

Keepin' On:
The Life and Times
of
Anna Eliza Hooks Guess

By
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Preface

"You've just got to keep on keepin' on," perhaps not the most profound saying that one can construe from the English language, but, nonetheless, something to think about. As a motto for life, I would never doubt its positive feeling and knowing the person who developed the phrase, "keepin' on" has been both a necessity and a privilege. I want to introduce to you my friend, Mrs. Anna Eliza Hooks Guess, as I had the pleasure of getting to know her during an outreach project at the University of Southern California during the Spring term of 1984.

My apprehension about meeting Mrs. Guess was not the ordinary kind. I did not worry about what I would ask her or tell her. I did not imagine that she would be quiet and demure or simply afraid to talk to me. For some reason, I knew that this would be a very positive experience.

My first trip to Independence Square, a senior citizens' apartment complex located on the corner of Adams and St. Andrews Streets in downtown Los Angeles, was quite a feat. I borrowed my apartmentmate's car and drove in the general direction of the residential complex. I was nervous about driving a borrowed car, meeting Mrs. Guess, and the whole idea of writing a biography, not to mention the fact that I was running terribly late. I had purchased a yellow rose, for friendship's sake, to give to Mrs. Guess, and as I left for my appointment at the time when I should have been arriving at my destination, I was thankful that I had

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a gift with which to redeem myself.

I had spoken to Mrs. Guess once on the phone before our initial meeting. "I'm ninety-five years old," she exclaimed pleasantly in a voice that I swear did not sound a day over sixty. "There's something wrong with the phone, I can't hear you," was my only clue that perhaps the physical strains of the aging process may actually be present in this youthful sounding individual. She had given me directions to her apartment which was really all that our conversation had entailed. So, our first rendezvous was an extremely important one.

The first time that I passed the building I did not know it, and as a result I encircled the block several times before I finally realized that I had reached my proper destination. The guard out in front informed me that Mrs. Guess had been waiting for me downstairs, and seemed rather anxious about my impending arrival.

My first glimpse of Mrs. Guess, as directed by the guard, was through the glass doors which I believe lead to a garden and then a parking lot for the tenants of her residence. She is a short woman with a rounded figure which makes her look very happy and jolly. She wears brown tortoise shell framed glasses which match her hair and eyes. She moves not swiftly but deftly, and has as much energy as any one of my collegiate friends, if not more so. Her eyes twinkle everytime she recalls a story or sees someone familiar, and she loves to tease. I introduced myself, gave her the rose, and we started talking immediately. I felt as if she had been waiting all day just to see me. That really made my day. "Anything you want to know, I'll tell you,"

she said. "If I can do anything to help other people out, like you to get a good grade in your class, well. I'll be happy to do it." We talked and talked about everything that day and I left feeling just a tad overwhelmed at the task that I had undertaken. Mrs. Guess' last words to me that day were, "I always wanted somebody to write my 'history,' then I'll have something about me to share with everyone."

And so begins the story of Anna Guess.

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Some people think that Creativity belongs to Writers, Artists or Musicians. This is not so. We can all display creativity either for or against us. Whenever we are in a negative mood or accept negative ideas, we create experiences that are not likeable. When we are doing something that we like to do, we can always include the possibility of doing it our way- creating.

One can never be completely happy unless he uses his Godgiven abilities. At this point, to find success and happiness, one should relate and not compete. You are to become a creator and not a competitor. The creative process is not completed unless we have creative power, we should always be creating. A conscious mind states the desire. Step aside and let the subconscious reservoir of information step in.

Everyone can be creative by giving yourself the opportunity to receive ideas. The better use a person makes of ideas, the more ideas he will get. The creative power is not completed. First, we realize that we have this power and know that we then should be creating, then center the mind and attention on the desire, step by step, let the subconscious mind work.

Last but not least, relax, be still in mind and body, then let God.

