



Christine Dark, left, and Eva Armstrong stand next to Mrs. Armstrong's car in Winnsboro.

## A reunion with Eva

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**A** teen-ager wanting spending money, she first appeared in our lives when my brother and I were preschoolers - apparently exhausting pre-schoolers. She'd come in the afternoons to entertain us outside and give our mother a break.

I can't say I actually remember those afternoons at our Winnsboro home. She would likely have slipped into one of the voids in my childhood memories, except that at some point she left a memento that would be with us for years to come. Maybe it was a rainy day, or maybe Mama had gone somewhere and she had free access to the phone. Whatever it was, on the side of the single drawer in the little maple table that the big black phone sat on, she neatly inscribed her name in inch-tall block letters: EVA.

Time passed, we started school and Eva finished it and went on her way. A pretty cherry telephone table with an attached bench replaced the little maple one, which was relegated to a corner of the hall, with a plant on top and odds and ends in the drawer. Over the years, I'd note Eva's name on my infrequent search of something in that space, and the "story of Eva" came to be a more real part of my memory than she herself had been.

More time passed and, now grown up, I'd find myself occasionally checking the drawer

side to see if the name was still there. Protected from the fading of light and air, it was still as plain as day - EVA. The question to Mama, "Whatever happened to this Eva," would bring predictable responses: "I heard she's now married and has children of her own" or "I see her now and then. She's working during the week."

More than 45 years had now gone by and my mother was losing her central vision to macular degeneration. The doctor had pronounced that dreaded edict: no more driving. My 30-mile trips home had become more frequent so that I could play chauffeur for my still active and anxious-to-go parent. On one of those days we were in the grocery when I heard the delighted greeting, "Why, hey, Mrs. Dark! How're you doing?" Mama needed no special glasses to see and respond, "Hello, Eva!" I was enthralled. Could this be the EVA of the telephone table?

Indeed it was, and no meeting of any famous figure could have thrilled me more. The conversation that ensued brought Eva back into our lives. On hearing that Mama could no longer drive, this warm and cheerful woman promptly declared that she needed something to do now that she was retired and why didn't Mama just call when she needed to go somewhere. From that offer evolved an arrangement for Eva to spend one morning a week putting around house and town with the mother who STILL needed a break from her kid!

Now, three years later, there are lots of Eva stories. There have been escapades with cars, funny stories of mixups, and plenty of laughter as these two ladies tackle the business of an everyday life quite different from the one they knew those many years ago. Better known around my hometown as Miz Armstrong, Eva seems to know everyone and everyone knows her. Her spirit and desire to help others have added to my mother's enjoyment of life; and, along with other good friends, she's certainly made it easier for Mama to remain where she wants to be.

The little table still stands in the hall and, while the proper Mrs. Armstrong insists that she didn't do it, I suspect it pleases my former teen-age baby-sitter to know that her graffiti has endured as a part of my life for so long.

The fascination with those three letters has not ended, though, for I've come across them again in another place. Rumormongering through a box of old silver in a shop recently, one spoon nearly leaped out at me. I could hardly believe what I saw on the elegant curve of the handle. The patina of age on the silver could not dim the engraving, in simple block letters: EVA.

Serendipity? Maybe, but it surely seemed more meaningful to me. The spoon, Eva, is my gift to you.

**DODDS**

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