



JOHN E. COCHRAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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Omie Rachel Cochran McCarthy

Writing this biography was a cooperative project. Paul McCarthy provided information from his mother's teen-age diary, her early years of teaching in the Pacific Northwest, and his memories of life in Alaska. Walter McCarthy shared his early experiences in Alaska as part of the family. Marion Shinn blended their memories and other data into the following document.

Omie Rachel Cochran was born February 9, 1892 at Glenwood, near Elberton in what is now Whitman County Washington. She was the fourth daughter born to John and Emma Cochran within a span of 6 1/2 years. Her arrival was noted in John Cochran's diary, but was not heralded with a lot of excitement. The family was living on land owned by her Grandpa Pickard. John Cochran had plenty of horses and most of the family income came from plowing sod for other farmers after his own crop was planted in the spring. Omie was a sickly child and the Doctor said she probably would not grow to adulthood. As a young child she was shy and timid, but after a few years became very outgoing to friends and relatives. She grew rapidly and soon appeared much older than her sister Mary; they spent most of their school years in the same grade. After the arrival of sisters Inez and Zenna the foursome was sometimes called "the little girls" by their parents and older sisters. Omie's influence as a leader of that group extended well into adulthood.



The family made the journey from Colfax, Washington to Idaho before Omie started school. School terms were short in most of the districts. Omie started in Cottonwood, but the family soon moved to Whitebird. In April 1903 Omie's sister Edna became the teacher of the new school on the Canfield place on Doumecq.

Life on a homestead was not easy. Money was scarce for the Cochrans and for all of their neighbors. Barter was a way of life and John Cochran was a good horse trader. The Cochran children enjoyed a close family relationship, and the home was a center of community activity. The meal tables were generally filled with friends as well as family.

In 1907 Edna, age 22, was hired to teach in the grade school in Whitebird. Since the grade school on Doumecq operated only a few months a year, Mary, Omie, Inez and Zenna joined her during the winter months and the girls batched. The girls were ages 17, 15, 13, and 11. During the winter Mary became very ill with diphtheria and returned to Doumecq, but Omie graduated from the 8th grade.

In 1908, the fall after graduating from grade school in Whitebird, Omie started to school at Lewiston State Normal School. In Omie's words, "The first four years I worked for my board and room; and I earned it!" Sisters Edna and Ethel, who were already teaching, assisted in her education by sending a little spending money. The philosophy of the family was to provide help to the younger siblings--an attitude that is still with us in the JEC Education fund. Omie missed the close family ties with her large and active family. Lewiston was 140 miles away from Doumecq and the trip took most of two days. Christmas and summer were the only vacations long enough to allow the girls to go home. The biennial visits home were made by train, stage coach, lumber wagon and/or pack horse.

During her years at Lewiston Normal School Omie kept a diary and many of the entries reflected her loneliness and her concern about personal self-worth. Some of the entries follow:

"Things have gone pretty rough all day. I have a 'don't care' feeling on me."

"At the advanced age of 19 I now consider myself. I am not much wiser, very little better humored, no better looking than I was one year, two years, or even three years ago. Mama sent me half a dollar, Edna a Jabeen, Mary, Inez, and Zenna a clothes brush, Mrs. Barnett a fountain pen. I was delighted." "Life is something of a habit. Some have bad habits, some good."

The fifth year Omie stayed with Aunt Texie and Uncle Pleas Kittrell. Texie was John Cochran's sister and the two had come west from Tennessee together in 1880. Omie's life with the Kittrell family was a little happier. The Kittrell farm was near the little prairie town of Ilo which is now part of Craigmont, but Pleas was serving as County Commissioner of Nez Perce County at the time.



