."



L-R: Rear: Naomi Weaver, Gary Weaver, Dan Shaeffer (head turned), Rob Weaver; middle: Carrie Toronto, Amy Toronto, Jane Toronto, Claudia Hilton, Joe Hilton holding Brittney Hilton, Marty Shaeffer, E.C. Shaeffer, Jeannine Irwin, Bo Irwin, Jo Ellen Olsen; Front: Beth Irwin, Will Toronto, Kevin Slade, Monica Hilton & Kory Olsen on Nanny's lap, Colin Slade, Austen Slade, Becky Slade, BJ Irwin, Will Irwin; leaning over the Slades: Ryan Olsen and Mart Shaeffer.

Jo enjoyed the three-day party immensely. Thirty-six people were in attendance, sleeping in trailers, tents and out under the stars as well. John Duncan Shaeffer, who was serving as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Washington state at the time of the birthday celebration, was unable to attend. In spite of missing JD, the big birthday celebration was deemed a great success and has been remembered fondly by all who attended.



Bobbie Jo passed around a small book so that family members could write their tributes to Jo. It included the following sentiments:

*Pagosa Springs, Colorado – Marty's fishing camp – a small bit of heaven – July 7, 1986
– for Helen Josephine Shaeffer – In honor of her birth – July 7, 1906*

*Blessed are all those who cross her path! Beloved daughter, sister, wife, mother,
grandmother, great-grandmother, teacher, friend and neighbor!*

*Mother, I have always felt so blessed to have been brought into the world by you. I
always knew that your love was boundless and forever wrapped me in a protective
blanket that kept me going through any storm. You were born with a sense of wonder
and infectious joy that you have never lost and have always shared. You have always
been an inspiration to me: your sense of wonder; your appreciation of beauty; your joy in
small things; your creativity; your ability to face the unpleasant sad times without losing
hope; your love of children whether they be clean, dirty, smart, dull, ugly or beautiful;
and your ability to laugh and giggle at the dumbest jokes. You inspired all of us with
your loving care and devotion to Dad when he was so ill, and although you knew how ill
he was you never gave up hope. I thank you for your strength that carried us through. I
also thank you for loving me enough to point out my faults, and helping me think through
problems to find solutions. I love you dearly! Bobbie Jo [Irwin]*

Dearest Nannie: The highest compliment I can pay: You have been an accepting, loving mother-in-law, one who took me in without expression of doubt or fear or distrust. I love you dearly. Bill [Irwin]

Dear Mom, It is such a joy for me to have you and all our families with us this first week of July 1986 in our fishing camp in southern Colorado. It is because of you, Mom, that I have this great love of these mountains and of Colorado. You have been such a wonderful devoted mother to me over all these many years. I can't thank you enough. Of all the many gifts you have given me, and believe me there are too many to be accounted for on these pages, the one thing that stands out most is your concern and love for other people. I hope I can take that gift, use it and pass it on to my children as you have me. As I write this and think back over our 55 years we have had together, from Grand Junction to Cripple Creek to Palisade to Clovis, there are so many outstanding memories that I will carry with me all my life. I thank you for all of them. Happy Birthday, Mom. Love, Marty [Shaeffer]

Precious Nanny, Thank you! Thank you for being you and for loving me all these 29 years. Thank you for being my mother-in-law all this time, and for being my only mother for over 20 of those years. How I have tried to please you—to be like you—to follow your lead. Thank you for being such an outstanding example of kindness, consideration and thoughtfulness. Thank you for looking beyond my faults and loving me in spite of them. And thank you for all your loving support for all whom I love—Marty, the children, our son-in-law—our grandchildren, my sister and her family, my brother and his family, even my friends. Believe me, you are unique in all this world—a shining star whose influence has extended far beyond the bounds of our family—a light for others to look to and to emulate—for your warmth, your joy in living, your sense of fun, your courage in adversity. I have always admired your great intellect, your love of books, your sense of style, your gift for descriptive narrative and your great generosity. Your talents in the domestic arts—cooking, sewing and decorating—have always helped you to create a home where we all (and everyone else, too) loved to be. Thank you for sharing all these things with me. Our Heavenly Father has blessed you with 80 wonderful years. May He continue to bless your coming years with health, happiness and love. I love you, Ellen Claire [Shaeffer]