From the mind and heart of
Mrs. Anna Hooks Guess

In a modern context, Mrs. Guess' philosophy can be summed up in her favorite expression, "You just gotta keep on keepin' on." The words themselves have a powerful meaning. There is a much deeper context, however, only present when you hear this simple sentence from Mrs. Guess herself. She will look at you straight in the eye, her own brown eyes wide and intense, peering understandingly at you with her eyebrows slightly raised. The childlike grin which accompanies this look and encompasses

her face is acutely contagious. You cannot help but join her in her smile. "Ain't that right?" is the question and the answer to the statement. 5

A positive thinker is perhaps a grave understatement when describing Mrs. Guess. She claims that by only concentrating on the positive and eliminating the negative, life is fuller, less burdensome and much more happy and rewarding. She must be doing something right, for at the age of ninety-five she is a healthy, financially and physically self-sufficient woman of the eighties, a feat which has not been accomplished without hardship and yes, a great deal of positive thinking.

Tracing Mrs. Guess' roots brings inquiries into the days of slavery in the rural, deep South. Her grandmother on her mother's side was a Chockshow Indian while her mother's father was a white slave owner. "You know about slavery," Mrs. Guess confides, "the white man do whatever he want to do."

Anna's mother was born into slavery on a plantation in Bonham, Alabama. The family remained on the plantation even after being freed. Anna recalls her mother telling of the family's first meal after the surrender. "We had chicken for breakfast. We cooked it right up. The Mistress on the plantation asked what we'd had to eat and we told her chicken. 'Where did you get the chicken?' she asked angrily. We learned real quick not to tell where we got our more extravagant meals."

Entering the world as the seventh child, the second of three daughters, in a line of ten children, Anna was born to Elija and Homieh Hooks on December 20, 1838. Her memories begin primarily at age three and I challenge nearly anyone to recall events which occurred over ninety-two years ago! Mrs. Guess has

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many stories to tell about her early childhood, but one of her favorites involves a cat crossing her path. No, it is not a superstitious fantasy, but a humorous anecdote told complete with the contagious smile and a mischievous aura which those who know her can certainly recognize. A kind of squint of the eyes and a lifting of the shoulders coupled with grandiose arm movements which heighten your interest, spark your imagination, and make you imagine that you are right along side of her in every adventure.

"Back then, in the 1890's, water did not flow underground through metal pipes to a faucet. No, you had to walk to the spring to get your water. My sister and I, one day we were going to the spring and a cat crossed the road in front of me. I picked up a rock, I was four years old, and threw it at that cat. I hit the cat and it went hobbling off to the side of the road. I was so worried that I had killed that cat. I didn't dare tell my mama, 'cause she might whip me if she found out I'd killed that cat."

At this point Mrs. Guess' demeanor becomes very matter-of-fact as she stops and exclaims, "And you know, it wasn't 'till I got to California (1924) that I learned that a cat has got nine lives. Here I was worried all that time about that silly cat." She chuckles to herself. "That silly cat."

Another of her favorite stories involves Anna playing a mischievous trick on her younger sister. Anna was quite a creative practical joker and enjoyed the sport immensely. Unfortunately, when her mother discovered a scheme that Anna had devised, she often received a whipping. This involved going out around

the house and farm to find an appropriate switch. If Anna did not return with a "good switch" in her mother's eyes, she received a more severe whipping than she might have suffered under normal circumstances. Anna remembers catching on to that idea very quickly. 7

One day Anna asked her sister Daisy if she wanted to lay an egg. Her sister replied that she thought that would be great fun, and asked what she had to do. Anna took a corn cob and told her to break it, eat the pith out and go to the chicken house and sit on a nest. Her sister dutifully followed Anna's wise instructions. As she was sitting on the nest she exclaimed, "It isn't working." Anna chortled and replied, "Well, cackle, fool!!" With this line Anna elicits peals of laughter which seem to say, "Boy oh boy, I got her that time."

The Hooks moved from Alabama to Indian territory in what is present day Oklahoma when Anna was four, the year 1891. Their mode of transportation was a covered wagon. Anna recalls little of the trip, an imaginably long venture for a toddler. The family homesteaded by building an ordinary midwestern farmhouse, high ceilings, spacious entry ways, large upstairs bedrooms, and a smokehouse where meat was kept, on the outskirts of the "colored town" of Tatum.