Omie created strong bonds with her friends. When Claribel Ingle, one of her school friends from Kendrick, had what was probably a nervous breakdown Omie came to her rescue. She wrote and asked if Claribel could spend the summer and fall on Doumecq with the family. As far as mother Emma was concerned another plate on the table was hardly noticeable. Claribel joined in with the other girls with eagerness. Thirty years later she wrote for Pioneer Days "We did everything we could on horseback. We called on the neighbors; we herded sheep; we rounded up cattle; we hunted grouse and quail; we went fishing over steep and narrow trails; we swam our horses across creeks; picnicked on Camp Howard; took parties down the trail to the girls' homesteads and, of course, we invited all who were at the Cochran home to go along."

The first three years at Lewiston Omie was enrolled in the academy section of the school. In 1908 education above the grade school level was available only in the larger communities. In 1913, after completing two years in the professional part of the Normal School, Omie graduated with a two-year teacher training certificate with a major in Home Economics.

On February 8, 1913, four days after Omie reached her 21st birthday, she went to the Land Office and filed homestead rights on 160 acres of land that extended into Rice Creek. Her land claim bordered her sister Mary's homestead on the south and west. Cochran family lands extended from Rice Creek, up Center Canyon, to the big house on Doumecq. One suspects that her father had instructed Omie to file and had provided the description of the land to be selected. Many stories have been written or told about the experiences of Mary and Omie "proving up on the land." The homesteader had to build a house (or cabin) on the land and live on it over a period of 5 years. Their weekend excursions to the cabins were much like overnight picnics.

After graduating from Lewiston Normal Omie accepted a teaching job in Finley, Washington. Jobs were scarce, but Billy Cochran, Omie's uncle, lived in the district and that provided her contact to the school board. For a few years she continued to teach in Washington and Idaho. In 1918 and 1919 she taught at the Canfield School. John and Emma Cochran had moved from Doumecq to the Horse Heaven Hills. Omie lived with Edna and Clark McCoy in the "big house" most of the time, but was a frequent boarder with Ethel and Ray Shinn. Helping with the six nieces and nephews was part of living with the family. She walked baby Maurice when he had the colic, and Edith started to school at 5 so she could have Aunt Omie as a teacher. After getting some teaching experience she returned to the Lewiston Normal and obtained her "Life Certificate." In those slow changing times it was generally believed that holders of the certificate had all the training necessary to teach for the rest of their life. After teaching on Doumecq, Omie accepted a teaching position in Montana.

When Omie returned home from teaching in Montana, she received an offer to teach in Haines, Alaska, a small town near Fort Seward. Zenna had just finished a very unsatisfactory teaching experience and agreed to join Omie in Haines. On the way to Alaska on the boat they met Luella, one of Omie's former students, and her husband Delmar. They had been

hired to teach in the Haines school system, too. The four of them, Omie, Zenna, Luella, and Delmar, rented a store front with living quarters in the back. Zenna agreed to operate a candy and bake shop to help defer expenses. With much hilarity (according to Zenna) they named the new enterprise the LUDELZENO SWEET SHOP, the first letters of their first names.

Part of Zenna's article in the 1983 *Cochran Chronicles* follows: "Omie managed to pay the bills. We played endless bridge and exchanged dinners during the long winters. In the summer we hiked through fantastically beautiful forests and along the beach. Once someone shot a grouse, which we cooked over a campfire." Luella became ill the spring of the second year and Zenna taught briefly and earned enough money to pay for her ticket home.

Omie decided to teach in California and made plans to attend summer school in Berkeley. She and Zenna contacted Claribel Ingle, their old school friend and asked her to join them. Again, from Zenna's *Chronicle* article: "We found an apartment, picked out an ideal program for Omie, and prepared to enjoy California where none of us had been before. When Omie and Claribel went sightseeing I went to her classes. When she and I went, Claribel attended class. Omie did pass but not with distinction." After being offered a job in Woodland, Omie found she could not teach in California without a course in the State Constitution. She needed a teaching job and an offer came from Romano, Nevada; Omie accepted it.

Sister Mary and Inez were working in the Methodist hospital in Nome. They sent a telegram saying there was an unexpected vacancy in the school in Nome and Omie could have it if she wanted. Without hesitation, Omie accepted the job and Zenna fulfilled her teaching obligation in Romano, Nevada.

