



Thelma Messersmith

November 23, 1916 - February 26, 2011

Glendive, Montana: Thelma Messersmith, age 94, passed away on Wednesday, February 16, 2011 at the Glendive Medical Center Extended Care Unit. Visitation will be held from 10:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M. on Friday, February 25, 2011 at the Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home in Glendive. A Life Tribute service will be held at 1:00 P.M. on Saturday, February 26, 2011 in the Chapel of the Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home in Glendive with Celebrant Sandy Silha officiating. Interment will be in the Dawson Memorial Cemetery in Glendive. Silvernale - Silha Funeral Home of Glendive has been entrusted with the arrangements. Thelma was born on November 23, 1916 in Pleasant Lake, North Dakota the daughter of Fred and Lena (Garber) Brager. She was raised and educated in Knox, North Dakota, where she graduated from high school. Thelma was united in marriage to John Messersmith on June 23, 1935 in Minnewaukan, North Dakota. They moved to Joplin, Missouri after their marriage where John worked at a meat packing plant. In January of 1944 John entered the United States Army and Thelma and her children moved to Leeds, North Dakota until he returned home from World War II. Thelma and John lived near Knox where they farmed before moving to Tioga, North Dakota when John started driving truck until 1954 when he was transferred to Glendive. Thelma was a dedicated homemaker and babysat for the Ken and Sharon Skillestad family. She enjoyed crocheting, embroidering and she loved watching soap operas. Her main hobby was cleaning house. Thelma was preceded in death by her parents; and her husband, John in 2006 and one

sister, Frances Davidson. Survivors include her son, Robert Messersmith and his wife Karen of Tioga, North Dakota; her daughter Sharon Russell and her husband Cliff of Glendive; sisters, Bernie Hall of Aberdeen, Washington and Ester Stave of Leeds, North Dakota; one brother, Wayne Brager of Leeds, North Dakota and 7 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren. Remembrances and condolences may be shared with the family at: www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com Eulogy: Today is an important day. Today we take time to remember and honor a life lived. In her 94 years of living, Thelma Messersmith touched the lives of those around her. A deeply private individual, there is much about her history, much about herself that Thelma just did not share with anyone. Born, raised and educated in rural North Dakota, Thelma was the eldest of five children, and was about ten years older than her next closest sibling. Their mother died when Thelma was in her teens, after which, according to her sisters, Thelma went to live with an aunt until she finished high school. Childhood memories of times with Thelma amongst her siblings are scarce. After graduation from high school, Thelma married John Messersmith, a young man from the area, and they began a family of their own. John and Thelma had two children, a son, Robert, and a daughter, Sharon. Daughter Sharon recalls her father speaking only once about how he and Thelma had gotten together. John commented to Sharon that he and Thelma "had went somewhere, and all of a sudden they were married." John, like Thelma, was also a very private person, and he did not elaborate. Their marriage was very traditional. John worked to support his family, doing some farming early on and then driving truck. Thelma took care of the household. Thelma inspired John to work. She would not let John turn down any driving jobs that would come his way. John spent a great deal of time on the road. The family could only recall two jobs that Thelma had held outside the home. One was early in the marriage when they lived in North Dakota near a small motel. Thelma cleaned rooms at the motel. The other job was after her own children had left home and this was a job babysitting the children of a family in their home while the parents worked. Thelma enjoyed