During this era, an individual could farm any stretch of land he wished, thereby establishing his right of ownership to the property. In addition, if a person saw an unbranded cow or horse roaming the plains, he simply caught it and put his brand on it. This made him its owner. The only people to contend with were the Indians native to this territory. The Indians, however,

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wanted primarily to be unassociated with the state people, especially when intermarriage was an issue. Their reason for this was sound. If a stater married an Indian, all the land that the Indian owned became the property of the stater. Although the Indians were more tolerant of the western movement of Negroes than that of white men, largely due to the difference in treatment that they received, the Indians still valued their autonomy.

The Hooks farmed cotton, sugar cane and corn, as well as keeping horses and cows. Anna remembers her farming career vividly. She will stoop over pretending to have a large, deep bag slung over her shoulder. "You bent over like this (stooping further) pulled off those cotton balls and stuffed them in the bag. Over and over again, all day long."

Making molasses from sugar cane is another event sharp in Anna's mind. In this chore, Anna played father's helper. First, the tall stalks of cane had to be cut. They were then stripped and the juice from the stalks was boiled. As a pot of juice boiled, different layers rose to the top of the pan in a sort of modified fractional distillation. Each layer was poured off into another vessel. The end product of this task was the thickest sweetest part, the molasses.

Corn was perhaps the most versatile crop that the Hooks farmed. It served to feed the livestock and corn meal was made from the shelled kernels. There was, however, one more little publicized use for the corn cob. In the 1890's paper was extremely hard to come by, particularly in the form of tissue or toilet paper. Since the bathrooms were actually outhouses, corncobs were used for wiping after one went to the bathroom.

One of Anna's favorite chores was to break broncos. She loved to be the first one to saddle up a young, energetic, wild horse to attempt to tame it. Anna laughs as she recalls, "My mama used to say, 'Anna, you can't do that. You're crazy.'"

When it came to milking cows, Anna would allow a calf to suck and bring the milk down. While a brother or sister milked the cow, Anna would ride the calf. It would wail and moan because it wanted milk and was hungry. Many was the time that Anna nearly fell off her crying, young charge.

Spring brought the time for butchering the livestock. Mr. Hooks would take a portion of the meat and cotton into town and barter for one hundred pounds of sugar and flour, as well as other staples to provision the family for an entire year. During that time, Anna and her mother and sisters canned fruit for the year and made jelly.

Although Anna performed every task imaginable on the farm, with the small exception of running the plough, her primary duties were in the kitchen. By the age of eight, she did the cooking, cleaning, ironing, and housework for a family of twelve. All of her brothers and sisters worked in the fields and barn leaving her to the housework. If Anna's mother returned from the fields and was dissatisfied with Anna's work, she would whip her. Anna admits that like most eight year olds there were times that she "played hooky" from her chores by allowing her free spirit to get the best of her. Unfortunately, her mother was relentless in the arena of discipline.

Holidays were celebrated by the Hooks as a family. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years donned a feast of turkey and

fixings which are appropriate for a festive treat. For birthdays, the honored member received cake and homemade ice cream. Even Anna, whose birthday falls only five days before Christmas received a true birthday celebration.

Anna claims to have started school at the age of three in Alabama. The journey to school entailed a three to four mile one-way trek which was a long haul for short legs. Travelling with brothers and sisters made the walk seem shorter as they laughed and played together. When the family moved to Oklahoma, the schools were very poor because they were not organized until Oklahoma became a state in 1907. Anna continued to love school despite the lack of quality education. She remembers being well-liked and having good relationships with her peers.

In the spring following her twelfth birthday, Anna was working in the field when she discovered a spot of blood on her pants. She had no idea what this meant and was scared to tell anyone about it. She ran to the creek and washed out her panties. After several days, Anna finally confided in her elder sister who explained the concept of menstruation to Anna. Needless to say, Anna was quite relieved to learn that she was a normal, healthy young woman. "Back then," Anna recalls, "people never talked about sex. I can remember hearing strange sounds coming from my parents bedroom and wondering what father was doing to mama. She never acted any differently the next day so I assumed that it was nothing."

