

## The First Lady:

Teresia Holahan is from Oklahoma. Tre (pronounced "tree") lives in New Jersey now, up north in the beautiful valleys and running waters. I know it's hard to imagine but there are parts of Jersey that are stunningly beautiful. She is surrounded by rolling hills, excellent farmland and quiet nights. It looks and feels a lot like our fair Houston County.

Tre (please remember to pronounce it "tree") is ninety-one years old. Being from Oklahoma means that she was born in a very tough place during some of the worst times of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her maiden name was Buchmiller, a fine traditional German name. She was born in 1916 just before America's entry into WW 1 when feeling against German-Americans was running high. She was too young to remember but her mother, Anna, who immigrated here in 1915 remembered all too well the term "kraut" when a neighbor was referring to a neighbor who happened to be German. It was standard, dull normal. It was like saying "Minnesotan". Only it didn't mean any of the good things we mean when we say "Minnesotan". Anna had a very heavy accent. Tre says she doesn't remember speaking English with an accent as a child. I'll bet she did. Kraut.

But that was nothing. The Dust Bowl followed. Have you seen photos of the dust bowl? Are some of you old enough to have been alive during the dust bowl? Then you know. Imagine the gorgeous farmland that surrounds us looking like a desert. No top soil. Just sand. No greenery just empty. No smiles just tears. No conversation, just jaws set against the unremitting violence of nature gone against you. Imagine that.

When times got really tough Anna took to making home brew, beer. She had five children on her own. Her husband had the nerve to die at the age of thirty-nine. A stroke killed him slowly. In Oklahoma the brew was called 'chalk'. I don't know why, but it was. She made a few gallons a week and it went a long way to getting her family through the hard times. Well, some enlightened neighbor turned her in to the authorities. This was during prohibition. When she went before the local magistrate, with whom she was on a first name basis, this is what happened.

He said, "Anna, what should I do with you? What should my sentence be?" She did not hesitate. "Judge, I could use the rest. Why don't **you** take my children during the time that you put me away?" His honor thought about this for almost a minute and pronounced, "Case dismissed." That's the way it was. Harder times. Simpler times. Tre, being one of the five children, was free to stay with her mom. She spent the next year, with her brothers and sisters, living in a chicken coop on her uncle's farm. It was the best that could be done. It was cold in the winter and hot in the summer but it sure beat going to the County Orphanage. Much better than the Work House.

Tre was smart, got herself a diploma, second in her class, and left that hard place. She left Oklahoma and its dirt and its poverty and its hopelessness. She went to Washington, D.C. to work for the Government, like so many young women during the War. That's where she met Joe. Smart guy, good looking guy, from New York. He's the one who nicknamed her "Tre".

Well, these two smart kids, one from Will Rogers' neighborhood and the other from Jimmy Cagney's neighborhood got together and fell in love. They made a family and made a life. In our neighborhood, in New York City, they were as good as they could be. Great neighbors, great friends to everyone. They were a pleasure to be around. You could ask anyone. Really, you could.

Well, here it is now, so many years later. Tre is in Jersey spending several hours every day in the family business. She's in charge of watering the plants. Then she helps with supper. Then she cuddles the family dog. Then she sleeps the sleep of the innocent. It takes my Mom about two minutes to fall asleep. Two minutes from the time her head hits the pillow until she begins to dream of a ninety year life. I inherited that trait from her. Thank you, Mom.

Your courage and your strength and your smarts and your love are all that a boy with imagination could want. You are the center of the universe, the start of life, the hub. Nothing else happens, nothing that I have, or have wished for, happens without you. My Mother.