

MARCELLA FRANCISCO SPEER THOMPSON

Hello. My name is Marcella Speer Thompson. I was born Marcella Francisco on May 15, 1886 in Iowa. When I was only 14 years old, I came with my family to Corona. The weather here was much nicer than back in Iowa. In Corona, I never had to shovel snow from the sidewalk in the winter before I went to school.

In 1903, I married the widower, William H. Speer. There was a bit of a stir at the time, but 17 was not that young for a girl like me to get married, even if my betrothed was a mature 32. I loved William, and that's all that mattered! His first wife, Jennie Wall, had died twelve years earlier. She had birthed four children, Joe, Sam, Harvey and Rose, but only Sam and Harvey had survived. It wasn't easy being a step-mother in a family that had not had a mother for twelve years, but Billie and I made it work. Sam, my oldest stepson became the family member most rooted in Corona. For years he had "an everything you could ever need but never find shop" on West Sixth Street. Why even the newer stores in town would call Sam when they got a big order for something hard to find. Land sakes, that boy was always a saver. He would keep anything and everything, but it all came to good use in the end!

Billie and I had three children of our own, Warren, Thelma, and Herold. Sadly, our first son, Warren, died when he was only eighteen months old. But I suppose it's another painful time in my life, the day my Billie died, that you really came to hear about. At the time, we had been married for fourteen years. It was the day of the Great Circle City Race. He and Sam had been sworn in as track guards and were on the sidelines, watching the race together. Sam, thank God, had walked away just an instant before Bob Burman's race car lost a wheel and went out of control. My William was crushed and killed instantly. Five other spectators were injured, but none seriously. As for my dear husband, he died not even knowing what hit him, it happened so quickly. For that I am truly thankful.

That day and the days that followed were the most difficult in my life. Harold was only two months old. I thought I would lose the very milk that fed him during those dark times. My life became a blur of things that had to be done; none of which I wanted to do. Would you believe I actually had to put a notice in the paper, so I could gain access to the money in our account at the bank? I had just been through such a terrible ordeal, and on the very day of William's death, I couldn't even get my own money out of the bank until the public had been notified of his death. I had to put a notice in the paper applying for a petition to be the administrator of his estate, the overseer of our own affairs.

I was so thankful for the older boys. Harvey had the funeral at his house. My brothers were pallbearers. The house was filled with flowers, family and friends. I don't remember much of all that, but I do remember the music. Mrs. Ballard and Miss May Grow sang so beautifully. Everyone told me later how nice everything was. I just remember feeling numb and empty and the children needing to be fed.

After a lengthy delay, I was finally awarded a sum of \$1,000 by the company that insured the race in compensation for my dear Billie's untimely death, but not until months later, after the Industrial Accident Commission of California decided the case. The family of the driver of the car received nothing, since it was felt that he participated at his own risk. I would gladly have given back my insurance money just to have lived out all my days with Billie, but it was only in our eternal rest that we were once again reunited.

I am sure you noticed that my name is now Thompson, as I did eventually remarry. After all, I was only thirty when my beloved Billie died, a young widow with children to raise, and life goes on, even if we think it won't. I loved my second husband and the life we shared. I lived to be eighty-nine years old, long enough to see and hold six great grandchildren and one great, great grandchild. Life is funny that way; you just never know what's around the next curve.