

**ONE OF MY FAVORITE RELATIVES:
MY GRANDMOTHER, VERONICA VICTORIA DORRIS GREENE**

By Marjorie Daehler

Her friends called her “Ronnie” for Veronica, but I called her Grandmother. She was named for her father’s youngest sister, Veronica, and her mother’s only sister, Victoria. Dorris was her maiden name and Greene was her married name.



Both my maternal grandmother and grandfather, lived with our family ever since I was ten months old. My grandfather died when I was five, but my grandmother lived until almost ninety-nine. She was always there, and strongly influenced my life. As a child I used to brag that I never had a baby sitter because if my parents weren’t available, my grandmother was. She both infuriated me and at other times I was sure I was her favorite grandchild.

Grandmother was born in Mississippi in 1883 and lived there until a teen when her family moved to Phoenix, Arizona. Some of her father’s brothers owned the biggest bank and stores in

Phoenix, and were very influential in the development of that city. Her father was a farmer, the fifth son of eight boys and four girls. Her mother died when Ronnie was three or four of smallpox and by the time grandmother was five she had a stepmother.

After her father remarried, Ronnie eventually had three stepsisters. Besides losing her mother she also lost to illness a younger sister that she adored. She said the child was about one and a half years old when she died and the family laid her out on the dining room table overnight for the wake.

Grandmother said she hugged her on that table before going to bed and noticed she was still warm. In the morning her sister's body was cold. Grandmother was convinced that her sister was still alive when she left her to go to bed even though the adults said she was dead. I think she grieved that sister her whole life.

The story of her family life was much like Cinderella's. She was always expected to do the cleaning and take care of the younger children. She felt unappreciated and abused as a young girl, and said that at one time her stepmother told her, "You can't expect me to love you as much as my own daughters."

When she was in the third grade in Mississippi she was pulled out of school to pick cotton on their farm. That was her last chance at a formal education for many years. Later, when her family moved from Mississippi to Phoenix, Arizona, she was invited by an aunt and uncle to live with them. They told her she could help in the house and attend school. She readily took them up on it. Thus, she stayed in Phoenix when her parents returned to Mississippi. I never heard grandmother regret her decision.

Although she was able to get a little more schooling in Arizona, she always longed for more. Her chance came when she met Nelle, a woman a little older than herself who became a great friend, older sister and surrogate mother. Nelle arranged a reading club for Ronnie's benefit and they read Shakespeare and poetry and some classics to enhance her learning.



She always loved babies.



Nelle Blount, Veronica's friend, & surrogate mother

Finally, after Grandmother's children were born, first a son and later my mother, Grandmother made a point of learning everything with them as they attended each year of school. She also vowed to send them to "The Harvard of the West," Stanford University, to complete their education. She made it happen by taking in borders. My uncle became a doctor and my mother earned her master's degree in 1933 when very few woman were doing such things. When my uncle was a college freshman he felt overwhelmed with his studies and asked his mother to write an essay for him. She did and he received an A on it. Grandmother always said that was her diploma.

Ronnie was very tall for her time, five feet eight and a half inches. She also had gray hair and false teeth by the time she was in her forties. In spite of her difficult upbringing she became a very strong, talented,





My grandmother, older sister Dorris Jean, and me.

independent and determined woman. She especially loved babies, but was loving to all people. Her motto in life was “Others.” She always aimed to think of and take care of “others.” The following story tells a lot about her personality. After Ronnie was married she visited her relatives in Mississippi. After boarding a local bus, she sat down and the bus driver walked back and said, “Mam, you can’t sit back here, this area is for colored people. You come on up front.” Her response, “I’ll sit where I please I am colored, my name is Greene.” He knew better than to argue so moved the sign, “For colored only” behind her.

No one had more fun or enjoyed a joke better grandmother. Once, a group of high school kids from our church spent a weekend at our summer cabin. The youth advisors warned the teens to not make noise after lights out because my grandmother needed her sleep. At four AM a very loud alarm clock rang for many minutes before it was found. It woke everyone up and the kids were in severe trouble until they learned it was my grandmother who had set the alarm and hidden the clock.

I learned from her to be honest, loving, and thoughtful. I also learned how to stand up straight, have good manners, work hard and with confidence, and to enjoy life. One of my many interests came directly from her. She loved genealogy, taught me about my family and saved family treasures for me to preserve. She was a great influence in my life.



Grandmother's new car in 1954. She let me and my sister choose the color. I had always wanted a red car.