

Elizabeth Greaves Eames - written from the perspective of Robert Moss Lewis III, December 30, 2012

One of my all-time favorite people was my Grandma Benson. She was born Elizabeth Greaves Eames on June 6, 1884 in Logan, Utah, to David Cullen Eames and Elizabeth Cluley Greaves. Grandma was a tiny person growing to a height of 4'11" and weighing only 99 pounds for most of her life. She was very pretty. We have a photo of her on the day she reigned as Queen of the Harvest Ball. She was wearing a homemade silver crown and carrying a homemade staff. By today's standards, the staff and crown look quite funny, but she was beautiful.

Grandma moved with her family to Preston, Idaho when she was a small child. While she was in elementary school, she met her future husband, Frank Taft Benson. From her diary, it is clear that she was smitten by him from the time they met in elementary school. In many ways, they were opposites. While both of them were strikingly good-looking, Grandpa Benson was very tall (over 6 feet), muscular, with a dark complexion, and very outgoing. In contrast, Grandma Benson was tiny, with a light complexion, quiet, and very refined. My mother said that they were deeply in love with each other and had a great love affair all the years of their marriage.

My mother was particularly proud of her father. He served in the bishopric of their large ward most of the years of their marriage. Mother said he was very good-looking and everyone loved him. It was Grandpa Benson who used to sing "Have I Done Any Good in the World Today" every evening with his family in his home.

Grandpa Benson was a farmer and cattle trader so the family lived on a farm in the country nearly all of Grandpa and Grandma's married life. They had a large family. My mother, Carmen, and her twin brother, Harold, were Grandma's second pregnancy. Grandma Benson, being such a tiny person, had a difficult time carrying the twins. She became so large during her pregnancy that she couldn't sit down. The only two possible positions for her were standing and lying down. She went into labor with the twins during a blizzard on November 4, 1911. Grandpa brought a neighboring woman to the house to watch Grandma while he traveled through the heavy snow to get a doctor. The storm was so bad that Grandpa didn't return for hours. In the meantime, Grandma delivered her twin babies, Carmen and Harold, with the help of the neighbor. The babies weighed 8 pounds and 9 pounds, respectively. My tiny 99 pound grandmother had carried 17 pounds of babies and delivered them at home without the help of a doctor. When the doctor finally arrived, he and my grandfather found Grandma Benson and the twins well and safe.

Mother spoke often of the happy, almost idyllic life they led on the farm for the next several years. The children had a pony named Topsy that they rode to school, often with as many as three or four children on the back of the small horse. Topsy used to love to run and Mother said it was not uncommon for all three or four children to slide from the horse's back as he thundered around the corner and down the lane to their home.

There was a recession in the farming industry in the early 1920s. By the fall of 1922, things had become so difficult that Grandpa Benson could not keep up with the debt on his farm, and the property was foreclosed. Grandpa and Grandma Benson moved their family of four girls and two boys to Logan, Utah where the family of eight lived with Grandpa Benson's brother, Surge. Grandpa Benson, who had been a farmer all of his life, worked for Uncle Surge in his butcher shop in order to support his family.

In December, 1922, just two months after arriving in Logan, Grandma Benson's youngest child, Frank, became ill and died of the flu. She was so heartsick at the loss of her child that there were no Christmas decorations in the house that Christmas. Two months later, in February, 1923, Grandpa Benson suffered a cerebral hemorrhage while dressing for work one morning. He died later that day. My mother was 11 years old at the time. She remembers Grandma sitting next to the coffin holding my grandfather's body late at night after the children were in bed, caressing his body and weeping. She had not told Grandpa Benson, but she was two months pregnant with my Aunt Nellie Lou. In the space of four months, Grandma Benson had lost her home, her two-year-old baby boy, and her husband.

After burying Grandpa Benson, Grandma moved to a small home in Preston where she found work as a clerk in a store. Seven months later, Grandma gave birth to little Nellie Lou. Mother remembers Grandma Benson calling out her husband's name as she struggled through the delivery of their baby girl.

Upon returning to work, her employer allowed Grandma Benson to bring the baby with her in a buggy to the store so she could watch the baby while she worked. My Aunt Nellie Lou told me that she always believed my mother was the most beautiful woman in the world because she would stand in her baby carriage and watch through the window for my mother's face. Seeing mom come to pick her up, was the grand highlight of Aunt Nellie Lou's day as a toddler.

Grandma Benson worked incredibly hard to support her family of six children. She was very independent and determined to care for her family without taking charity from anyone. Mother told me the story of one Christmas when there was not enough money for presents for the children. The Bishop in the ward had a large basket of fruit and food delivered to Grandma's home, and left on the front porch. When the children discovered the basket, they were thrilled. Grandma, however, would not allow the children to bring the basket into the house. Instead, she called the Bishop and asked that he come and pick it up and deliver it to someone who really needed it. While her strength and determination were exemplary and remarkable, that determination probably went beyond the mark on this particular occasion.

I was born when Grandma was already 62 years old. She continued to work well into her 70s, never accepting charity from anyone as she raised her six children.

The last great tragedy in Grandma Benson's life came in the summer of 1948. Her son, Harold, the only remaining male member in her family, died in an airplane crash while he was piloting a plane on a search and rescue mission. Mother said that Grandma Benson was never the same after that. My little brother was born a month after Uncle Harold's death. Mom named my brother Harold Benson after her twin.

Grandma Benson told her daughters that the greatest pain a mother can suffer is the loss of a child. She told them that she prayed daily that none of her children would ever have a child precede them in death. My mother and all of her sisters have now passed from this life. Among them, they had 28 children. None of those children died before their mother.

Grandma Benson kept a diary. In it she recorded both the major events and the day-to-day activities of her life. It was inspiring to read the diary and note the number of entries in which she characterized the little daily events in her life as being “grand”, a word she used repeatedly. It was clear from her diary that she had great faith in the Lord, and she loved the church. After the death of her son, Harold, she fell into a great sadness. She never told us about the event that we found recorded in her diary. We only learned about it after her death. But, in the diary she records going to bed one evening feeling overwhelming sadness at the loss of her husband and her two sons. The pain was almost more than she could bear. And then she recorded that a light came into the room. The Savior appeared to her, comforted her, and assured her that things would be well for her and her family.

My recollections of Grandma Benson are of a tiny, kind, perfectly gracious and proper person. In all the years I knew her, I can never remember her saying an unkind word about or to anyone or using even a remotely inappropriate word. She was as good and as pure and as kind as any person I have ever known. And, for a 4’11”, 99 pound person she was the strongest woman I have ever met.