Dear Nanny, Words cannot express how much you mean to me. The memories I have of a special childhood with you means so much to me. The pink house in Palisade with the swing that Pappy made us, and the wonderful huge breakfasts that you always made are among some of the wonderful memories I have. You have always been so dear to me and I have always cherished your advice and companionship. I hope that we have another wonderful celebration on your 90th birthday! I love you, Jo Ellen [Shaeffer Olsen]

Nanny, The one most cherished persons in the world I ever had was my grandmother Olsen. I never thought it would be possible to find another person on earth like her. Since I have met you, I can see I was wrong. Love, Kevin [Olsen]

Nanny, How can I tell you how much you mean to me? You have given me life, nourishment—you have been the basis of my existence way beyond the physical. I see you every day in every one of my actions, especially now that I am doing the most wonderful thing of my life, being a wife and mother. I see you in how clean I keep the house, make bread, read to the boys, play and tease the children, sew, wash dishes and on and on. Thank you. All grandmothers are like this, of course, to some extent, affecting their children after them like the concentric rings on the water after the rock has been thrown in—but few are as powerful as you. Your powerful love, your strength, your strong focus on family has made this family a strong, loving unit. You are responsible. You are the real creator of this family unit. And such an inspiration you are! Nanny, you taught me by your direct action and through Mother, the most important

things of my life: love and devotion to family, and thus to God in simple every day actions. You have given me the most powerful means to God I think a woman can be given—simple service to your family. I read in a book recently where a woman said “Some may call me housewife, servant, mother, wife, but really these are my daily offerings to you, God.” I try to remember and act on this simple devotional service as well as you have in your life, Nanny. I feel all my really important skills in my life have come from you directly and through Mother. Mother to mother to mother, but Nanny, you started it. You did some incredible mothering that you have given out. I see how easy it is for me to [be a] mother and wife because my pot has been filled by you and mother’s constant high quality love. I thank you and my children thank you for the skills and love I possess. I know you worry about the little differences in our mothering. Differences like how long I nurse Austen, different food styles, Colin’s schooling, but really these are so small compared to the powerful stream of energy, love and devotion flowing from you to me. These are but small waves coming from this stream. Don’t worry about them. The Big You is still guiding me. Love, Becky [Irwin Slade]

What you mean to me, Nanny! When I think of you I always feel your smiling face and your tender-hearted laugh. You have always been a smile on Becky’s face after she has spoken with you on the phone. You were our first home and our dreams coming true. You’ve helped us with love through hard times. You’ve been a grandmother to me, Colin and Austen. I thank Becky for bringing you into my life. And my thanks are to you for sharing your love and your life with me and my family. With great love, Kevin [Slade].

Thank you Nanny! Thank you, Nanny, for being my best friend. You always have been there for me for financial, spiritual or loving inspiration. I’ve never thanked you enough for inviting me to go with you and the Shaeffers to Hawaii. You are so creative and always know how to make a bad situation into something wonderful. You never seem to see the bad or fearful side of any situation. Your laugh is so beautiful and you manage to always laugh at anybody’s joke whether it is good or bad. If it weren’t for you I know that I would never be able to create things with my hands; such as macramé, crochet, knitting and sewing. You have always inspired me with your creativeness. I just hope I can be half as creative as you. You are a remarkable woman. Nothing seems to keep you down. You are always the first one to help out or volunteer or to get people off their lazy rears and get moving. I will never forget the delicious food we had when we were young and in Palisade. You always supported our ideas even though you didn’t feel that they were right and you never told us, “I told you so,” when things didn’t work out. Just like my [first] marriage. If it weren’t for you, Nanny, our family ties would not be so strong. You always get us through the good times and the bad. You somehow have a special warmth and unitedness that always brings our family so much closer. I love you so much and I’m afraid I don’t know how to appreciate the love you have for me. What I think I love the most about you is that you always can laugh and always are in good spirits. I hope I’m lucky enough to learn your skills from you. I love you with all my heart. Beth [Irwin]

