



# Grandma and Me

Family Stories, Information, and Photos of the  
Crabtree and Higginson Families of  
Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs

*Compiled and Edited by*  
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Other books by Louise E. Smith: *Aida Austin's 1881 Diary*

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## About the Author



Louise Elizabeth (Austin) Smith was born in Fillmore, New York, and spent most of her growing up years on Peach Street in Southgate, Michigan, a Detroit suburb.

At nine, her mother taught her to embroider and sew. At ten, she loved reading biographies, and gave up on fiction writing after a failed attempt at a story about a bear. At eleven, she started playing the violin. In high school, she discovered her all-time favorite book, *Jane Eyre*.

College brought her a degree in music education. She worked on (and received) a Masters Degree in elementary education during her first several years of teaching. She taught for a total of ten years in Fenton, Michigan, where she met her husband (at last) in the

fall of 1978. Gary Smith and Louise Austin were married in December of that year.

The last 24 years have been spent moving across the country, raising four children, and dealing with a dog, parakeets, hamsters, guinea pigs, and chickens that somehow ended up being part of the household. Gary and Louise now live in Cave Creek, Arizona, where she currently enjoys counted cross stitching (although she doesn't do it very much), and reading (although she doesn't do that very much either), and is learning to make bobbin lace and rag rugs. She was fifty-five before she decided that nonfiction writing was more her style, and has worked on the Crabtree/Higginson family stories for three years.

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# Acknowledgments

In late summer 2004, armed with several pictures, nine pages of 30-year-old notes I had taken when I visited Grandma in Oregon, and some memories of stories Grandma and my mother had told me, I started to write a short narrative about my grandma, Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, her parents and grandparents, and the places they lived.

Over a year later, after meeting second, third, fourth, and fifth cousins through email; receiving and finding old photos, information, and answers to questions from those cousins as well as from my aunt and mother; calling or emailing for wills and death certificates; and of course, searching for hours on Google (What did I do before Google?)—the story of Grandma and her relatives is more complete and the book is longer than I had ever thought possible.

The text of Grandma's story, most of which is in Part I, is a combination of a short tape of Grandma talking about her life, two short handwritten stories by Grandma of her early life, and 15 typed pages of my grandma's whole life story. Special thanks to my mother, Mary Briggs Austin, for preserving this information and the many photos she also contributed.

A special Thank You, too, to Cal Bivens. Cal's Grandfather, LeRoy Crabtree, was a brother to my grandmother, Myrtie Crabtree Briggs. (Cal's family knew LeRoy and Myrtie's mother, Ida Emily Higginson Crabtree, as Emily.)

Combining the stories from both families has filled in a number of gaps in the timeline of the families of John L. Crabtree and Ida Higginson, our great grandparents.

Cal has been doing family research for some 30 years. He has shared his photos, documents, information, and research, including timelines, census reports from 1835–1930, and Civil War information, as well as answered multitudinous questions for this book, because he would like the family stories to be available to other family members.

Thank you does not adequately express my appreciation to all those that contributed photos, documents, research, information and/or answered my many questions. These include:

### **Austin/Briggs relatives:**

Mary Briggs Austin, my mom  
Mildred Briggs Lufburrow,  
Mom's sister, my aunt and  
major question answerer and  
contributor.

Clara Jean Briggs Whan wrote  
Briggs Heritage and gave  
me advice, information, and  
encouragement.

### **Crabb Cousins:**

Dan Brady  
Wendy Crabbe  
Duane Crabtree  
Jeannine McGee Nichols  
Lloyd Webber

### **Higginson Cousins:**

LaRetta Higginson Beard  
Raleigh Emry  
Mildred Amick Horton  
Dorlene Tolle Higginson  
Ron Horton  
Kathleen Higginson McCallister  
Zee Higginson Spanicek  
James Tracy

### **Crabtree and Higginson Cousins:**

Cal Bivens  
Hazel Crabtree Ramey

### **Friends, Family, and Relatives:**

A special thank you also to my family, many relatives, and friends who have been so very encouraging as I have written this book.

### **Gary Smith**

And to my husband Gary, who realized from the start the enormity of this project and still offered his expertise in laying out the book, creating the cover, and getting it ready to be published—THANK YOU!

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## Dedication

*To Grandma Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs, who preserved and told the stories of the Crabtree and Higginson Families; and to the Crabtree and Higginson Descendants who have made this book possible.*



*Grandma with an African Violet plant.*

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## Grandma and Me Introduction

Grandma “Go” Briggs, was our Austin Family’s affectionate name for Grandma—Amanda Myrtie Crabtree Briggs. Myrtie or Myrtle, as she was called after she was married, traveled by train and plane or car. As soon as someone mentioned going anywhere, Grandma had her purse and was ready to go. I think it was in her Crabtree blood.

