

Life History of Emilia (Millie) Helena Christensen Knaphus (1891-1931)

Parents: Mads Miller Christensen
Anne Marie Mathiasen Lundgreen

By Anne Marie (Knaphus) James, her daughter

My Mother – and Jack’s – was Emilia (known as “Millie”) Helena Christensen Knaphus born the 17th of November 1891. She was the 4th of 5 children. One of her sisters died before mother was born. Her parents were both born in Odense, Denmark, though they married in Utah. They had Rose, Lillie (who died), Myrtle, Millie, and Christian or Chris.

This was not a happy marriage and ended in divorce when Millie was about 3 years old, and Uncle Chris was just a baby. After they broke up, Grandma Anne Marie moved to Monroe with her four little children to live on their small farm and modest log house. Monroe is 5 miles south of Richfield.

As time past, Grandma Anne Marie married a very kind neighbor– a widower, Fredrick Andersen, with 2 children. Together they had another son, Uncle Dan Andersen. They became a very happy family together and were all active in the Church.

Millie and Myrtle worked together on various beet farms in the area to earn money. They made enough to buy their own bicycles. Millie was a good bicyclist. The children were real close to each other. Millie lived in Monroe until 1907 when she was nearly 16 years old. She and her brother Chris went up to their father’s place in Murray to attend school, where they graduated together in 1908.

Millie’s older sister, Aunt Rose, who was 4 years older had been teaching school for two years in Sevier County and decided to move to Salt Lake to live closer to Millie & Chris. Rose met and fell in love with Conrad Hansen, from northern Norway. Our Dad, Torleif Knaphus, was a good friend of Conrad - both having come from Norway.

While visiting Temple Square one early spring day in 1909, Rose and Conrad introduced Millie to Torleif. During the summer they did fun things together, hiking in the mountains, going to the resorts and I’m sure enjoying their courtship.

Rose and Conrad Hansen were married Sept. 1, 1909, and Millie and Torleif were married on Nov. 25, 1909. For a while, they lived in the same house on Linden Avenue in Salt Lake City, each couple occupying two rooms.

In the summer of 1910, Millie and Torleif moved down to Monroe, Utah to the same log house where Millie had grown up. Millie’s older sister, Aunt Myrtle, met Andrew, Torleif’s brother who had come from Norway and joined the Church. They were married the 4th of April 1911. Oh, how this family was bound together.

In later years, Aunt Myrtle told me of when they had 2 to 3 children each, and lived together in Grandma's old log house, while their husbands were out of the country. Torleif was studying art in Paris and New York City and Andrew was on a mission in Norway. They had no inside water and had to carry it from a block away to scrub all those dirty diapers out on a scrubbing board in a big tub, heating the water on a little monkey stove. They chopped all their wood, and had no inside plumbing, furnace, electricity, or refrigeration at that time. Life was very hard for them, but I never was aware of it until I was grown, and my Aunt told me, after I questioned her about the earlier days. My siblings Kim, Harold, and Olive were all born in that little log house in Monroe.

Millie and Torleif left Monroe and moved back to Salt Lake in approximately 1918. They first lived in a small house at 2631 South 600 East. During that time, Dad was in Hawaii working on the temple when Grace was born. Later they moved to 1446 Redondo Avenue where the remainder of our large family began our lives.

I remember being told many times by Kim that I was the first child in the family to not be born at home. Dad was in Canada working on the Temple when I came into the world. Kim went with Mother on the old shaky streetcar out to the Maternity Hospital in Murray. They walked about four blocks after they got off and she gave birth before the doctor arrived. I heard Dad didn't want to pay the bill, because the doctor hadn't appeared 'til so long after he was needed. Mother then had two more children, Irene and Jack – eight children in all.

To let you know of a few of Millie's personal characteristics:

She was so kind and loving – and very Spiritual. Mother taught a Religion Class, which was a for-runner to Seminary and also taught in Relief Society. She attended the Temple frequently with Dad to do the ordinance work of the genealogy Dad had gathered. We regularly had Home Night each week, which was renamed "Family Home Evening".

She was especially clean and orderly and very organized. Mother taught us all how to work at a young age. The household jobs were delegated out on a weekly basis. My sister Olive told me she planned her menus out, with nutrition in mind, sometimes a month in advance. Buying groceries to make everything from scratch on a low budget. Millie baked a lot and was a beautiful sewer. Her mother, Grandma Anne Marie, had been a seamstress and had taught her at a young age how to sew. Mother made Irene and I a beautiful dress with lots of fancy handwork on them for every holiday and special occasion.

Though they had little income most of the time, Mother was thrifty and economical enough to have a few luxuries that she valued. We had two nice sets of books besides our encyclopedias that we read together regularly. She had a deep love for cut crystal and valued its beauty. I'm certain that's why I have always loved it so. And she enjoyed beautiful China and loved flowers, and the out-of-doors.

I am so grateful for my memories of her and my experiences of being at her side as she mixed the bread and rolled out the piecrusts and while she sewed.

I will never forget one summer evening when all the neighborhood kids were out in the field behind our house. We had exhausted our imagination as to what to do. I came to her for suggestions, and she said, “Why don’t you play ‘Run Sheep Run’? Well, none of us knew how to play it, so Mother willingly laid down her sewing and came outside and taught us. She stayed with us for a long time, ‘til we really caught on – and that became the favorite neighborhood game for years.

Another sweet memory is Saturday night baths after a light supper. When clean and ready for bed, she often served us some good Bread Pudding and we picked our favorite story to be read. Often Mother played her harmonica for us. I particularly remember her playing the song “Red Wing”.

When Mother was just 40 years old, I was 8 and Jack was just 16 months old, Mother suddenly left our lives on Sunday, December 13, 1931. We missed her tremendously. What a wonderful woman and mother she was.

Thanks for the beautiful memories.

Written 2005