After arriving in Nome, Omie's letters to her siblings were exciting reports on her activities. She sent pictures of driving a dog team belonging to a local bachelor. The team's claim to fame was that it was supposed to be the last relay leg to haul diphtheria serum to Nome. They were bypassed and left standing at the post. Little Diomed Island was unknown to the family until her report of going there from Nome on the ice. Her story about walrus hunting on a coastal boat was printed in the 1986 *Cochran Chronicles*.

Inez and Mary left the hospital in Nome and returned to take care of their mother and the McCoy children in Hover. Omie was the only Cochran sibling left in Alaska. In the fall of 1924 Zenna, who was teaching in California, received a letter from Omie telling that she and Bert had quarrelled. She hoped never to see him again! The week after Christmas a telegram was delivered to the Cochran home in Hover where many family members were celebrating. Omie and Bert McCarthy had married on Christmas eve, 1924, and she was deliriously happy.

Omie filed as a candidate for the Alaska Territorial Legislature during the fall of 1926 as an Independent. Before the election she resigned from the race and announced that her mother

was ill and she was leaving for a visit to "the States." With Bert's blessing she caught the last boat from Nome to Seattle. Their first son, Paul, was born March 14, 1927 in Kennewick.

For a couple of months Paul was shuttled to as many relatives homes as possible to show him off. In June she was escorted by many relatives to Seattle where she boarded the first (June) boat to Nome. The Captain carried the baby on board and Omie followed closely. The porters loaded the baggage and the boat pulled away from the dock. Several hours and many miles later it was discovered that the suitcase carrying the baby's clothes had been left on the dock in Seattle. People aboard the boat came to her rescue. Someone, probably the Captain, produced a bolt of yardage to make diapers and some passengers gave of their clothing to make necessary baby things. Mother and son arrived safely at Nome about three weeks later. The much needed luggage arrived on the July boat.

On June 21, 1930 a second son was born. This time Omie stayed in Nome and Walter was born in the local hospital.

Economic times were very difficult during the early 1930's everywhere in the nation and Alaska was no exception. When Omie wrote her article for her father's book *Time Rolls On* she ended it with the statement "Due to unsuccessful mining ventures, sickness, accidents, operations, debts, financial troubles, lack of funds, poverty, and being broke I went back to teaching." There were very few money making opportunities in Alaska; Bert could not make enough money as a miner, plumber, carpenter, and handyman to support the family.

Alaska had two different school systems. The Alaska Native Service (ANS) was operated by the Federal Government and only natives could attend. The teachers were under Civil Service and most were hired from the "outside." The Alaska Territorial Service schools were open to all--natives, breeds, and whites. Nome had both a Federal (ANS) and Territorial School (ATS). Omie had a two year "Life Certificate" from Lewiston State Normal; this did not qualify her under the Federal Civil Service rules. She applied to the Territorial Service. Nome was the biggest city in that part of Alaska and there was strong competition for jobs.

In 1933 she landed a job in the territorial school in the little village of Golovin about 100 miles from Nome. She moved there with Paul, age 6, and Walter, age 3. Omie, the boys, and all their goods were flown from Nome to Golovin by a "Bush Pilot"--a practical means of fall and winter transportation for rural Alaska. Most of the "bush" planes flew three passengers and the pilot and had room for baggage or freight. Open spaces around most small villages were large enough for the skilled pilots to land. In summer some planes used pontoons and would land in smooth waterways; in the winter the planes were equipped with skis and landed on the ice in front of the town. "Bush Pilots" delivered the mail on a fairly regular basis and were the contact with the outside world.

At 41 years of age, Omie found herself with two small boys living in an isolated Eskimo outpost--a frightening experience! The school house was quite new. It was divided with one

half for the classroom and the other the teachers living quarters.

Golovin was a one-room school with grades 1 through 8, but the total enrollment was probably not more than 15. Paul was in the first grade. Walter was not old enough to officially be enrolled, but he remembers climbing up on his mother's lap while she was teaching.