In terms of Anna having romantic relationships as a youngster, there was little if any opportunity for social relations. The primary reason was simply a lack of time after home

and school chores. The second reason was Anna's mother. The general way for a boy to show his affection for a girl was to ride up beside her on his horse during her homeward journey from Church following Sunday services. The two become acquainted while they ride. In Anna's case, boys knew better than to accompany her all the way home. They had to turn away before they were within sight of Anna's home for fear of an encounter with her mother. 11

By the time Anna was fourteen (1902), many of her brothers and sisters had established families of their own. One brother had even married an Indian. Anna decided that to simply get married was not her cup of tea--a progressive thought for a young teen of this era. She decided to go away from home to attend school in another Oklahoma town called Boley. Boley was the home of Creek Seminole College, a boarding school for grades one through twelve. Anna attended school there until she completed twelfth grade. At this time, Anna transferred her studies to Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma.

Anna's favorite subject was mathematics, which explains her fondness for an accounting class that she took at Langston. Anna recalls a homework problem in which her balance sheet was one cent off. She stayed up late into the night, literally burning the midnight oil as they used oil lamps at this time, until she had successfully located and corrected her error. Anna attended school at Langston during an ordinary September to June school year.

During the summers, however, Anna attended "Summer Normals," a six week short course which was designed to help individuals brush up on various subjects. Summer Normals was

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followed by intensive teaching examinations. After passing the exams, which included Agriculture, Arithmetic, American Literature, Civics, Composition, Domestic Science, Geography, Grammar, Oklahoma History, United States History, Music, Physiology and Hygiene, Psychology, Reading, Spelling, Theory and Practice, and Writing, Anna received a certificate which allowed her to teach up to a specified grade level. Teaching certificates were renewed every two years pending successful examination scores.

Anna recalls fondly some of her first teaching jobs. Her first job was in Tatum in the one room school where she had attended only a few years before. The school was located in the Church which still stands today. Anna still has a black and white tin-type photo of her first school and students.

For her work, Anna was compensated \$50.00 per month, which in the early 1900's was quite a large sum. Her board totalled \$2.00 each week which left \$42.00 to live on. The first fifty dollars that Anna ever earned she sent to her parents who, with all their children gone, had built a home and moved to Boley. Anna continued to go to Summer Normals and teach in schools all over Oklahoma, but primarily in Okfuskee county.

At one school, Anna resided at the school during the week and borrowed a horse to ride home on the weekends. One Monday morning before Anna's return to school, there was a terrible rainstorm. Anna's mother said, "You can't ride back now in this storm." "I have to," Anna replied, "those children will be ringing the school bell when I get there." Off Anna went, riding her horse side saddle in the downpour. When the horse got to the creek it was unable to jump it as the rain had caused it to overflow its banks. The horse forged onward and swam. Anna

quickly pulled up her feet so she would not get pulled off into the current. She was wearing the typical fashion of the day, a long high-necked dress which buttoned to the waist with a full skirt and petticoats. Her shoes were the fashion which was shaped like a short boot and laced past the ankle. "I held on so tight to that horse," Anna muses. Anna made it to school, though only reasonably dry, and the children were ringing the bell as she arrived. 13

Despite all her years of teaching, which total around sixty-five, Anna can recall only one case in which she had to resort to disciplinary action with a pupil. "It was at that ~~first~~ school," she says. "A man teacher had to quit because he couldn't handle teaching the kids. When I arrived, one mother said, 'That little girl, my Henry's not gonna let that little woman do nothin'.'" Sure enough, Henry was not a perfect angel and would not cooperate when Miss Hooks asked him to do so. One day Henry was acting particularly obnoxious so Miss Hooks tried to whip him. "Whippin' was allowed to keep children in line in those days," she will tell you. Henry was such a large fellow that in order to catch him and hold him down for his punishment, Anna had to enlist the aid of one of his cousins who was a big, burly girl. Henry ran away, however, without a right and proper whipping. He stayed away from school for a full day. Upon his return, Miss Hooks payed no attention to him, would not hear his lessons, and in effect, gave him the silent treatment. After a few days, Anna requested that Henry stay inside during the lunchbreak. She ask where he had been and why he had come back. Henry replied that he had gone "up the creek" and had returned