*Of all the people I know, there is no one more loving, understanding or more special to me than you, Nanny. You have been a special inspiration to me during my college days. Many times I sure felt like quitting, but just seeing how proud you were of me just kept me going. Your love and advice has helped me more than you will ever know. Being your favorite grandchild has been difficult at times, but has made me a much better person, because I have had to apply myself at everything I do to keep this high honor. Nanny, to tell you the truth, I wouldn’t want to have it any other way. Happy 80th Birthday. Nanny, I love you very much, Earl Martin Shaeffer III
PS: I am very proud to have Pappy’s name – thanks.*

Nanny, this is the greatest honor that I have had in a long time. You are so very special to me. I will never forget this day. We have had so much fun and so many great times.

Without you in my life it would be very, very dull. I am very proud to be your youngest grandchild. You have taught me many things. I remember when I went to your house every day to learn how to read. You are a great teacher and a super example. I hope you will enjoy your birthday to the greatest extent. Let's go to the moon for #100—we'll take the shuttle. Have a great birthday! With much love, Daniel Weaver Shaeffer.

Family activities and events kept Jo interested and busy in the ensuing years. The weddings of the grandchildren were major milestones in which she participated. Both of her children's families were growing and changing. Her brother, Dallas Osborne, and wife Inez moved to Clovis. Childless, they "adopted" their Clovis family wholeheartedly:



Dal & Inez (about 1981)

The grandchildren, ever the focus of Jo's love and attention, each responded to her in loving and thoughtful ways. Throughout her years she was beloved of her family and they each knew that. She reveled in their visits, letters and phone calls. Unfortunately none of them lived nearby after 1988 when Dan went off to college. A few letters have survived. The following was from Dan and Angela Shaeffer, newlyweds since April 1992:

Sept. 6, 1992

Dear Nanny,

How are you? It's been a while since I have heard from you or talked to you so I thought that I would write you a little note just to say hello, and to tell you what is happening in my life. I started school last Monday and I already have a ton of homework. As you probably know, this is my last year at BYU so my classes are getting pretty difficult. I am also spending about two hours a day preparing for the LSAT, which is the Law School Administration Test. I am a little nervous about it. If I really want to get into a law school I really need a good score. It seems like it just gets more competitive each year.

I actually have quite a few options open to me. If law school doesn't work out for us, I might begin working as an accountant and get my CPA and then maybe go on and get a master's degree in professional accounting. I am

going to interview with all of the big firms who come on campus and see if I get any really good job offers..

I am writing this letter on our new computer. We bought it just this summer so I could use it for school, and so that Angela could write her grandmother's personal history and life story on it. It is so much fun and also we are both learning a ton about computers. The world is quickly moving toward using computers in everything, especially accounting. A major emphasis of the accounting program at BYU is the use of computers in accounting. The whole profession is actually moving in that same direction.



Sept. 22, 1992

Today is Tuesday and I just talked to you on Sunday. Although this letter is a few weeks old you requested that I send it, so here you have it... I apologize for letting this letter sit so long before getting it out, but I think the topics that I talked about earlier in the letter are still relevant.

Angela and I are hoping to come to Clovis for Christmas if she can get enough time off work. I'm sure that she can. It will be great to spend Christmas in Clovis. I wish we could come and visit sooner, but I guess that we will have to wait. Nanny, I have to run. Have a wonderful day, I will write or call again soon.

We love you tons!!!

