



# From a ride on the Orphan Train to a house full of family

*Article by Pat Welch, Lifestyle Editor of Sherman Herald Democrat, Sherman Texas, June 29, 1997*

*Anna Forshee Scott, my father's aunt, was born 17 Feb 1911 and died 20 Apr 2008.*

*Posted by Michael Allison - 12/25/2017*

Three small children, a tiny boy named Sam, 3, his sisters Anna, 6, and Helen, 8, huddled together as they waited for a train – but a train to where?

They were bewildered, frightened. Their mother and father had died earlier, just weeks apart. They were too young to understand what was happening to them. Why were they here?

These little ones were placed on the Orphan Train to be a part of the destiny awaiting more than 200,000 children who were sent all over the country to strangers who might want them. Strangers who might care for and love them. This did not happen to all, but some were fortunate and found good homes. Regardless of who decided to take them home, their new parents never filled the place of their own mother and father. For most of them, all their lives there was an unknown empty feeling that something was missing. Missing was the warmth of a mother's love and touch, the strength of a father.

Thus was the fate of these three and their plight throughout the years as told by Anna Forshee Scott, an orphan train rider who now resides in Sherman (Texas). Anna is a strong woman by faith, a loving and caring woman because of her own need, one that was only fulfilled when she married a man she loved and later gave birth to their daughter. She was able to show the love she had missed as a child. She had her needs but had to be strong, for her little brother need her. He was her strength and she his. He was too young to know how much his big sister loved him.

The story of Anna and her siblings continued as we sat around the dining room table at her home, reading notes she has written and that were recorded by her son-in-law, Sidney Peveto.

As Anna's story unfolded, many incidents she revealed almost brought tears to the eyes. She talked about her beautiful family that includes five great-grandchildren. The legacy she will leave her family is of a strong woman's love for them.

"Our French name came from our father, Samuel James Forshee, but many of our physical characteristics were inherited from our mother: In our early years we were all bilingual, since our mother, Louise Frederike Volg, had been reared in a German orphanage until about the age of 18 and then immigrated to the United States. Thus, both the German and English language was spoken in our home," Anna said.

Their mother and dad married in New York City in 1907; little did they realize that they would be contributing three children to ride one of the "orphan trains" to Texas. They got in on the ride near the end of its era but were still a part of the 200,000 who were transported from their native states to another many miles away. "The orphan train carried us to our new homes through a relocation system know today as placing out," Anna noted.

Helen was born March 8, 1909, Anna on Feb. 17, 1911, Samuel on April 22, 1913 and Woodrow on Feb. 16, 1916. Two weeks after Woodrow was born their mother died of childbirth complications. Woodrow was not well and was placed in foster care in Brooklyn, N.Y. The other three children and their father moved to their grandparents' in Belleville, N.J. But a string of unhappy events took place. In early December 1917, their grandfather passed away and on Dec. 12 their father died from heart and kidney complications.

That left the children with their grandmother and Aunt Mary, their dad's sister. However, they soon saw that they could not care for themselves and the children, so the children were placed or surrendered to The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in New York City.

When they entered the society, each had whooping cough and the measles. In addition, Anna had a bad case of bronchitis. Near the end of December 1917, they were referred to the Children's Aid Society for placement or adoption.

They stayed at the orphanage only a brief time. The CAS had a long list of prospective families who wanted to adopt or take in children, who were soon placed on the orphan train headed for Texas.

A woman from CAS accompanied the group that arrived in McKinney around Jan. 22, 1918. They were immediately taken to a hotel where they were bathed and "dressed up" and then lined up for the local people to "look us over," as Anna said.

"Fay Binion selected me and took me to Pilot Grove to the home of her parents, Zeph and Zora Binion. Sam and Helen went with others but the CAS person preferred Sam be placed with one of the girls because of his young age," Anna said.

Helen was placed in several homes following their ride to Texas but Sam and Anna thrived with the Binions.

“We liked our foster parents and felt that they, for the most part, liked us. We were taught to work and carry our share of the working load. Since the Binion children were all grown at the time that Sam and I were taken in, we were expected to ‘pick up the slack’ left by them. I soon was taught to milk the cows, shell the corn, feed the chickens and gather eggs. Sam learned to shuck the corn, turn the cream separator and draw water for the wash house. A lot of Sam’s work became my responsibility because of his young age. But as he grew older, he had to take over more of the work load,” Anna said.

She and Sam attended a one-room school in Oxford, which was close enough to the Binion farm that they were allowed to walk to school. Even though they were expected to attend school, they still had chores to do. Before Anna left for school she said she had to help cook breakfast, wash the dishes and sweep the floor; then she could dress for school.

“We always thought the Binions intended to adopt us, but the Binion children did not want that to happen. They probably thought we would inherit part of their parents’ estate. I kept the Forshee name throughout, but Sam took on the Binion name,” Anna said.

Sam and Anna continued their education and in 1928 she finished the 10th grade, the highest grade in the school. By 1930 she married Rufus Scott and had received her teacher certification from East Texas State Teachers College. She took a year’s leave from teaching to have their only child, Patsy Ann. She remembers praying that she would not have a lot of children for fear something would happen to her and they would be left like she was.

Sam completed high school one year after Anna and they attended college together. However, jobs were scarce in Texas at that time and he went to California to work in the aircraft industry. He now lives in West Virginia.

Helen, after living with several families, quit school and moved to Dallas and took business courses to prepare her for a position in the business world. Now deceased, Helen married and lived most of her life in Fort Worth. Through one of her daughters, Jeanette, who contacted the New York CAS, the family found that Woodrow had been adopted in 1919 by a couple named Kreig. At the present time, the family is making inquiries in the New York area for any information about Woodrow.

Neither Anna nor her late husband, who was also a teacher, ever talked about her being on the orphan train. They were afraid it might frighten their students and make them worry they might lose their parents like she did.

Anna has attended the Texas Orphan Train Annual Reunion held in Granbury twice, in 1995 and again this year. She was one of five attending with their families this year. She and Sam have remained close and visit as often as possible.

It’s hard to think of these little ones when they rode the train – they had to be brave, even when they felt bad, there were always chores to do, housekeeping never ended. But they grew up thankful for food, a warm bed and an education. They are thankful for the people who saw to these needs and, after years, found that they were loved, too, which was revealed in later letters.

Passing through life, these children of immigrants grew up to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that was promised in the United States of America, fulfilling their parents’ dream.