A large family of Swedes, the Osts, lived in Golovin and several of their children were in school. A family of half-breeds, the Fagerstrom's, lived in Golovin and Walter remembers part of the family well. Floyd, who he now describes as a swaggering loutish teenager, bragged he could lift a 50 gallon drum of gasoline; however, he made a small bi-plane which was fascinating to young Walter. Sister Myrtle was the half-breed beauty with blond hair and blue eyes; she married one of the white hot-shot bush pilots and moved "outside."

Most of the Seward peninsula villages had racial classifications. The whites, the elite, included the storekeeper and the teacher. Other whites included itinerant Europeans who had married an Eskimo and were referred to as "Squaw Men." Most of the pure-bred native families retained their ancient culture.

The food in the small towns, like Golovin, would not be considered the best in today's society. The fresh fruits consisted of those that were stored after the arrival of the last boat-- usually in September. Long before spring arrived there was no fresh fruit. Paul and Walter were raised on canned milk and didn't know it came fresh for years. Most of the staples came out of cans. Flour was a main ingredient for cooking, but none of the Eskimos had ever seen grains grown. While Omie was teaching in Golovin sister Ethel sent a small bundle of unthrashed wheat as a teaching tool and bags of home-ground graham flour for the family to eat. The Eskimo children and the grade schoolers on Doumecq exchanged "pen pal" letters one winter. It was an interesting experience for both groups.

The meat was almost entirely reindeer and fish. In a letter sent to her sisters, Omie mentions buying a reindeer for the winter for \$4.00. It was hung in the back cache and stayed frozen all year. There were no refrigerators. To get meat for dinner Omie went to the cache and cut off a slab with a hack saw.

In the early years the Laplanders from Norway imported reindeer into Alaska and had large herds. After a time, the Government decided the animals should belong to the Eskimos, so the deer were turned over to them. The natives did not do a good job herding them, and gradually the reindeer turned wild and were no longer domesticated. There was a short lived industry of shipping reindeer to the States, but it was not profitable. In the outlying villages no one had ever eaten beef. The natives were very glad to sell the teacher a reindeer. One deer would last the family all winter.

Omie taught in Golovin during the winter and went back to Nome during the summer vacations. The little boat Meteor was sometimes available to haul them back to Nome. The

boat came from Seattle every summer; she was only 65 feet long and could lay off the villages from Kotzebue to the Yukon. Walter remembers getting violently sick on one trip back to Nome.

After three years in Golovin Omie changed schools; she got a job in St. Michael, which is about 60 miles from the mouth of the Yukon River. It was further from Nome than Golovin. Herb and Nell Johnson were the storekeepers at the Northern Trading Company. Bill Williams taught at the ANS; probably the school was in the nearby village of Stebbins. Omie played bridge with the Johnsons and Walt and Paul learned Morse Code and how to play many indoor games. In the winter the weather was bad and the only outdoor sport was running over thin ice to see who went through first. The boys called the thin ice early in the freezing stages "rubbery" ice.

The Trading Company owned a tug boat used to pull freight barges from the docks to the bigger steamships that could anchor in the deeper channel. Paul used to go to work for him from 5:00 a.m. until school started. Ivory was a common trading item in St. Michael. Natives sold their ivory to the trading post, but Walt remembers that Herb Johnson could carve more skillfully than the Eskimos bringing in their crafts to sell.

St. Michael was the graveyard for stern wheeler paddle boats. This was the major type of transportation up the Yukon river at the time of the gold rush and for some years afterward. When Omie, Paul, and Walt were there in 1936 at least 40 steam engine stern wheelers were beached and abandoned around the bay. Walter remembers going aboard the old hulks and removing brass knobs from the railings. The old boats were gradually being stripped, but at that time appeared to be waiting for the tide to rise.

St. Michael was originally settled by the Russians and the community church was Russian Orthodox. There were no squaw men or half breeds in St. Michael. Except for Paul and Walt all the students were pure blood eskimos. St. Michael, like most villages, had its own dialect and the older Eskimo's didn't speak English well, if at all.

