

Thelma Stephens

1914-1987

Homemaker * Family Corporation Secretary * Social Organizer

How Related: Verna's Mother



Thelma Imodene Richerson was born December 30, 1914 in the little community of Fairy in Hamilton County Texas. Long before the days of personally-owned Kodak cameras, her parents must have taken this one-year-old to a photographer's studio in Hamilton or Fort Worth.

Her parents, Ida Arvizina Culp & James William Richerson had built their little farmhouse via a Sears & Roebuck catalogue that shipped all the materials from Canada. As you can see, they had a well with its windmill and a barn with loafing porches on the sides to shield their cattle from the scorching sun in summer and the endless winds year round. This painting by J. Guerrant hangs in the living room of Norma Stephens in Abernathy, having been commissioned by Darrell, and based on an actual photo hanging in the home of Kim Lovelace (2017).





1898



1928



1941

Thelma's Parents

Will Richerson, born in 1873 at the start of the Civil War, is pictured here in 1898 at 25 yrs. old when he married Ida Arvizina, age 20. She was born in Mississippi in 1878, They had three children: James **Elden** Richerson Sr., born in 1900 in Cranfalls Gap, Bosque County TX, **Buzz** (Spurgeon Eldridge), born in 1903 at that same house, and **Thelma** Imodene, born December 30, 1914 on the farm in Fairy. Photos by Rich Salmon in 1985 with a windmill over the well and the original barn still standing. 1941 photo in County Line, Lubbock County TX with granddaughter Verna Lee Stephens.





1919. Feeding the chickens next to the entrance of the storm shelter, Thelma did her chores with a willing heart. She was always busy and always obedient. The shadow of the photographer indicates the family had acquired a Brownie box camera.

Her Mama probably was the one who sewed this party dress and may have been the one who used watercolors to tint the photo. Center photo with her parents on the front porch in 1924. There were lots of children in surrounding farms and here she is with girl friends on a bridge.



Starting in 1920, Thelma walked with her older brothers a mile up the road to the Fairy schoolhouse. It had been built well enough to still be standing sixty-five years later when Rich Salmon took this picture in 1985. The blackboard was still attached to the wall and the chimney in place where the pot bellied stove had stood, used to heat the entire room during cold winter days. The floor was gradually rotting and the photographer had to be careful where to step.



Although Thelma attended the Baptist Church, this historic Methodist Church still stands in Fairy.



At the beginning of high school, Thelma met Viola Berkeley who had transferred from Gum Branch. Viola and Thelma became great friends because they enjoyed the same things. They took piano lessons from the same teacher and played duets together at recitals. While the other girls were standing around, scared they might break a fingernail, Thelma and Viola were playing basketball on the court next to the high school.

Viola introduced Thelma to her boyfriend, Marvin Stephens, from Gum Branch. Much to her dismay, Marvin took a shine to Thelma and a courtship followed. Eventually, Thelma married Marvin Eugene Stephens on March 2nd, 1932, seated in the back seat of a car outside the office of the Justice of the Peace in Hico, Texas. She was eighteen and he was nineteen. Within six weeks, Thelma was pregnant and gave birth to Darrell Owen Stephens on January 19, 1933 in James and Ida Richerson's home in Fairy. Two years later, on January 26th 1935, Thelma delivered Verna Lee, again in the upstairs of her mother's home. Viola and her husband Leonard Hargrove, her twin sister Zeola and her husband Dan Haile kept up a lifelong friendship with Thelma and Marvin. Who could have imagined that 55 years later after Thelma's death, that Marvin would marry Viola (then a widow), and honeymoon in 1987 in Verna Lee's home in Colorado. They lived happily together during the final nine years of Marvin's life.



After the family moved in 1937 from Hamilton County to County Line TX (in West Texas), Marvin rented a tiny two-room house on a tract of land where he began subsistence farming. His cash crop was cotton, but he and Thelma had a garden, a milk cow, some chickens and a sow. The pump-handle water well, an outhouse, a chicken house and small tool shed made up the rest of the homestead. The green John Deer tractor and its attachments sat year-round in the yard.



Thelma had a large iron kettle in the yard where she lit a fire both for cooking, washing clothes and heating water for the weekly baths. Cooking inside utilized a wood/coal burning range as well as the potbelly stove that also heated the house in winter. One room had the family table and chairs, cabinets for utensils and food storage. Clothes hung on pegs on the wall. The second room contained two beds... one for the parents and one for the two kids and a tall dresser. This photo was taken by Rich Salmon three decades later (1973) when Verna was showing the

decaying house to her new husband and her three kids.



Thelma's family was living in the two-room house when Reggie was born December 22, 1940. Verna began First Grade the following September by riding a school bus with her big brother Darrell to the school house in Monroeville (later renamed New Deal TX). Complaining that their house was too cramped, Thelma got Marvin to move them to the Biffle Place in 1942 where they had indoor plumbing and a barn for the livestock. The move crossed over into Hale County and Verna and Darrell then took a different bus to Abernathy Elementary School.

Marvin and Thelma moved later to yet another rental farm house they called the Biffell-Howell Place. It wasn't until after

Verna Lee was graduated from Abernathy High School in 1953 and had moved in with her grandmother Ida Arvizina in Lubbock, that Marvin and Thelma bought their first house on Avenue G in Abernathy.

Family photo in 1954 after moving into Abernathy: Darrell, student at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene TX, Reggie in high school, Verna Lee working in Lubbock and student at Texas Tech, Marvin and Thelma.



Thelma died February 12, 1987 in Mesa, Arizona and was buried in Lubbock, Texas.