

Pass It On®... Love and Healing

Nelda was 23 years old and pregnant with her third daughter during the Great Depression, living in a hardscrabble western town with hard-packed dirt roads lined with desert flowers that somehow managed to push up through the cracked clay. Her husband found work on the Hoover Dam dangling from ropes with a hundred-pound drill. He died on the job. Nelda got the news two days later and sunk into a deep melancholy that would resurface throughout her life. With three small girls to take care of she worked as a postmaster at the small-town office that doubled as a general store. Neighbors dropped off bits of their harvest, widow's mite offerings in those lean times. There wasn't a lot of time to offer support and condolences; everybody was working sunup to sundown. But one friend suggested Nelda ease her pain by writing to servicemen injured in the war. It was a pen pal program begun by the Red Cross. So, Nelda introduced herself, not sure what to say.

Ross had been in the Merchant Marines in Canada. While working on a boiler, the thing exploded and injured his leg. He'd walk with a limp the rest of his life. He received Nelda's letter while convalescing in Vancouver. And that's how it began.

A year's worth of letters made their way from the Western desert to the temperate coastal clime and back. She sent photographs of little girls in pinafores with sun-dried faces beside a young mother who smiled shyly at the camera. He wrote poetically of the rainsqualls that roll in from the Northern Pacific. Conversations took months to complete. Here were two people, each with a piece missing trying to fill each other's spaces. There was time to respect each other's scars, to embrace without the physical contact that can sometimes hurt if you're not careful. They began to understand each other, to find love between lines. And so Ross wrote the letter that would change everything: *Will*

you marry me? Love longs for answers. Love endures the wide spaces between hearts. Finally, a scented letter came. Ross hurriedly packed a few bags, including his tools and his best shirt, and drove down the coast; somewhere at the top of California he turned inland and ended up between Nevada and New Mexico.

There was a small wedding inside a clay brick church. Hand cut doilies and music from a Victrola. He would lead as they danced, supporting her thin body and fragile emotions. She would be patient with his slow left leg.

Ross opened a service station and thrilled Nelda with daring speed on long dirt roads in his automobile. He raised the girls and they called him daddy. He patted their soft heads with his big hands and walked the floors with Nelda when her darkness returned and anguish turned her breaths into sobs. Like the desert flowers, they always seemed to push through, enough love between them to bring on the beauty of another new day.

Love...PassItOn.com

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