While they were in St. Michael a young man was there from Seattle. During the winter he taught Paul and Walter how to downhill ski. The sport was just beginning to be popular in Washington State. He hand-made a bear claw binding and attached them to crude ski runners.

In the spring a government cutter with a Doctor and Dentist aboard usually visited St. Michael. They would examine patients; this was the only medical service. The nearest hospital was in Nome. In the winter bush planes could land on the ice in front of the village in response to a radio call from Herb Johnson.

After three years Omie moved to Teller, another one room school with all eight grades. Teller was a strange little town on a sand spit about 100 miles north of Nome. One of the stores was operated by a second generation family named Tweets; the first generation had come to Teller in the early 1900's. The Tweet's two girls and the McCarthys were the only white children in

school. Percy Blatchford, an Englishman, had eight or nine half-breed children from a couple of Eskimo wives. The rest of the school were full-blood Eskimo. Omie played bridge with the Tweets, and Percy Blatchford, a friendly, intelligent mink farmer, would visit most Fridays evenings and the adults would talk about things outside of Alaska.

Teller had two stores, a post office, a school, numerous little Eskimo houses, and an airplane landing strip. It was closer to Nome; probably only an hour in an old Stinson Reliant. One Christmas the boys flew to Nome to spend the holiday with their father, Bert. Omie stayed in Teller because it was too cold to leave the house unattended. Tug boats hauled freight barges to Teller; they were beached and unloaded by hand.

Behind the village was a large fresh water lagoon. It was the backwater from a small river. The lagoon was a fascinating place for small boys to play. There was a boat that could be used in warm weather, a place to ice skate in the winter, and icebergs to play on in the early spring. During the winter professional cutters used timber saws to cut ice blocks from the lagoon; some were stacked behind the teacherage for the winters water. In the house, a 55 gallon tank with a lid was kept filled with ice; as it melted drinking water was drawn off the bottom of the tank. In Teller the school and the teacherage were separate. Both houses had big coal stoves. At the teacherage coils around the stove were used to heat the hot water reservoir. The family bathed in round metal tubs from the melted ice water.

In 1939, after teaching in Teller one year, Omie brought her two boys out to the states to show them off while she was attending a school for teachers. Walter had his foot cut by a mower at Canfield and the boys spent the next year in Palo Alto with their Aunt Zenna while Walter was getting medical attention for his injury. Omie returned to Teller and taught there until 1946. The boys returned to Alaska in 1941. Paul was in High School and stayed with his father, Bert; Walter joined them in Nome in 1943.

Probably Omie's happiest years in the villages was at Teller. She had established a social life and enjoyed professional recognition not duplicated by most white women, even in Nome.

In 1947 Omie was offered a teaching job in Nome. She taught there until retirement in 1952. After retirement she spent many happy days substitute teaching in the Nome Schools. For most of 44 years she taught elementary students, mostly grades 1 through 8. A few years were spent working with grades 1 and 2.

Bert owned the house in Nome many years before he married Omie in 1924. It was a small, comfortable two bedroom place. There was a good storage space, or cache, behind the house; a poorer shed was behind that to store the heating oil. The ground under the house was perma-frost--a mixture of mud, sand, and ice. The houses in Nome were built on large beams; they were held up by pilings driven six or eight feet into the unstable ground. In the winter the house was stable, but at other times the pilings would rise or sink. When the doors would not close in the house, Bert would go underneath and jack up the beams until the floor

was level again. The house had skirts around it to cover the pilings. Moving a house to a new location was easy; a sled could be pushed underneath and the house could be pulled away.

Nome had a pressurized water system in the summer, but it was turned off during cold weather. In the winter a man with a big water tank on a truck or sled filled the inside tank from an outside pipe with a five gallon bucket. Another man, the only black in Nome, came weekly with a "honey bucket" to pick up the toilet can. He would take the can from a small outside door and dump the contents into his large tank. His cart was equipped with tires in the summer and a sled in winter. After emptying the McCarthy can he would drive his horse to the next house. The city had a power plant to provide electricity. Bert had an oil stove which was easier to handle than coal.

