

Dorothy Dee Moore Essex



Born: 14 August 1920 in Walla Walla, Washington

Mother: Mary Willieta "Willie" Rice

Father: William Dwight Moore

Married: 19 June 1944, in Hastings, Nebraska

Died: 14 Jan 2009 in Ohio



Life on sheep farm: A narrative by Dee Essex about her early life.

I hear many people talking about how hard it is to survive financially in today's economy, and I know it is difficult. The affluence of the past decades (relatively speaking) has made the present period seem harder than it really is. This brings memories of the way my parents dealt with our family's survival during the depression of the late 20s into the mid 40s. For our family, the beginning of trouble was in the spring of 1927. Dad had a sheep ranch which had been doing very well. It seemed to be the time to expand his operations. The bank was willing and loaned the money for the expansion sometime in 1925.



When the world economic conditions began to deteriorate, this bank failed.

Our family home was in the town of Walla Walla and mother and my brothers and I were there during the school year. Dad was at the ranch in the Horse Heaven Hills down river (Columbia River) from Kennewick where the lambing and shearing season were just ending. Mother heard of the bank closure and drove to the ranch to tell Dad. Too late! He had already written checks to pay the shepherders and shearers for their season's work. I don't know exactly how it all developed, but since all of the ranch and family funds in the bank were gone, our home had to be sold to pay the debts. To his credit, Dad was able to see that every check given to one of his employees was redeemed. Through the years, he was also able to pay all the debts incurred during that black time. His explanation was simply, "I owe it."

THE SURVIVAL SCHEME: Move to the country where living was cheaper and food could be raised. The first step was to move to Finley, Washington, down river from Kennewick, and live with my mother's parents in their rather small house on their small farm. This happened sometime in late fall. We lived with my Grandparents Rice through that winter. There are several stories to be told about that winter but not now.

Dad got a job managing another sheep company, so he was away a lot. In the spring he built a tent house out in the side yard of Grandpa's house. It was framed rather like a house and had a wooden floor and sides up about three feet; above that was window screening. A large tent was put over the frame. A plank door with a string latch was hung and--instant house. It was the size of a single-room log cabin, the kind of house our pioneer ancestors had lived in when they came to that region in the 1850's, not even eighty years earlier.

We lived in the tent house until fall. We moved to a rented house that had a large garden plot, barns, chicken houses, and pig sties, with use of pasture for cows. It was about a quarter of a mile from the school. We lived there about three years and then moved to another place on the banks of the Columbia River. It is in this period my memories of the many things my parents did to bring us through THE DEPRESSION.



Aunt Dee: A Brief Memoir from the Perspective of Margy Moore Willen

In my early primary school years, I became curious about my parents' lives and started pouring over the photo albums always close at hand. A tiny crinkle-edge snapshot showed Aunt Dee as a little girl, overall legs rolled up, her dark hair in a no-nonsense Dutch-boy cut—well kitted out for the vigorous life of keeping up with two older brothers on a ranch. Her high school graduation portrait showed large, velvety eyes looking out at me with confidence and affection—the tomboy now had all the self assurance, beauty, and good brains to get her through college. And, best of all the pictures, there she was looking over her shoulder into the camera in a snapshot with my Aunt Muriel (my mother's only sister), both aunts grinning broadly as they modeled their fur coats. It seems this was taken when these two independent women shared an apartment in Spokane before their marriages. I didn't know it, but I was getting a role model.



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As I was growing up, my family didn't have too many visits with Aunt Dee's family, mostly because distances and my dad's work assignments precluded them. But I have clear memories of the visits. Having just one sibling, it delighted me to be in a busy household of four children. During those visits, despite ten of us under one roof (and often more at the dinner table), it seemed to me that my Aunt Dee moved through the hubbub with great good humor and purposeful calm. I recall how she and my dad teased one another, obviously engaging in a practice begun in their childhood. It was a lively teasing based on open fondness and old-fashioned cleverness. Clearly, they had been raised in a home that valued wit, affection, and being well spoken and well educated. I remember many other things, too, about visits to Aunt Dee's home. She was a great cook, loved her flower garden (she insisted we go out after dark during a summer visit to see a moonlight-blooming plant), and used stronger colors in her home décor than the grays and browns of my family's home.

Aunt Dee was many women. How to describe the investment of strength, talent, perseverance, excellence, thoroughness, and generosity she gave to her many endeavors? In addition to being a mother-wife-sister-educator, she was an artist, adopted mother/grandmother of a family newly arrived from India, caregiver to a daughter struggling with cancer,



temporary mom to brother Bob's family, seamstress par excellence (Liz's elegant wedding dress), promoter of the arts (including gardening), social activist, and a woman of deep faith.

When it was my time to wed, Aunt Dee made sure that I wore the beautiful pearl and gold lavalier-pendant that many Moore brides have worn. And she welcomed Richard into the family with the same unconditional and generous love she gave to all.

Aunt Dee and her congenial, beloved partner Uncle Paul were visiting Richard and me in our first tiny house in Portales, NM, when we got the phone call about Daddy's death. I remember Aunt Dee rocking me in her arms as I cried and cried. She put her understanding of losing a father before her own pain of losing her brother to comfort me.

Aunt Dee had too much her share of helping the grieving and dying, but she did so with utter calm and rock-solid generosity, controlling her own anguish to help others. She and Uncle Paul were on hand when Mama and I visited Uncle Bill in his last days. And I will never forget her missing the first wedding of a grandchild to be at the

side of her daughter Connie. Now that I am at a time in my life when losses of my own can still feel sharp despite the passage of time, I marvel at Aunt Dee's fortitude and outward serenity.

Her delight in her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren was never-ending and there was always a funny story to be told along with the accomplishments of her brood. She loved so much that her children were as good at parenting (and grand-parenting) as they were in their professions.

When circumstance permitted face-to-face visits, Aunt Dee made us feel so important, included, and loved. At Dee's wedding in Chattanooga, we had a foursome meal with Aunt Dee and friend Louise, and Richard and I enjoyed their company and witnessing their friendship.

The last visit we had at the serene Felicity home was filled with reminiscing, since I had brought my parents old albums to fill in some blanks. Aunt Dee identified old sheep ranch photos, told stories of her scalawag grandfather, helped me understand better my stern grandmother (her mother), and talked about college life in late Depression days. It was a happy time for us both, she the family genealogist and story-teller, I the rapt listener.

As I write these words, I know that Aunt Dee wasn't a paragon, because no one is. But, quite frankly, despite the many years I knew her and the many circumstances of our times together, I never saw any grumpiness or short temper that may have been there in day-to-day living. That's fine with me, because she's my Aunt Dee.

