

## OBITUARY

# Alta Cassietto

Dec. 21, 1907 — Feb. 16, 2006



*Pictured in a Cassietto family photo circa 1940-50 are: (L-R), Maria Gallo, Rosetta Gallo Parker, Bud Parker, Alta Cassietto, Barbara Elder Cassietto, Maria Cassietto and Bert Cassietto. According to Alta's nephew Jim Cassio, the only one from this photo still living is Rosetta who lives in Grand Junction. Cassio said his Aunt Rosetta remembers making polenta that day.*

Alta Cassietto, age 98, a longtime resident of Montrose and Telluride, died early Thursday morning, Feb. 16, 2006, at her assisted-living

apartment in Montrose.

Born on Dec. 21, 1907 in Cedaredge, Colorado, Alta was the first of four children born to Maria Albertina Motto and Domenick Victor Cassietto, immigrants from Torino Province in Northern Italy. Soon after Alta was born, they returned to Italy where Alta spent most of her first seven years before the family returned to Colorado following the death of their second child, Bartolomeo, an infant.

With no work in Italy, the family had come back to America in search of a better life. But it would not be an easy one. Alta's father, who had served in Russia in the Italian army, had only one option to support his family: the risky life of an exploited immigrant miner. Soon two more children were born to Alta's parents: Lora, who died of pneumonia at 8 years of age, and Bert, who had five children and lived in California until his death from lung cancer on May 6, 2000 at 82 years of age.

While Alta learned to speak English and excelled as a student, her father, already in poor health, tried to find another way to support his family by buying a small general store in Telluride. For a while it looked as though it might be a solution, but then the store's previous owners decided they wanted to buy the store back (an option which was part of the condition of sale), and so Domenick had no

choice but to return to work in the mines. Alta had barely graduated from high school when her father was killed in an accident in the Carbinero Mine near Ophir, Colorado in 1926.

At the time of her father's death, her brother, Bert, was just 8 years old, and the family had fallen on very hard times. Alta and her mother had to take in washing and ironing and any other work they could get to help pay bills and put food on the table. Just 3 years later the Stock Market crashed and the Great Depression was in full swing. Alta was smart and pretty and, perhaps, could have found a better life for herself, but she took her family responsibilities seriously and became a career woman in order to support her family during hard times.

Her first career was as a reporter for *The Journal*, Telluride's newspaper during the depression years. Soon Alta was running the newspaper! Her editorials consistently reinforced her optimistic outlook. She foresaw better times in Telluride, and — sure enough — better times eventually came around. But the newspaper salary of \$125 a month was not going to keep her there beyond seven years. When the opportunity arose, she decided to apply for the position of postmaster of Telluride, a post she proudly held for 36 years.

Although the job of a small-town postmaster didn't pay much back then, Alta was

## OBITUARY

interested in the security that the job would provide. And she was remarkably good at running the post office. During her reign, the Telluride post office always ran efficiently and reliably. During World War II, the post office even functioned like a bank (as there was no bank in town during that period) with Alta issuing up to 100 money orders a day.

Her post office always had pretty flowers from spring through fall — and the gardening was all done by Alta during her off-hours. Of course, she also had a beautiful yard at her family home in Telluride. Even after retiring from the post office and moving to Montrose, she won several awards for her beautiful gardens and was still gardening right up into her 97th year. In fact, one of Alta's hearing aids is currently serving as fertilizer for her roses at her house on Stratford Drive!

Although Alta took her post office duties seriously, she also enjoyed the many social activities that Telluride offered, including town picnics, weekend dances, card parties, and dinners with friends. In fact, Alta was a natural at making friends, and she had many close friends throughout her life and many others that she corresponded with on a regular basis. Alta recently recalled having had "lots of boyfriends" during her dancing days, but Alta only married once and only for a very short time. She remained duty-bound to her mother — for better and for worse — and she realized that marriage wasn't compatible with her other responsibilities.

Being a postmaster gave Alta an opportunity to travel, as each year she had to attend the annual postmaster's convention. She found that she loved to travel. After retiring from the post office, Alta continued to travel and made 10 trips across the Pacific and 10 across the Atlantic. She particularly enjoyed traveling to Europe and met some cousins in Italy that she continued to correspond with for many years.

Another of Alta's hobbies was history. She was a founder of the Telluride Historical Society and served as its president for many years. Much of what the society had in its early years was donated by Alta. She was also obsessive about newspaper clippings that caught her interest. It was rare that people got a letter from Alta without newspaper clippings enclosed.

With her mother disabled



*Alta Cassietto is pictured on a recent trip to Telluride's Lone Tree Cemetery.*

and unable to continue living in Telluride, Alta retired from the post office in 1970 moved to Montrose a few years later. But retirement for Alta just meant having more time to serve as a volunteer. And volunteer she did, for 20 years with Montrose Memorial Hospital, among others.

Whether as a volunteer or on her own initiative, Alta spent much time visiting and tending to people in nursing homes. Eventually, in 2006, at 97 years of age, Alta realized that she could no longer live independently. She moved to the Homestead of Montrose, an assisted-living facility, where she spent her 98th birthday and lived comfortably for her final six months.

Alta's legacy also includes a series of oral histories on cassette tape at the Wilkinson Public Library in Telluride. Her recollections are said to be both amusing and very detailed. In many ways, Alta served as Telluride's walking history book, as she was quoted over the years in countless articles and books about Telluride and its people.

Although Alta had no children of her own, she always considered her nieces and nephews as her "kids." The "kids" include: Karen Smith of Sunnyvale, Calif.; Vickie Smothers of Sacramento, Calif.; Lauren Grosz of North Highlands, Calif.; Jim Cassio of Folsom, Calif.; and John Cassietto of Sacramento, Calif..

Alta requested no services immediately after her passing; however, the family does plan on arranging memorial services sometime in the spring or summer in Telluride. Interested parties may contact Jim Cassio at 198 Willow Creek Drive, Folsom, Calif. 95630 to request that they be notified of the services.

In lieu of flowers, a memorial contribution may be made in Alta's name to Hospice & Palliative Care of Western Colorado, PO Box 1804, Montrose, Colo. 81402.