The gold rush in Alaska brought 20,000 miners to the beaches and hills around Nome about 1900. The city was an active center for a short time, but there was not enough gold to support the rush of men very long. Bert came to Nome in 1906, shortly after the gold rush. However, he never lost the gold fever and always felt that someday he would strike it rich. About the time the price of gold was increased by President Franklin Roosevelt several large dredges were brought in and they worked the stream beds around Nome. Many of the Eskimos worked for the dredge companies. Even after the price increase to \$38 an ounce, Bert always complained that the price of gold was too low.

In the late summer months Bert would get his old 1932 International pick-up operating and hook it on to his gold prospecting drill. He would load on his tent and necessary cooking utensils and drive toward the Dexter or Anvil Mountains over narrow rough roads. None of the roads out of Nome went more than 20 miles. He was sure a good gold field was out there just waiting for him to find it. He would drill down through the perma-frost and collect the dirt that came up in his drill. It would be carefully panned to check for gold. He prospected in many different places and found bits of gold, but never struck it rich. Omie was occasionally talked into joining the expedition to be the cook, but it was not one of her favorite experiences.

The population of Nome was less than 1500 most of the time Omie was there. All but two or three hundred of the residents of Nome were Eskimos or half-breeds. They worked at various jobs, had craft businesses, fished, sold reindeer, made ivory carvings, and lived off of Government handouts. Many fished for Tomcod for both enjoyment and food. During the summer the Eskimos from Little Diomedé would come to Nome in their large kayaks. They would sit on skins outside their wooden huts south of town and carve ivory. Men carved ivory and women made parkas, moccasins, and other skin clothing. Omie occasionally bought from them and sent the handicraft as gifts to relatives "outside."

Some of the old pictures of Nome show many fine buildings and a main street filled with stores. The town burned down twice and was destroyed by major storms a couple of times. In later years, the Corp of Engineers built a heavy sea wall to protect the city. When the heavy

construction came to Nome Bert got a supervisory job with the major contractor, Morrison-Knutson. Later he was hired by Lomen Brothers, the Standard Oil distributors and one of the major commercial companies in Nome.

Incoming steam ships docked a couple of miles off shore from Nome. Lomen also ran the barges that hauled the freight from the ships and Bert was Dock Foreman in the summer. The process of moving the freight to the dock was called "lightering." The river leading to Nome was hemmed in by a jetty built by the Corp of Engineers. The Corp dredged most of the summer to keep out the silt. The jetty was directly in front of Bert's house and there was a front room view of all the activity. The first boat came through the ice about June and the last one left in September. In 1941 the Army built a long first-class airport on an old tailing pile and that improved transportation in the winter. The airport was used to ferry planes to Russia during the war.

Nome had very long days during the summer, but they were not very warm. Both Omie and Bert loved to garden, but the ground stayed frozen so long it was difficult to raise anything. One year Bert bought lumber from an old abandoned horse barn and built several above-ground beds for a garden. The beds were about 3 feet wide, twenty feet long, and were filled with about 12 inches of dirt. The whole bed was elevated about six inches off the ground. All of the land under Nome was perma-frost and remained cold all summer. With the air all the way around the box, the soil warmed up quickly in the spring. The soil, even when thawed, was not very fertile. Sister Ethel mailed double lined gunny sacks filled with rich manure compost from Doumecq a couple of times to improve the soil in the raised beds. It was sent in early spring to catch the June boat. Parcel Post served rural America well and inexpensively at that time in our history. For years this garden grew the best vegetables in Nome. As time passed a greenhouse was built behind the garden to get the plants started sooner in the spring.

Omie loved to have groups of ladies over to her house to sew, play cards, or just visit. She also loved to pick and eat the wild berries that grew on the tundra. In the summer, after church, she would talk someone to go with her. The group would walk inland from Nome and gather the abundant Arctic berries for jam.

