

Putting the bits and pieces together

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As a genealogist I want to know more about those on my family tree than just the dates of their birth and death. I want to know about the kind of life they led and what interested them. Sometimes finding this kind of information takes roundabout methods.

When I think I about all the talented people on my family tree, the one person that comes to mind is my Great Aunt Cora Cook Thomas (1893-1987). She was a concert violinist and attended the Juilliard School of Music. I am not sure when she attended this prestigious school, but it probably was in the period from 1914-1920. She toured for some years and then settled back in Texarkana, Ark. At first she lived in my great grandmother's Victorian

house and taught violin and other stringed instruments in her home. My mother, Norma (Nancy) Sain McGraw took violin lessons from her when she was young and so did I.

My family lived in Texarkana from 1956 to 1961, and this is the time period I knew her. She was very flamboyant. Her signature color was red. She dressed in red and her car was red. She had long black hair and always wore it up in a bun.

Cora was married to "Ernie Pie." (Ernest R. Thomas 1899-1974). I am not sure when they married but it was late in their lives. She was older than him and lied about her age to him. I keep my family tree on Ancestry.com and because of that a granddaughter of

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Ernie contacted me. Until then I never knew that he was married before and had another family.

I had a period in my life when I dreamed of being a concert violinist, but truth be told I just was not talented. I did not have the ear to even tune my violin. But I did learn to appreciate music and am thankful I had the opportunity to learn from Cora.

One day I googled Cora Cook and found her in a couple of places. One was at the Texarkana Genealogical Society Page where it shows her as a senior in the Arkansas High School 1913 roster. I also found mention that she played basketball. Elsewhere I read that girls' basketball was very popular at the time.

Then there was a mention of her on the Arkansas Historical Preservation Program page regarding the Texarkana Municipal Building. In the description of the history of the building, there is mention of it being used for concerts, including recitals of guitar students of Cora Cook. I believe I have seen a picture of my mother on this stage with a group of Cora's students in the early 1930s.

I once blogged about her on my genealogy blog and a reader contacted me. He restored violins and one of the violins he was restoring belonged to a student of Cora. He sent me pictures and recital programs from when his client was a student.

Family history is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. I guess that is what makes it so much fun.