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to get his lessons. To this Anna sternly demanded, "Do you know what you have to get before you get your lessons?" To this Henry replied, "Yes, a whipping." Anna responded, "Yes, and a good one." After this encounter Henry the trouble maker was no more and Henry the prize student took his place. Henry would always bring Anna apples and other treats as well as having his lessons completed.

About this same time, Anna met her friend Molly Palmer while shopping in a store in Boley. Molly introduced Anna to one of the young men who worked at the store and also happened to be the brother-in-law of the owner. His name was Samuel Cullen 'Guess. Anna took one full sweeping glance at this handsome young man and said to herself, "I believe I could use him for my husband."

Unfortunately for Anna, Samuel was going out with the girl who lived across the street from her. "There was no competition," Anna says matter-of-factly, "he just realized who was better." Miss Hooks and Mr. Guess courted for eight months before they were married.

The story surrounding Anna's marriage is a great one. Without telling anyone except Anna's sister with whom she was living, Anna and Sam got on a train and travelled to Fort Smith, Arkansas on July 17, 1917. Upon arrival in Arkansas they were promptly married. Back in Boley, people were very curious as both Miss Hooks and Mr. Guess mysteriously disappeared on the same day. Later that night the newlyweds returned. Anna stayed on the train which continued on through Langston to attend Summer Nootals and Sam showed up on time for work the next day. For the first three months these two lovers were separated by work, followed all too

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closely by separation due to World War I.

As with all patriotic and good-hearted American citizens, Samuel Guess received the call to come to the aid of his country and take part in World War I. He was to be stationed in France. Before he left, however, he was stationed in Chilicathaw, Ohio. It was here that Anna bade him farewell before his overseas journey.

To travel from Oklahoma to Ohio was quite a feat. Anna was brave enough to ride in a airplane alone and had a safe journey. "Planes weren't as big or as strong back then," she muses. "But I have never been afraid to travel in airplanes. It's no more dangerous than riding in a car." Mr. Guess never saw battlefield duty, instead he worked in offices overseas. Nonetheless, Anna received a letter from him every day.

Following the war, Sam had to go to Fitzsimmons Hospital in Colorado for treatment. Anna had been teaching throughout Oklahoma and Missouri during his absence. She had just made plans for a renewal of a one year contract teaching high school when Sam requested that she be nearer to him and come to Colorado. Anna honored his request and the two stayed in Colorado for a year.

Following Sam's hospitalization and recuperation the Guess' moved to Los Angeles, California. The year was 1924. Even Anna, the daredevil traveller, admits that traversing the Rockies in a 1920's vintage car with no side barriers was quite scary. The Guess' travelled with another couple and moved to East 47th Street in downtown Los Angeles.

Sam's first job as a civilian was as an embalmer. His enthusiasm for this occupation dwindled quickly, however, and

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he soon turned to real estate which served as his livelihood for the remainder of his life.

Anna, too, decided that she wanted to try her hand at real estate. She took a job with the Blodget Realty Company. Anna laughs as she remembers how absolutely astonished she was at the amount of ~~the~~ commission on her first sale.

Despite reaping a plentiful bounty, Anna still found her greatest love in teaching and learning. She went to night school at Los Angeles City College, followed by the University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California. She obtained a greater knowledge of the educational administrative hierarchy and earned a certificate of specialization for teaching preschoolers aged two through six.

During her first years in the Los Angeles school system, Anna taught in high schools. In the early sixties, however, Anna turned her focus of attention to preschoolers which had always been her favorite. She took a job as a head teacher or supervisor at Miramonte Preschool, the first position in which she was not employed by the Board of Education.