Omie made excellent homemade root beer and was proud to serve it with ice cream to her lady friends. She was a strict teetotaler, but Bert liked regular bottled beer. One day Omie served a group of ladies her favorite root beer floats, and they seemed to enjoy the treat. The next day Bert complained that someone had taken his beer. She was aghast to find she had served her guests real beer and ice cream. None of them had said a word about her error.

Attending church and Sunday School was a way of life for Omie. As a teen-ager at Lewiston Normal School she became involved with religious activities and continued her strong connection with the church throughout her entire life. She was given many awards for her

faithful work with the nursery class of the Nome Methodist Sunday School. Without a doubt, she was the best Sunday School teacher that ever served the area around Nome.

Her influence on youngsters is shown by a paragraph in a letter from a Alaskan born 40 year old, Caroline "Cussy" Readron, who presently lives in Nome. She wrote the following to Walt in 1991.

"One of my fondest childhood memories was attending a little Bible School during the summer months at your mom's home. We would all lay on the floor for rest period and were promised if we had learned our verses like we were supposed to that when we opened our eyes her blue bells (morning glories) she had coming up the wall and over her bay window would open up for us. We must have been a studious lot, because it never failed--the blossoms were always open when we opened our eyes. Now that I think about it, I believe it must have been the sun traveling around out of the east coming westerly. The warmth in the living room prompted the opening of blossoms each day. I still have a fascination for the morning glories, but have never seen any except in your mom's bay window. She was so kind to us."

After retirement in 1950 she and Bert visited relatives in "the States" many times. Whenever she visited her siblings, cousins, or children it was a gala time for all. Betty Ann McCarthy met Omie only once--just six weeks before she died. Omie and Bert went to Palo Alto to see Walt, Betty Ann, and David, 2, and Kiki who was just a baby. BAM remembers they had a lovely weekend after every one got over their initial nervousness. One incident endeared Omie to her forever. Walt asked Omie to tell Betty Ann how she made her special stew. Omie looked at Walt and told him to "cut that out for she had no special way to make stew and hers was nothing to write home about anyway."

Sister Zenna would do anything for Omie and said "I was putty in her hands." When asked why she didn't leave Nome Omie always said "Nome is my home, my friends are here." However, she had friends and admirers where ever she went.

Omie's influence changed the lives of many young people. Walt and Bert went back to Nome about 1980. Walt was being installed in the Pioneers of Alaska, Igloo No. 1. On the flight up, the stewardess on the B737 asked if they were related to Mrs. McCarthy. After finding their relationship the Eskimo girl said "Mrs. McCarthy taught me in the third grade when I was a little girl in Teller."

Even though she had a great retinue

of friends and admirers she apparently never got over the feeling of her lack of attractiveness as expressed in her early diary. Pictures exchanged after visits with the family had her face cut out. Few pictures of Omie are available in the family archives.

In December 1960 Omie was flown from Nome to Seattle for emergency medical treatment. She died on January 3, 1961 from a brain tumor and is buried in Kennewick in the same cemetery as her mother.

Alice Osborne, a Nome newspaper writer, included this tribute in Omie's obituary: "Her small home in Nome, where she and her husband Bert had reared their family, was constantly sought out, and up to the last week of her life the cozy living room welcomed many visitors. It was an unusual day when no one stopped by for a cup of tea, for, as a friend of Omie's has said, she lived in "The House by the Side of the Road and was truly a friend to man." But Omie did not wait at home for folks to come to her; her kindly wit and lively intelligence made her at home alike in Eskimo cottage or the finest home, and a brown paper bag of lettuce from her little garden or a loaf of her warm home-baked bread found itself resting as easily on a smart chromium table as a humble oil cloth."

After Omie died Bert sold the house where they had lived for nearly 40 years and moved near his family in the States. He died in 1980 at the age of 95.

Omie Rachel Cochran Mc Carthy, February 9, 1882 - January 3, 1961
Reprinted from *Cochran Chronicles*, Volume 18, Number 1, October 1993

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