

WHY MARY, NOT NELLIE?

Mary Geneva Kidd

How happy I am that I have reached the age of so called majority, plus a few years so that I am able to pen some of the outstanding remembrances of my life. My parents migrated here from Europe and like all of the rest of the immigrants they believed that gold could be found in America. I remember Mama telling me that when I was born Papa was so happy he sat and rocked me and spoke to me in Italian for I was his first American born daughter. He said that since it was August 15th that I brought my name with me. "Mary" it was, Mary Geneva but sometime later when I wished to obtain a birth certificate I discovered that the records as recorded in the Tuolumne County Courthouse of Sonora, California contained the name of "Baby Caruso," born August 15, 1917 to Severio and Vincenza Caruso of Standard, California.

It took me six months to prove that I was Mary Geneva, also known as, "Baby Caruso." It seems that my mother wanted to name me "Nellie" and so a royal battle ensued between my parents that was not settled until the day I finally obtained my birth certificate with the name of "Mary Geneva Caruso" both parents had passed away.

Since I was born on August 15th my parents expected me to live up to the name of "Mary." Mary did not have to be told to do this or that because Mary was supposed to know right from wrong. I can remember walking to Standard to the little Catholic Church and proudly wearing my lavender dress and white straw hat. My Father walked first, then the three of us followed him in a straight line, Angie, Ernest and myself.

I sang in the choir and how I loved the Christmas Carols: "Noel," "Away in the Manger," "It came upon a Midnight Clear." They still remain for me. When the Catholic Church burned down in Standard we had to drive to Sonora to the St. Patrick's Church, located at the rear of the County Courthouse. This we could not do every Sunday because gasoline was too expensive it cost 17 cents a gallon.

Old Man Caruso thought he ruled his family or so he was led to believe because he made a lot of noise. "Mary! Get me a glass, Angie! Get the wine bottle and bring it to me out here in the backyard. "White Goat," (Mother's pet name "Capri Bianchi") when is lunch going to be ready? Can't you tell that I'm ready to eat? Do we have to starve around here for the love of mercy? So it went, day in and day out.

There were times when I would run outside and just look into space wondering if I was ever going to get away from this horrible place. It was many years later that I realized who the dominant one really was in our family. The little "White Goat" ruled the family and it was not by using her mouth, but with her head. It was her silence that put things in perspective.

How I loved to play house with my little sister and brother. We had little blue dishes and a little green trunk went with us wherever we decided to play. The little brother was coerced into playing dolls with us. We always played "Cowboy" with him if he played dolls with us.

My greatest joy was rocking my doll to sleep. One day I dropped the doll and its paper mache head cracked and broke off. I can remember crying so much that I became ill. It took many years to forget this incident. I believe that is why I was such a loving mother and rocked my son. The love that I had for that doll is shown in the love for my child. I guess I felt that my doll died when I dropped her and broke her head. I carried a lot of guilt for a good many years because the doll was never replaced or I have no recollection of having played with any other doll after that. Things come only once.