After her husband Irwin Briggs, my grandpa, died in 1958, Grandma often spent several months at a time at our home and shared the bedroom with my two sisters and myself—four in one room at times—until I went off to college. I don’t remember Grandma ever complaining about the crowded conditions.

I do remember Grandma combing her long black hair. Her hair still had black in it well into her 80s. Some nights Grandma would wake up wheezing because of her asthma. I was afraid she wasn’t going to get her next breath, and was always relieved when the medicine in her atomizer started working.

Grandma was interested in healthy eating and was a fan of Adelle Davis who wrote, *Let’s Eat Right to Stay Fit*. I remember Grandma making bread. It took a long time for her to knead it and a long time for it to raise. The aroma and taste of fresh baked bread was well worth her trouble, in my opinion.

The oven, (due to lack of space), was where we stored our pans which had metal handles. One violin lesson day, I forgot the oven was pre-heating and grabbed

the pan handles. I burned the palm of my hand and knuckles. At Grandma suggestion, I put honey on my hand and wrapped it in a washcloth. By lesson time, my hand was fine.

Grandma loved pansies, a favorite flower of mine. When I see pansies, I think of Grandma. Grandma and her three daughters also loved African violets. Every time all four Briggs ladies were at our home, the cousins were dragged to the African violet greenhouse, where we impatiently waited until Grandma, our mom, and Aunts had seen each plant.

Grandma liked to buy products that advertised a moneyback guarantee. One time Grandma, about 80 years old, sent for a bottle of Oil of Olay lotion because the advertisement said it made women look 10 years younger, and also offered a money back guarantee. After a few days of using the lotion, Grandma did not think she looked any younger, so she packaged up the jar and sent it back. I don’t remember if she got her money back, but I bet she did.

Grandma knew every hymn and all the words to all the verses. Often in the evening, at 8:15, I think it was, she would go back to the girls’ bedroom, turn the radio on, sit on one of the three beds, and listen to J. Vernon McGee’s, *Through the Bible* series. J. Vernon was my favorite of the preachers she listened to on TV or radio.

The first summer I came home from college, I was on my feet all day, and very frustrated working at the lunch counter of a 5- and

10-cent-type store. About a week later, I got a call from a high school friend offering me a very welcomed desk job in an office situation. Grandma told me she had been praying for a new job for me.

While working on Grandma’s biography, I read that Grandma also had a job where she had to stand all day which she didn’t like—she understood my situation.

Some years Grandma lived in Oregon near her sister Mary. One summer in the mid-1970s, I spent a few weeks with Grandma who was living in an apartment there.

One of the things I did during that time was to write down some family stories Grandma told me of her growing up, of her parents and grandparents—the Crabtrees and the Higginsons.

Almost 30 years later, in the fall of 2004, I searched for and, amazingly, found my notes taken during that visit.

I was and have been fascinated by these stories, of relatives from Ireland and from New Brunswick, that homesteaded in the midwest, or fought and were wounded in the Civil War, or had a trading post in a wild new town in South Dakota, or that rode spotted ponies through the Indian sacred land—with permission. I especially remember Grandma telling about the moccasins the Indian lady in South Dakota made her. Grandma would never let us talk bad about the Indians.

I have written down these stories about Grandma, her parents and grandparents—real pioneers of the midwest.

*Happy reading.* ❀

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## Psalm 91

A favorite Psalm of Grandma

He that dwelleth in the secret place  
of the most High shall abide under  
the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the LORD, *He is* my  
refuge and my fortress: my God; in  
him will I trust.

Surely he shall deliver thee from the  
snare of the fowler, *and* from the  
noisome pestilence.

He shall cover thee with his feathers,  
and under his wings shalt thou  
trust: his truth shall be thy shield  
and buckler.

Thou shalt not be afraid for the  
terror by night; *nor* for the arrow  
*that* flieth by day;

*Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh  
in darkness; *nor* for the destruction  
*that* wasteth at noonday.

A thousand shall fall at thy side, and  
ten thousand at thy right hand; *but*  
it shall not come nigh thee.

Only with thine eyes shalt thou  
behold and see the reward of  
the wicked.

Because thou hast made the LORD,  
*which is* my refuge, *even* the most  
High, thy habitation;

There shall no evil befall thee,  
neither shall any plague come nigh  
thy dwelling.

For he shall give his angels  
charge over thee, to keep thee in  
all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in *their*  
hands, lest thou dash thy foot  
against a stone.

Thou shalt tread upon the lion  
and adder: the young lion and  
the dragon shalt thou trample  
under feet.

Because he hath set his love upon  
me, therefore will I deliver him: I  
will set him on high, because he  
hath known my name.

He shall call upon me, and I will  
answer him: I will be with him  
in trouble; I will deliver him, and  
honour him.

With long life will I satisfy him,  
and shew him my salvation.

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