both of these jobs and the money she made for herself. To look at Thelma, you would have never guessed her to have been a farm girl. Grandson Kevin just shakes his head over that image. Thelma took great pride in her appearance. She had her hair done at the beauty shop once a week, and it looked as good going in as it did when she came out. She enjoyed clothes and always looked very fashionable. But Thelma was raised on a farm and she and John did some farming in the early days of their marriage. Daughter Sharon can remember her mother sending her out to collect eggs, a job Sharon hated because the hens pecked her when she would reach under them to get the eggs. Thelma would sometimes chide Sharon when she brought in the eggs because there wasn't enough of them, and Thelma could just reach under those hens and get the eggs without ever getting pecked. Thelma knew how to care for newborn animals, raising calves, bunnies and even baby fox. But farm life really wasn't the life for her. Thelma liked new, nice things, the more modern the better. This was reflected in her house. Her homes were always picture perfect. Thelma's passion was cleaning, cleaning, cleaning and keeping her house immaculate. She did not allow anyone to wear shoes in the house. But Thelma also hated windstorms and she would tell Sharon that if one came up Sharon should run for her shoes! Thelma really set an example of cleanliness and everything had its place. Thelma did not like her space messy. When Sharon had her own home, a Christmas tradition was for Thelma and Sharon was to make cookies and lefse together. They always did this at Sharon's house though, because making lefse made a mess. Thelma had a notable temper and something that could get her riled up was when her house was in disarray. Thelma's voice had a unique pitch when she was angry, and her language could get quite colorful. It was mentioned that she could "make a sailor blush." John didn't seem to mind Thelma's temper though, as many times he would say or do something to get her going, and then wink at whoever was present in a conspiring manner. First impressions seemed to stick with Thelma so making a good first impression

was important. When Clifford Russell began dating Sharon, their first date was a double date with another couple. They ended up parked, and all four fell asleep not waking until 5 a.m. Sharon was mortified and did not want to go home and face her mother, but Thelma never said a word when Sharon came in. Later, Clifford went back over and told Thelma what had happened, apologized and promised that it would not happen again. Thelma really didn't say much at the time, but she and Clifford got along famously after that. And Thelma never told Sharon that Clifford had come over to explain and apologize. Thelma wasn't big on listening to the radio or watching television except for her soap operas. When her soaps were on, she didn't talk to anyone. She and John might listen to or watch the news. Otherwise radio and television was just noise. Thelma was an expert at crocheting and at embroidery. She made many doilies and embroidered table linens that she used in her home and gave as gifts. Her dining table always had a fancy tablecloth or runner on it. When the table was being used, the fancy one was removed and a different one was put on for serving food. Thelma was an impeccable hostess, always ready with cookies and coffee for guests. It would be John's job afterwards to shake out the used tablecloth and replace it with the fancy one. Although Thelma hadn't spent much time with her siblings during their growing up years, as adults they kept in touch with visits to each other's homes over the years. John and Thelma vacations were always to visit family in North Dakota or on the West Coast. About fifteen years ago, they had a family reunion in Devil's Lake, North Dakota, that everyone enjoyed. Thelma's two living sisters, Bernie and Ester both enjoyed the visits they had with Thelma and John and commented on Thelma's beautiful home. Bernie especially remembers taking her small sons to Thelma and John's house and even though the house was not kid friendly, Thelma let those boys do whatever they wanted and never indicated that they were a problem in any way. Bernie's sons liked visiting "Aunt Thelma." Cookies may have something to do with that. Brother Wayne especially remembers how well fed he was at Thelma's. Not only was Thelma a good housekeeper, she was a good cook,

with her fried chicken dinners at the top of the list. Wayne recalls going down into the basement to get cookies out of the freezer with Thelma. The freezer was loaded with cookies. Cookies were a specialty of Thelma's.

Granddaughter Kim shares this memory of her grandmother: "I remember she always had to have cookies for us kids. If she didn't have any she would get a little upset. I think just once I remember she didn't have any cookies for us.

She would always have my favorite date cookies." Kim's son, Thelma's great-grandson, Justin, remembers that whenever he went to her house, Thelma always had gingersnaps for him. Grandson Kevin remembered the cookies,

too, and how Thelma always had his favorites. Keeping favorites for each family member certainly would help fill a freezer. Other food memories included these: Granddaughter Sandy says, "I remember being at Grandma's old place when I was young and she offered all of us girls either a popsickle or ice cream bar. After eating most of mine, I went back to Grandma and told her I didn't like it and wanted the other kind...she laughed and let me have one."

