

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 209

By Fincher

A RESOLUTION to honor and recognize Velma Elizabeth Thompson on the occasion of her 95th birthday.

WHEREAS, it is only fitting and proper that this General Assembly pause in its deliberations to honor and specially recognize one of our State's outstanding citizens on the occasion of her ninety-fifth birthday; and

WHEREAS, four score and fifteen years ago on April 25, 1914, the remarkable life of Velma Elizabeth Thompson began; born to proud parents Mary Jane "Mama" Thompson and James Boliver Thompson, her life is still going strong almost a century later; and

WHEREAS, known, seemingly interchangeably, as simply "Velma" or "Vela," she has lived an enviable life that has been simple but remarkably rich and fulfilling: walking to the square to work at the Putnam County Selective Service Office (with the Woodman of the World office down the hall) where she typed like the wind on her sturdy, but hardly portable, Remington Standard typewriter, home for lunch, back to work and home in the afternoon every day for years; walking the nieces and nephews to the legendary Spark's Grocery for popsicles, with everyone hoping to get a coveted "Free" stick; limiting herself to one Coca-Cola per day; always church on Sunday morning, but also always time for bridge every Sunday night with Jo Haile and Charlene; and, of course, always popcorn for dinner; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Thompson has called 536 Douglas Street in Cookeville, Tennessee, her primary residence since 1937, and it has, since the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, been the site of family gatherings for more than fifty years, the venue of countless contests of skill and chance, ranging from "spirited" to "lawless" to "life-threatening," amongst her nieces and nephews and selected friends, including such diverse diversions as croquet, any type of game that could be played with a full or partial deck of cards, a nameless game, for

which the rules were unknown and irrelevant, involving the placement of a number of small mollusk shells in each of a line of parallel bowl-shaped indentions carved into board until reaching a larger indention at each end, Monopoly, Parcheesi, Cribbage, for the intellectual or difficult-to-bore, and, more recently, Bocce ball and Risk; and

WHEREAS, when these contests progressed from the “competitive” to the felonious stage, Velma was forced to assume one of her many identities, and in desperate times such as those it was as sheriff, referee, umpire and mediator, immediately quelling any “respectful disagreements” threatening to take an ugly turn by proclaiming to both the innocent and guilty (you know who you are) that “I am so mad I could eat fried chicken” and that if the alleged miscreant did not immediately cease and desist their unseemly behavior, she convincingly let it be known that she would be forced to “thump” them; and

WHEREAS, while sometimes forced to serve as judge and jury (but never executioner) to petty inter-familial squabbles, she, as the situation dictated, masterfully served in many other roles such as educator, counselor, nurse, Yoda, cheerleader, moral compass, mother, cook, recreation director, confidante, spiritual leader, and mentor to all of her nieces and nephews and anyone else wise enough to listen to and heed her words; and

WHEREAS, a 95-year “cradle roll” member of the First Presbyterian Church, Velma still found the time and skill to amass, since commencing in 1959, a world-class doll collection, going so far in her quest as to walk up-town in the snow on Christmas Eve to obtain the much-coveted Jackie Kennedy doll; to transform, with only the occasional assistance of a well-used Singer® sewing machine, ordinary cloth and thread into works of art, ranging from any type of clothing imaginable, human or doll, to instant-heirloom quality Christmas ornaments, and personalized stockings for relatives and friends alike; to be a perennial season ticket holder to Tennessee Tech basketball and football games, as well as an avid fan of the incomparable Pat Summit and the eight-time national champion Lady Vols; and, more recently in her “retirement” years (which would exhaust the Energizer Bunny), to make in the immediate vicinity of five hundred quilts, a phenomenal accomplishment, given that she does most of the piecing and all of the quilting by hand, and each of which is an intricate, exquisite work of art; and

WHEREAS, while it is the "Velma way" to always be quiet and unassuming in demeanor, her deeds have spoken loudly and often, such as going to the train depot to see-off young men from the surrounding area drafted into the service through her office, some of whom she knew would never return from their probable next destination of Vietnam; giving brother James \$15.00 (which was, of course, a fortune at the time) so he could pay his tuition and stay in college; and caring for Anne Ruth and her other siblings and friends, such as the Yergen sisters, in their times of need; and

WHEREAS, on April 18, 2009, numerous nieces and nephews and in-laws and relatives and other friends will descend upon Cookeville from near and far to meet in reunion and to honor Velma for, well, being Velma; and

WHEREAS, consistent with everything in her history and character, Velma, although a nonagenarian, is insisting upon hosting the event and doing the majority of the cooking, including her incomparable chess pie, although there will be others in attendance who are quite skilled in the culinary arts; and

WHEREAS, the world will little note nor long remember what we say here today in honor of Velma Elizabeth Thompson, but it will always remember all that she has done for her family, extended family, community, and this State during her remarkable life and how much she has influenced those privileged enough to be in the presence of her kindness and learn from her wisdom and goodness; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we take note of, honor, and congratulate Velma Elizabeth Thompson on the celebration of her ninety-fifth birthday and the extraordinary service she has given to this State and sincerely hope to "see her in the funny papers" for many more birthdays.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.