

**MONA LEE  
BRUSTER  
BROCK**  
1932-2019



**THE ANGEL  
AT THE  
END OF  
THE LINE**

Mona Lee Brock had farming in her bones. “Farming you don’t learn from books,” she once said. “It’s not taught to you by a professor in college. It’s taught by sitting in your father’s lap on a tractor.” When the 1980s Farm Crisis swept across the nation, when bankruptcies and foreclosures soared and crop prices fell, and when many farmers, who saw no way out, took their own lives, Brock volunteered to be an ad hoc emergency counselor to farmers. Willie Nelson called her “the angel at the end of the line”.

Mona Lee Bruster was born in January 1932 in Madill. She was raised in Marshall County attending Kingston High School. In 1947 she married farmer F. M. Brock on July 12, 1947 and they farmed in Lincoln County. She graduated from Southeastern State College (now SEOSU) in 1964 with a bachelor’s degree in education and the University of Oklahoma in 1967 with a master’s degree in education. She was a teacher, guidance counselor and principal for many years in Moore, outside Oklahoma City.

A disastrous combination of skyrocketing interest rates, sinking farm prices, and misguided federal policies sparked a national tragedy known as the 1980s Farm Crisis – the most serious financial crisis in rural America since the Great Depression. The country was losing more than 2,000 family farms weekly, from California to Minnesota to the Carolinas. Loans keeping farmers afloat were foreclosed, costing them their land, their livelihood and their way of life. They watched as their livestock and farm equipment were auctioned off.

Amidst this chaos, a small group of farmers began to fight to save their neighbors and their land. The Brocks held meetings of farmers, bankers, business leaders at their farm for mutual support. In the end, however, they were not able to hold on to their land, where they had raised cattle and grown wheat, soybeans and cotton. In July 1985 the Brocks lost their Lincoln County farm.

One unforeseen consequence of the Farm Crisis was the skyrocketing suicide rate among farmers. Brock began to volunteer for the Oklahoma Conference of Churches, which operated a hotline for emergency counseling and suicide prevention. She offered a sympathetic ear and soothing, understanding presence to people who could feed the world but could no longer feed their families. In 1986, while working as a crisis line counselor, her husband died of a heart attack.

Brock could hear the desperation of farmers on the phone by the sound of a revolver cylinder turning or shells being slipped in shotguns as they talked. Sometimes she heard a shot. Rushing to the scene, she was often the first to find the body. She had an enormous capacity to handle the most extreme and horrific moments and a calmness that made people think they were being listened to.

She told them to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and fight – by using the regulations and laws available. She helped establish a local network of Oklahoma farm advocates, who worked with individual farmers to help them understand their rights and identify opportunities for legal action. Musician Willie Nelson joined the cause in 1985, after hearing about Brock and the other advocates, organizing a series of Farm Aid concerts, which raised over \$50 million to help struggling farmers. Soon Brock was talking to farmers from all over the country.

For three decades, Brock spoke to tens of thousands of farmers, taking calls day and night. She was credited with saving hundreds of farms and thousands of lives. Brock was awarded the 1987 Humanitarian Award from the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and 1988 Women in Communications Byliner’s Award. After many years, Brock’s family was able to reacquire the farm that they had lost in the 1980s. In May 2018 she received a citation from the Oklahoma House of Representatives for advocating on behalf of farmers.

The 2015 documentary “Homeplace Under Fire” tells the story of the frontline, grassroots work that a few people like Brock took on during the Farm Crisis of the 1980s, and their 30- year fight to keep family farmers on their land. It is available at <https://www.homeplaceunderfire.org>. Brock retired to Durant, in 2006 to be closer to her family. She died there in March 2019 at age 87.