

JUANITA COOPER (JOHNSON) WALLER (#914)

Source: Heritage of Putnam County Tennessee – 2008 by Putnam County Heritage Book Committee and County Heritage Inc.

Pgs. 327 & 328 – What a giving woman! Juanita Cooper Johnson was born to Tommie Johnson and Aria Frances Cooper Johnson on New Years Day 1915.



She was the oldest of their children, but Selma, Lionel, Lelon and Gylma soon followed. (**Pictured:** Juanita Cooper (Johnson) Waller).

After Gylma's birth, their mother grew ill and died when Juanita was 11 years old. Feeling hurt and emptiness, she wanted to mother her siblings and tried to for the rest of her life.

Her Dad married another wonderful lady, Ida Mae Gentry and they had two children, Bernes and Mable Jean.

As "Nita" grew up she decided to teach school and attended college at Tennessee Polytechnic Institute. She taught at smaller rural schools like Boma and Ensor. At one school as she tested a grapevine, to be sure it was safe for the children to swing on. She fell into the ravine and broke her wrist. In 1936 she married Dow Waller, Jr. and they had one son, Tommy Dow Waller. Dow was wounded in World War II and unable to come home as quickly as many soldiers. During this time she cared for her son and worked as a clerk in the Baxter Post Office. Later she became the Post Master.

She encountered people every day with needs too great to handle alone. If she could not help she would find someone who could.

Often she took a foster child to the dentist or cooked for a sick person. She'd ask the affluent families for their children's clothes for a child less fortunate. She wrote letters for people who didn't get the check they relied on, or call anybody she believed could resolve some issue. She used every resource available and was a committee of one to do whatever was needed.

She know of needs in the community others were not aware of, and always helped the ones nobody else cared about, and did it subtly without others knowing. She wanted no recognition for what she did. The pound cakes from her kitchen were a treat, but best known were Santa Claus cookies. From 1951- 1995 her baking thrilled people of all ages. Every generation, down to great granddaughter Jessica had cookies for school. Nieces and nephews in other towns carried away treats to their friends. Grandson's Richard Thomas Waller and Robert John Allison Waller had cookies in Chattanooga all holidays. It was thrill to gather in her kitchen to bake and some even ate raw cookie dough. She retired from the post office to care for Dow when his health declined. Soon after his death she left for Memphis to care for her younger sister Gylma.

She helped others until her vision dimmed too much to drive or read. With failing health, she was lovingly cared for by her grandson Richard Waller and his wife Laryssa until her life ended on May 11, 1989.

Her one life was the equivalent of many.

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