Sandy also recalls, "I loved going to see them because Grandma would always make her fried chicken dinner, and no one did fried chicken like Grandma. At Christmas time, her Christmas goodies were the best, and you haven't tasted strawberry jam until you tasted Grandma's."

Granddaughter Patty shares the following food memories. "How could anyone forget the smell of fried chicken in her house! The best ever! And every morning we would get up and she would always have the table set for breakfast. And never a breakfast without cut grapefruits by each plate."

Sharon says that her mother always had fried chicken for Sunday dinner and for company. It was a popular meal at Thelma's. And greatly appreciated by those she served. Other memories shared by grandchildren are the following. Patty says, "I will never forget the times we came to Glendive to see grandpa and grandma and us girls would get to go with her to the beauty shop when she would get her hair done. And I will never forget the time some kids were playing outside the shop and they had little pebbles and one of those stones hit her car and she started chasing these kids down the street, but never caught them. Boy was she

mad!! And you know as well as the town of Glendive how high her voice got when she was mad. We were pretty scared at the time but when I look back, it really makes me laugh! I could not believe Grandma Thelma could run so fast! But thank goodness for those boys, she couldn't catch them. Who knows what would have happened. And I will always remember one visit. We got to Glendive and Grandpa and Grandma had bought us girls these dolls that came in a little bottles. We played with those dolls the whole time we were there. I am pretty sure it was to keep us entertained so that we would not get into grandma's stuff." Kevin recalls his grandma always driving the truck. She had a big red Thunderbird car, but that was only used for road trips, around town she would drive the big pick-up truck. Granddaughter Debi' says: "I am so sorry about Grandma's passing away. Dad was remembering about how Wayne came that time and surprised Grandma with the helicopter and gave her a ride in it. She just loved that and talked about it often. I also remember Dad and Grandma talking about the time they all lived on a farm and she'd go out to the garden to pick vegetables...Pal would come rooting through there and she'd think it was a snake and the vegetables would go flying as Grandma would run back into the house. I can remember after we gave Kru (a dog) to Grandpa and Grandma. She used to tell about how he loved to go in the garden and eat the ripe strawberries and leave the green ones. We used to laugh thinking of how mad she'd get at him. He loved those strawberries and she loved him." Thelma also inherited a cat named Carmel from Cliff and Sharon. Whenever Thelma and John had a pet it stayed in the garage, not in Thelma's clean house. But Sharon does recall a time one hot summer day when she came to weed the garden spot she had at her parents' home. She brought along her dog, Gus, knowing he would just stay with her while she weeded. Sharon got thirsty working garden and went into the house to get a drink of water. Gus followed Sharon to the door where Sharon left him. Thelma insisted that Sharon bring Gus in, much to Sharon's surprise, and then Thelma reminded Sharon how hot it was for the dog too, and gave Gus a

dish of water right there in the kitchen, something a bit unheard of for Thelma...all animals belonged in the garage. Then Thelma told the dog to lie down and Gus went right to a spot under the air conditioning by the sliding glass doors, and there he stayed until Sharon finished. Thelma truly did have a soft spot for animals. Thelma was a strong willed and independent woman all her life. About four years ago, she suffered a stroke which caused some paralysis and hampered her ability to speak. Thelma entered the nursing home to be cared for. John died soon after this ending their 71 years of marriage. Thelma died February 16, 2011 in the nursing home.

Granddaughter Sandy found the following short verse to be read today. It was written by Corina Coburn and is titled "I Will See You Again." The sun shall rise and sure to set. Her time has come, has no regret. Her life she lived we sure all know. A better place she has to go. Rejoice today, it's at an end. And she will see us once again.

Tribute Wall



“ *Thelma Messersmith*

December 07, 2022 at 04:10 PM