Love, Dan and Angela

At a family gathering in Clovis for Thanksgiving in 1993, Jo was there for dinner, but, unfortunately, not for this photo:



Standing, L-R: Kristin, JD, Angela, Dan, Erin, Mart, Ian, Jo Ellen, Steve; Seated: Ryan, Kay, Marty, EC, Kory, James

After Beth and Bob Martin's wedding in October, 1993, Bobbie Jo wrote:

"...The church dinner is over...Beth's wedding flowers were used on the tables and looked beautiful...I told the group, young for the most part, professional women, that you were my role model because you were always such a good sport! That you followed Dad to small mountain towns, camped, and made lemonade out of lemons. You have never become frozen in a time or period, for example, you started college at age 42. You faced reality, even when it was sad or disappointing and took action, and above all maintained your zest for living."

Granddaughter-in-law, Kristin Shaeffer wrote:

Nov. 5, 1995

Dearest Nanny,

I was reminded once again last Saturday of how grateful I am for you. I was glad to say hello to you on the phone, but was planning on writing you already.

Moms are wonderful things. I am grateful for all you taught your children and grandchildren. You have loved them much. You've not only set a good example in pursuing an education, but have also encouraged them to continually learn and reach their full potential. You've been a friend and encourager in many ways for Duncan.

Since I've been in the family I've enjoyed your company, our conversations, your encouragement and your positive influence in my life. If I lived in Clovis, I'd see you very, very often. I'd ask you questions about your young married life and your feelings about God. I'd enjoy seeing your influence more immediately in my children's lives as they sat in your lap and played and read with you.

Given our present location, however, my children should still feel close to you so I want to talk about you and look at pictures of you more often. I'd love more stories about you—more pictures of all parts of your life. One thing I can tell them, though, is how smart and kind you are.

I love you very much. Please have a wonderful day. We look forward to seeing you again.

Love always, Kristin A. Shaeffer

Attached to Kristin's letter was this note:

Dear Nanny,

We love you and think of you often. Both of the kids are doing quite well. J.D. is growing like a weed. He is getting longer and gaining weight. Kay is beginning to talk. She is copying practically everything we say. We look forward to seeing you soon. We will definitely see you next summer for your 90th birthday. Wow—90 years!!

*We love you,
John Duncan*



Kay & J.D. Shaeffer

One of the most difficult aspects of advanced old age is the loss of peers. Jo often grieved for her friends who had passed away at an increasing frequency as the years went on. Particularly painful were the deaths of Neva Stanfield, in 1998 and Charlotte Hyre, in 1999.

However, more painful than the death of friends was the loss of her great grandchild, Colin Slade, age 7, in 1988. It was a blow to the family of overwhelming proportions and a cause for continuing grief.



Jo & Colin

Austen & Colin Slade



In 1996 a 90th birthday party was given for Jo at the home of Marty and Ellen Claire at 1500 St. Andrews Drive in Clovis. Though it was a hot Sunday afternoon in July the party was well attended by friends and family from near and far.



Marty, Jo, Bobbie Jo



Becky, Beth, B.J., Jeannine



Beth, Jo, Austen, Becky



Kristin & Duncan



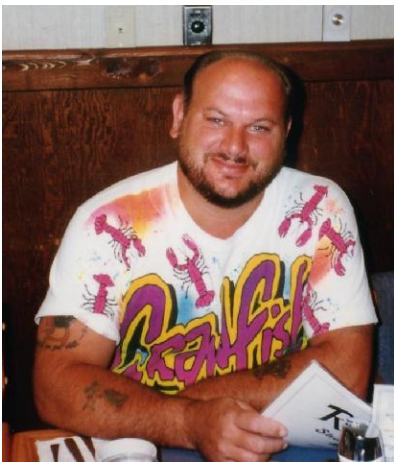
Mart



Ian



Bo & Jeannine



Bob



Courtney & Angela



E.C., Marty & Jo



Kay

Jo's friend, Geraldine Green, wrote the following birthday tribute:

When you think of someone who has all of the poise and elegance of a genuine lady,

You think of Jo Shaeffer.

When you think of a lady who gives all she has to her family, church and love for her friends,

You think of Jo.

Jo, you radiate kindness, a true Christian who is beautiful and magical -

Need I say more?

Let us always be friends!

* * *

