



ABOVE: Lamb's grocery opened in 1932 at Northwest 21st Avenue and Johnson Street. In 1957, Forrest and Neva Lamb moved the store to Garden Home near their home, where it still stands, although with many changes over the years.

RIGHT: Neva Anderson was teaching school when she married Forrest Lamb in 1938.



Grocer's life ripe

For Neva Lamb, longtime operator of Lamb's Thriftway, the business fed her soul

By AMY MARTINEZ STARKE
THE OREGONIAN

Neva Lamb was born into the grocery trade, living with her Swedish-born parents above Anderson's Confectionary, a little store in then-thriving Linton that provided food and sandwiches, liquor and chocolate sodas to the shipyard workers.

Neva ("Nee-va") Anderson didn't work in that store much, though: She always had her nose in a book. She took the three-year teacher course and graduated ear-

ly from Oregon Normal School in Monmouth, when tuition was \$6 a semester. On one of her early teaching assignments, Neva rowed out to a school on Government Island on Mondays, taught all week, then rowed back on Fridays.

Neva's beloved older brother, Oscar, put her up to a lot of adventures: swimming in the Willamette River, climbing Mount Hood, taking a steamship trip, flying in an open cockpit plane on Swan Island with legendary aviator Tex Rankin, and playing golf.

In 1935, she and a fellow teacher took a 7,500-mile summer car trip through 25 states and watched Lou Gehrig play at Yankee Stadium. But during that trip, Neva got the telegram that her brother had been killed in a car accident. Some of her adventurousness left her after that.

She met grocer Forrest Lamb, whose brother was dating her sister, and married him at age 30. Forrest then had a store, Lamb's, at Northwest 21st Avenue and Johnson Street. In 1957, he moved the store, Lamb's Thriftway, to the sticks — the Garden Home area of Southwest Portland. With her husband and sons, Neva operated Lamb's Thriftway for the rest of her life. She lived and breathed the grocery trade, and it was her stage for everything she loved.

She never missed a trade show, toured grocery stores for fun on travels, became best buddies with vendors, and was at the office doing the books, paying bills, and checking invoices every day, although she refused to learn a computer or use a calculator.

She and son Gary shared an office at the market. He picked her up and took her to lunch, and they went to Trail Blazer games, which she would not miss. Neva always wore red to the games, and her tickets were in the ninth row, down in front, where she could be fussed over. Some of the Blazers peed her, and she would fume, "Why don't we get rid of that guy?"

But she continued to spoil her dog, cross-eyed, asthmatic, hard-of-hearing, ornery Jennie. She thoroughly scoured the newspaper and read Harlequin romances by the bag, one a

NEVA LAMB

Born: Feb. 8, 1908, Portland

Died: Jan. 11, 2005, Portland

Survivors: Sons, Colin and Robert; four grandchildren; one great-grandchild. Son, Gary, died in 1999.

Private service: Has been held

Remembrances: Oregon Humane Society

day.

After Gary died of a heart attack in 1999, Neva made it to the office less and less, until finally retiring at 92.

Even after that, she roamed the aisles, shopping and keeping an eye on things and checking on sales. She died Jan. 11, 2005, just a few weeks short of 97. Her age was a big secret until she turned 90, then she was proud of it.

While raising their three sons, Neva helped out while Forrest managed the store. The first few years were very tight, and Neva and her children had to deliver handbills and ate whatever couldn't be sold, until development caught up to them in Garden Home.

Forrest was the visionary and Neva controlled the checkbook, including where the money was going to be spent and on what vision. But Forrest became disabled from a fall in the 1970s, and Neva began working full time (seven days a week in the grocery trade). The store was the dream she and Forrest had built, and she continued on with that dream, before and after his death in 1986.

Every day, Neva donned a whiff of White Shoulders perfume and stockings, did her hair, made sure her jewelry matched. She got in about 9 a.m. when the books were ready, then finished writing the checks.

She welcomed employees on their breaks in her office, where a parakeet named Emperor talked up a storm ("Emperor loves you!") and left birdseed all over.

She made Christmas decorations for the store and cranked out ideas, like getting the police to hand out stuffed lambs to children instead of teddy bears.

But the Big Event of her day was a long lunch break at Shari's or Village Inn or Newport Bay or Stockpot — which gave her so much food, she'd take some home for Jennie.

Then she'd go back to her invoices. Occasionally, employees would hear her blurt out: "These guys can't add!"

She didn't trust those electronic calculators. She nimbly operated an 1940s-era hand-crank adding machine, 10 keys across, 10 keys down. It worked just fine for her, and it gave the right numbers.

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Neva Anderson hated her given name, Genevieve. She changed her career from teacher to grocer and mother of three sons. She was an active member of grocer associations.