

**BRENDA
THOMPSON
(SHELBY GRANT)
1936-2011**



**LESSONS
THAT
SHAPE
YOUR LIFE**

Young women dream about leaving their small town, going to Hollywood, becoming an actress, meeting a handsome actor, getting married, and living happily every after. Brenda Thompson's dreams came true.

Thompson was born in October 1936 in Orlando, Oklahoma. She was raised in Wagoner and graduated from Wagoner High School. While at Northeastern State College in Tahlequah, she was named the Football Queen of 1959. She was also named Northeastern Oklahoma Dairy Princess that same year.

Brenda did a few television commercials for KTUL-TV in Tulsa before she moved to Hollywood in 1962 to pursue an acting career. In her book "Going Hollywood", Kristen Burke described a young starlet's decision, "Actors come to California with nothing but a dream, and the knowledge that anything is possible."

While trying to get into the entertainment industry, Brenda worked as a teacher of special education and deaf students at Hollywood High School. This school was showcased in the movies as a place to be discovered. Students who achieved stardom here included Fay Wray, Lana Turner, Carol Burnett, and Judy Garland.

Thompson was discovered by a 20th Century Fox talent scout there, whereupon she changed her name to Shelby Grant. "I drew Grant out of a hat", according to an interview she gave to columnist Hedda Hopper.

The green-eyed brunette debuted on television in a 1963 episode of Bonanza. She became a successful contract player for 20th Century Fox in the 1960s and appeared in such classic films as Fantastic Voyage, Our Man Flint, The Witchmaker and The Pleasure Seekers. Shelby also had a long list of television appearances on shows like Marcus Welby, Batman, and Bonanza.

Then she met actor Chad Everett. Grant was enamored by his romanticism. He sent her so many flowers during their courtship that "my balcony looked like a burial ground." She married Everett in Tucson in 1966 while he was on location filming the movie Return of the Gunfighter. She made multiple appearances on her husband's television series Medical Center, which ran from 1969 to 1976.

While the tabloids usually focus on celebrities' failed marriages, the Everetts proved that a long marriage in Hollywood could work. They were married for 45 years and produced two wonderful daughters. Eventually Grant left acting to concentrate on philanthropy. Over the years, she sponsored more than twenty heart surgeries through the Gift of Life, an organization which provides free medical services to children all over the world. Shelby Grant died in June 2011 of a brain aneurysm at age 74. Everett died of lung cancer the next year at 75.

Shelby Grant lived out her personal dreams in Hollywood but never forgot where she came from. She made many trips back to Wagoner to visit friends and family, never losing touch with who she was. No matter how far you go to pursue your dreams, it is important to remember the life lessons you learned in your youth that helps to shape the choices you make in life.