Anna loves children and found her job at the preschool tremendously rewarding. "I have a way with children," she will say. "I never had any trouble with them. Even today if a child is crying I'll just smile and talk to him. Then he'll stop crying and just look at me. Those little Mexican kids, whew, they can be mean and disrespectful sometimes. When I see a little one kicking his mama I'll say to him, 'Why, don't you do that, that's your mama and she loves you.' The child will stop and just grin at me then scamper off away from the scene of the

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trouble. I always strike up a conversation with the little ones on the bus, " she muses. "Also there's a lawyer whose office is at 29th and Western, just over there (with a point). I had him when he was five years old. Now he's nearly forty."

In all her years of acting as a supervisor, Anna had only one mishap with an employee. Anna hired virtually all the employees at Miramonte—by herself. There was one woman, however, that Anna's supervisor had requested be hired for cleaning. Anna honored his request. Anna recalls that items would be found missing from the kitchen on days following the visits of this woman. One day Anna saw her put a pound of butter under her coat. While the woman was in another room, Anna quickly returned the butter to its rightful place in the refrigerator. Anna kept a careful count of everything that was bought and used by the preschool. The phenomenon of missing items continued. On another occasion, Anna accidentally left some money in an unlocked drawer in her desk. She returned to the preschool only to find that the money had been taken. Anna knew who the thief was, but still remained silent. She invited her supervisor to visit the school as he was the one who had recommended this woman for employment. Anna set up a temptation that was too great for the cleaning woman to pass up, despite the presence of the school supervisor. As Anna and her supervisor looked on, the cleaning woman took an item from the preschool. Unlike Anna, her supervisor would not stand for such theivery and confronted the woman and fired her. Anna laughs, "You see, I didn't do anything. She knew that I knew what she was up to and I gave her plenty of chances to confess her wrongdoing. But, boy, that man, he sure gave her a

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troubled time."

During the time that Anna was teaching, her free time was by no means idle. She was very active in Church affairs and to this day is a devout member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She served as secretary of the Church for five years from 1924 through 1929 and again in 1931. Anna was also one of two women on the Finance Committee for her Church. One of her major projects was compiling the program for the African Methodist Episcopal Church Conference which took place in Los Angeles in the early thirties. Anna also put the first mimeograph machines in the colored churches of Los Angeles.

Anna was quite politically active despite the social setting and time period in which she grew up. In her forties, Anna decided that she wanted to distinguish herself by running for a political office, the one remaining seat on the County Center Committee. Unfortunately, Anna was too late in her decision to get her name placed on the official ballot. Not to be thwarted by her friends who did not believe that she could win, Anna ran against a man as a write-in candidate and won. This was quite an accomplishment for a Negro woman in the 1930's.

When Anna retired from the political and teaching arena in 1965, a huge party was thrown for her. She made a scrapbook containing all the cards that she received as well as the guest list which is three pages of looseleaf notebook paper. With the money that she was given, Anna took a cruise to Hawaii, a venture which heightened her wonderlust and gave her a serious travel itch.

After her retirement from teaching, Anna worked as a clerk and typist in the Los Angeles County and City Offices. She made

many friends among the employees at the Offices not to mention Mayor Tom Bradley, Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, and Councilman David Cunningham. She has pictures of these individuals, their wives and herself on her entry wall as well as the birthday cards they have sent her for each birthday she has celebrated over ninety. Not to be outdone, Governor George Deukmejian and Nancy and Ronald Regan also sent Mrs. Guess a birthday card to commemorate age ninety-five. Other awards which brighten Mrs. Guess' entry hall include a certificate of lifetime membership in the Langston University Alumni Club, certificates of accomplishment in Church affairs, and many pictures of lovely nieces and nephews.

