

Esther Evans – 1921-2012

Esther Bernice Hughes was born in Pomfret, Conn., on Dec. 28, 1921. She came to California as a tot with her parents and they settled into Long Beach where her siblings, Roland and Mildred, were born.

Esther grew up with music in the house, cats in the yard and playmates on every corner. After high school, she entered UCLA to pursue a degree in music and education. Following graduation she applied and was accepted into the Julliard School of Music in New York, where she specialized in piano and voice.

Returning to California, she was contacted by a friend and schoolmate, Thelma Bernhardt, who tempted her with a job in Lake Tahoe teaching music and English at a new high school. In 1950, Esther packed up her belongings and moved to Bijou (South Lake Tahoe was not yet incorporated), where she was hired to begin her career at South Tahoe High School.

At that time, the school was housed in what is now the American Legion Hall on Highway 50. She rented a small duplex from Thelma, who often sent her handsome brother to perform maintenance during the winter months. The brother, Owen Evans, ended up proposing to Esther and they were married on April 12, 1952.



Owen and Esther Evans

They had also survived the infamous "Winter of 1951-52" when storms closed roads for weeks at a time and Tahoe residents relied on one another for food, firewood, and medical needs.

In pursuit of an education, Owen applied to Cal Berkeley and was accepted. Esther followed suit, and they spent several years living in Richmond while attending the college. With diplomas in hand, they returned to their beloved Tahoe where Owen was employed by the U.S. Forest Service (the Eldorado National Forest at that time) and Esther continued her teaching career.

In 1960, they adopted Leona and Esther decided to be a stay-at-home mom. Now that the family was slightly larger, Owen began the task of building a home for them on Tamarack Avenue. He convinced the Forest Service to allow him to dismantle one of the Baldwin family guest cottages on Fallen Leaf Lake, and log by log, drove them in his 1947 Studebaker pickup to the property on Tamarack. He reassembled the structure, adding insulation and a front porch, and it became their home. The cabin still remains.

Not one to remain inactive, however, Esther began teaching piano and voice in her home while participating in many social and service organizations on the South Shore. She was instrumental in getting the first chapter of the American Association of University Women started, as well as the Toastmasters Club. She was a leading member of the local Christian Women's Club and brought the Community Concert series to Tahoe. She was also involved in the Tahoe Arts Project, and served as a soprano in the Tahoe Choir. Her rendition of Gilbert and Sullivan's "They Call Me Buttercup" was priceless.

Esther served as a local television talk show host that focused on arts and culture in the area. The show was broadcast from the basement of what is now the county building on Highway 50 and Takela. She was also a soprano in the Lake

Tahoe Community Presbyterian Church's choir for many years, after which she took on the role of organist/pianist.

Years later she was hired by Hope Lutheran Church to fill the same position and came to enjoy her new Christian family.

Most amazing about her social skills, however, was Esther's ability to make a 742-square-foot log cabin seem like a mansion when she entertained.



Esther Hughes, circa 1940

When Leona was old enough, Esther returned to teaching as a substitute in the intermediate and high schools. Admittedly, her biggest challenge as a teacher was having her own daughter in the classroom.

Esther also got her real estate license and began selling homes. She fell in love with the first house she was asked to sell, which was on Mount Olympia Circle. They bought the house and expanded into almost 4,000 square feet.

In 1993, Esther was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Although typically a disease that causes unpredictable and even violent behavior, Esther remained her sweet, compassionate self. Once

when the family was shopping and ran into an old friend, Esther exclaimed, "I have Alzheimer's, but don't worry. It's not contagious."

The family continued to care for her until she became a resident of Barton Hospital's Skilled Nursing Facility in February 2006. In the hands of their loving, generous and caring staff, Esther thrived. The staff became family and the facility became home. Although Esther lost her Mount Olympia home to the Angora Fire, her spirit lives on in the form of a community garden.

Esther passed peacefully with Leona and her Skilled Nursing family by her side on Nov. 15, 2012. She goes to join her adoring "OE" as well as her siblings.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that you perform a random act of kindness and help someone or a critter in need. The family will be hosting a remembrance day on Dec. 2 from 2 to 5pm at their home – 1897 Toppewetah St. in Meyers. Everyone is welcome. A celebratory service will also be at the Skilled Nursing Facility on Dec. 4 at 2pm (2170 South Ave., South Lake Tahoe).