

TRESSA PRISBREY

Tressa was born on January 19, 1896 to Catherine and Matthew Shafer in the small farming community of Easton, near Wells, Minnesota. In 1912, at the age of 15, Tressa married 52 year old Theodore Grinolds. Sometime in the late 1920s or early 1930s Tressa left her husband, with some of her seven children, and settled in Minot, North Dakota.

After Grinold's death in the 1930's, Tressa moved to Simi Valley where she married Al Prisbrey in 1947. In the 1950's Tressa took the wheels off the family trailer and began to build Bottle Village. When asked why she started Tressa told visitors about her extensive pencil collection that needed a home.

Claiming that you need more than money to make something out of nothing, Tressa used her Studebaker pick-up truck to collect bottles, dolls, seashells, books and other valley discards from the dump. Tressa's creation of color, light and clutter covers one-third of an acre. It features a series of 13 small houses and other structures including a wishing well, retaining and decorative walls, a fountain and cactus gardens interspersed with colorful mosaic pathways.

Tressa completed the first bottle room, "the pencil house," and then continued building because she enjoyed it. As Tressa constructed, furnished and embellished her rooms, she began to cultivate a new identity and became known as "Grandma". This public personality and identity may have helped Tressa to assuage the feelings of loss and isolation resulting from the many deaths in her family. She established a quasi-familial relationship with friends and visitors to the village. Anecdotes, stories and accounts of her premonitions comprised the nuclei of Tressa's "tour stories". These were told as she escorted her guests through Bottle Village, narrating, pointing out interesting features and monuments, and singing and playing the piano in the meditation room. Grandma called her village "My monument to show biz".

"If you think you are slipping, just get yourself a hobby that will take your mind off of how you feel and give yourself some-thing to look forward to ... Anyone can do anything with a million dollars -- look at Disney. but it takes more than money to make something out of nothing, and look at the fun I have doing it."

The Preserve Bottle Village Committee was formed in 1979 and the Village was declared Ventura County Cultural Landmark #52. In 1981 it became a California Registered Historical Landmark #939 and a historical plaque was dedicated by the California State Department of Parks and Recreation, State Resources Commission and the Preserve Bottle Village Committee in 1984. "Grandma" is still alive but confined in a nursing home.

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