After a long time of working for others, Anna decided to turn to her creative interests to keep her active following her theoretical retirement. She made pillows, afghans, quilts, and also knit dresses for herself. Her Christmas projects, however, are her most original. Anna takes old jewelry and uses it as the ornaments on Christmas trees which she has painted and framed. Behind the jewel ornaments she places small lights which blink, which makes a creative and festive artwork. Using old paperback books, Anna makes free-standing Santa Claus'. The books, when opened and the pages folded triangularly, serve as a base to a doll head Santa with home sewn red suit and hat. Cotton is used for the beard which makes him look truly like a "jolly old elf."

Additional "creatives" for Anna include painting, many of her works hang on her living room walls, and stained glass art, her latest venture. Presently she is completing a glass parrot which looks beautiful. Anna is very careful and precise in her

work and her talent truly shows through.

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Another of Anna's original and innovative ideas is her tie dress. "I had so many old neck ties lying around. I figured I could do something with them so I started sewing them together side by side. I tapered them in at the waist but did no cutting." The result- a dress made out of color coordinated neck ties sewn together vertically. It was this dress that won Anna acclaim on another one of her cruises.

In 1973, Anna and a few of her friends took a transcontinental bus tour. In October of 1983, Anna took a cruise on the Nordic Prince. She went on a Korean tour and spent ten full days on the ocean. Anna had great fun on these trips and took many, many pictures. Her next travel venture is a trip to Kansas City, Missouri for a family reunion in July 1984 where five generations of family will be present.

When asked about death, Anna responds, "I don't think about dying. I only think about the positive things. If I get to the point that I am unable to take care of myself, I want my family to put me in a rest home and leave me. They can take care of me there. I've had a full and happy life and I don't want my relatives to worry about me." In regard to having no children to carry on her name and tradition, Anna exclaims, "If I had known I wasn't gonna have no children, I wouldn't have married! Besides my grandmother lived to one hundred-five, so I have a few more years!"

Anna's current activities, in addition to having her "history" written, include helping her neighbors move in and out of her senior citizens apartment complex, preparing food and

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and taking it to individuals who are unable to cook for themselves, recording music and sermons at Church and visiting those who are homebound so that they too can hear, and even occasionally substitute teaching at the nursery school. "Getting down on the floor with those kids keeps you young," she confides.

Just the other day Anna had to go to the doctor to get her blood pressure checked. She had to wait in the office an inordinately long time. She finally went to ask the receptionist why she had to wait so long. As it turned out, her record had not been pulled causing her to be inadvertantly missed. Anna was seen immediately. When she returned to her car, however, she had received a ticket for parking overtime. Anna was quite angry because the delay was not her fault. She decided that she would just pay the ticket and forget about it. Then her positive thinking took over. The next morning Anna got on the bus and went down to the traffic court. She was all prepared to state her case and was called as the fourth case of the morning. Anna says, "I hobbled in so that the judge would think something was wrong with me. Like I was unhealthy or something. He took one look at my ticket and said, 'Mrs. Guess, you're excused.'" Anna was delighted by her ingenuity. "That old '67 Pontiac and I," Anna muses, "We both run good." "Positive thinking, that's the key."

Mrs. Guess' experience with positive thinking have brought her a long way. I certainly feel blessed by having met her, and she has made a more powerful impact upon my life than she will ever know. After that first visit I was treated absolutely royally. Everytime I visited there was ice cream with cookies, cake, or pie, and sometimes even a homecooked meal boasting of

chicken, sweet potatoes, green beans, rice, fresh rolls, corn-
bread, and drink. Mrs. Guess may not have any biological grand-
children, but I feel as if I am a granddaughter to her and I
know that she is a newly adopted grandmother to me. As she states
in her last wishes, "I am leaving with the thought that I have
not left one enemy in this world. I have the pleasure of many,
many friends, not only in California, but all over the world."

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Herein lies the story of Anna Hooks Guess. May she have
many more years of "keepin' on."

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Postscript

As I sit here having placed the last period in the story of Mrs. Guess, tears come to my eyes. I wish that all of you who read this account could come to know her as I have in these short eight weeks. Simply stated, Mrs. Guess is a model of personhood, the epitome of everything anyone could ever be. To Anna from me, "I love you."

