



Iris VanPelt

January 20, 1920 - October 28, 2004

Iris VanPelt, daughter of Robert Sigler and Marvel Todd Sigler, died on October 28, 2004, at 3:05 AM in Share Memorial Hospital, Alva, Oklahoma. She was born in Wakefield, Kansas, on January 20, 1920. After her father's death, she was adopted and raised in Alva by her maternal grandparents, Charles Bradford Todd, and Hattie M. Parker Todd. The Todds believed in education for women. They were the parents of three daughters, all of whom attended college. Pett, their granddaughter, continued this family tradition.

After attending Alva public schools, she was graduated in 1942 from Northwestern State College, Alva, with a BS degree. Her major was home economics, as she planned to be a mother and homemaker. (In 1941 she had married Garland L. VanPelt, of Freedom, Oklahoma. They were in Alva planning their wedding on Sunday, December 7, 1941, when they heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. They had no idea, then, how the entry of the United States into WWII would impact their lives.)

Iris was raised during the Great Depression and the Oklahoma dust bowl. Her grandfather, Charles Todd, was a skilled finish carpenter and cabinetmaker. During those hard times, he traveled as far as Santa Fe in his attempt to find any kind of work. Iris and Hattie once lived in a tent in order to be with Charles on a construction site. At times, the only food they had was dry potatoes; no butter could be bought. The house Charles had built for Hattie, on Olive Street

in Alva, had to be sold so the family could eat. On Charles' 67th birthday, he was working in the hole dug for construction of the still-standing US Post Office in Alva and was overcome by the 120-degree heat. While working on the building site of Jesse Dunn Hall, on the campus of NWOSU, he was told by other workers that he was taking a job away from younger men who had families to support, so he walked home and never worked again, leaving Iris, Hattie, and himself with no income. Social Security was yet to be created.

From Charles, Iris learned the importance of being a Democrat, a union supporter, and a believer in equal rights for all people. (Charles was once tied to the railroad tracks and left to die by the Ku Klux Klan.) She also learned to be a Methodist, in faith as well as in membership. Charles and Hattie never attended church, partly because in their later years they couldn't afford the "good" clothes Methodists then wore to church in Alva. Charles was once told that he would get more jobs if he attended church and his reply was that he would not engage in such a practice. From Garland's death in WWII, she learned that the horror of war is so great that no war should be fought until all avenues of diplomacy are exhausted. From Hattie, who lived in a dugout when she arrived in "Indian Territory," Iris learned to survive in adversity, to be a vigilant, patient mother, to have high expectations for her own daughter, and to do personal care of frail and aging family members in her own home. Those she cared for at home were Charles and Hattie; their daughter, Myrtle Todd Cargile, and Iris' stepfather, Arley Pierce.

When Iris' husband, Garland, became MIA, November 26, 1943, Iris needed to support their daughter, Sharen Kay VanPelt, who had been born August 31, 1943, during Garland's last leave home. She also needed to help support Hattie and Charles, with whom she and Sharen lived. She bought her house at 911 Locust, almost directly across the street from the house that then stood at 924 Locust, where she and the Todds were living during Garland's last leave. Even though the military declared Garland dead in May, 1944, his body

was never recovered, so there was always some hope that he might return home. Perhaps she thought he could find her if she didn't move too far away.

Iris began substitute teaching in 1946 in the Alva public schools and accepted a position as a second grade teacher as soon as an opening occurred. In those days it was still legal to pay female teachers less than males for the same work and the reason given her was that "men had families to support." She was graduated in 1970 with a Masters Degree and a Reading Specialist Certificate. She retired at age 65 after 39 years of teaching. She was elected President of the Alva Teachers Association and twice as President of Chi Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Teachers Society. She was named Teacher of the Year of both Washington School and of Alva Public Schools. She served at the local level on the Oklahoma Text Book Committee.

She was a member of the First United Methodist Church in Alva and a regular financial supporter. She taught Sunday school for 17 years and was an MYF sponsor. She greatly enjoyed gardening, crewel embroidery, and reading.

She is survived by her only child, Sharen Kay VanPelt Garner; her son-in-law, Robert A. Davis; her cousins, Juanita Frieze Brewer and Mary Frieze Hurley; her many Parker relatives including Willmer and Dean; her two deeply loyal and devoted helpers of many years, Reta Faye Lancaster and Melanie Cunningham, who cared for her as they would their own mothers, and who made possible her wish to live independently at home until her death. She is also survived by her dear friends, of whom only a few can be named, but include Sharen's mother-in-law from her first marriage, Grayce Garner; Margery Clyne; her Masters Degree professors, Rita Stuever and Margery Berends; her best college friend, Verla Oldham Allen (who stood up at her wedding), and many professional and community friends.

The family wishes to thank the medical staff of Share Memorial Hospital, who helped to the maximum of their training and who will be even more effective when Share puts in use the "Patient's Right to be Free of Pain," a legally required standard for accreditation in most of the United States; Holder-Southern Drugs; Integris Bass Home Health Care, and Marshall Funeral Home. Those wishing to honor Iris' memory can donate to the Cargile-Pierce Teacher Education Scholarship, which Iris established: Foundations, NWOSU, 709 Oklahoma Blvd., Alva, OK 73717 (580-327-8593).

Iris was an intensely private person who handed in her (not accepted) retirement notice a year early so she would not have to endure a retirement ceremony. In keeping with her wish for privacy, her funeral instructions were honored: She was buried within 12 hours of her death, without embalming, without a vault, and with a very few people standing at the gravesite speaking words in her memory. At her daughter's request, the Jewish tradition of doing a mitzvah (good deed) was observed. The ultimate mitzvah that anyone can do is to cover the deceased with earth. It is the ultimate mitzvah because it can never be repaid. Those present dropped shovels-full of earth onto the lowered coffin. The ceremony was simple and beautiful and Sharen's only regret is that more of you who cared about Iris could not be included. Since you could not be at her funeral, you are welcome to visit her grave and honor her privately - - - with a prayer, or perhaps by placing a small stone on the monument, the Jewish way to show you paid a visit. Sharen respects and honors all of you for surrounding her brave, fierce, beautiful Mother with strength and caring.

As a private person, Iris rarely spoke of her beliefs, but recently she shared that, when she died, she thought she would be reunited with her husband, Garland. It is comforting to imagine that she is with him now, after 61 years. As she lay dying, Sharen whispered to her that, if she would go to sleep, Grandma would come, and, as Iris' dying progressed, that now she was with

Garland, Grandma, and Granddad. May her eternity be one of peace and joy.

Tribute Wall



“ Iris VanPelt

January 30, 2023 at 03:38 AM



“ Dear Sharon, I've just read your Mother's story, and what a beautiful remembrance of her! Your Mother was my second grade teacher at Washington Elementary, and my neighbor as a child. We lived at 820 Locust street for many years. She was always rather a mystery to me, intensely private and always being alone in her neat white house made me very curious. It's nice to finally know about her life and journey. My childhood memories of the home I grew up in are still very vivid especially in my dreams, and occasionally while dreaming, I ride my bike up locust and wave to your Mother as she is watering her plant on the front porch. I wish I could tell you your Mother made a huge impression on me in second grade, and maybe she did, but I can't remember. But I do remember Mrs. Van Pelt as my neighbor and I see her in my dreams every once in awhile! Thank you for telling her story, she is not such a mystery to me anymore! I wish you and your family the best! Sincerely, Ann Fuson-Woodmansee

Ann Fuson-Woodmansee - August 01, 2008 at 12:00 AM