

Why Louise Thoresen Killed Her Husband

By Judith Anderson

On January 29 it will be 16 years since a naive young woman from a working class family in Chicago had a blind date with a handsome, rich young man.

The young man alternately charmed and belittled Louise Banich, who was 21 and a schoolteacher at the time. At the end of the evening she had decided 20-year-old William Thoresen's derisive remarks about her slum background were not something she wanted to hear again. She never wanted to see him again.

But Thoresen, then 20, was not a man to give up. His persistent calls convinced her she should see him.

They were married on New Year's Day two years later.

Louise Thoresen is a widow now. She shot her husband to death three years ago in the bedroom of their home in Fresno.

She was acquitted on a charge of murder. It was self-defense, the jurors decided.

The years between that fateful first date and William's death, at the age of 32, were filled with shoplifting and bombing "pranks," buying and transporting ille-

gal weapons and arrests for the Thoresens. The years brought growing terror — for William, the fear of being locked up in a mental institution, for Louise, the fear of being killed by her often-violent husband.

But today, what Louise Thoresen, 37, remembers most are "the good things. The bad things fade away, as they should," she said last week.

Mrs. Thoresen, with the help of novelist E. M. Nathanson, has written a book about her life with her late husband.

"I wanted to call it, 'William, Sweet William.' I loved that title," she said, smiling brightly and disarmingly while twisting her hands nervously.

But her publishers already had a book with a similar title, so she settled for "It Gave Everybody Something to Do," a reference to a series of dynamitings William Thoresen instigated in Tucson in 1964 to relieve his "boredom" and scare the daylights out of a radio announcer he knew.

"The bombing seemed like fun," Louise, a slender woman with clear, deep-set blue eyes, wrote of the escape she and some friends participated in.

William Thoresen, whose father was president of a Chicago steel company, was always finding things for other people to do, it seems.

"He was an extremely charming man," Mrs. Thoresen recalled. "People liked him and feared him at the same time."

Her memories of her late husband are loving and defensive. "I loved his humor," she said, smiling again. "I loved the way he would pick up stray animals and bring them home.

"He was charming. Everyone thought he was."

It was that charm that swept young Louise, an "ugly duckling" who had had only a few dates with three other men and no marriage prospects when she met William, off her feet.

Increasingly during their ten-year marriage, she was aware of his mental instability — he had made his first visit to a psychiatrist at the age of 3. "A psychiatrist recently described him as a volcano type smoldering underneath," she said.

Why didn't she leave him? "Because I loved him," she explained simply. And because, she said, she didn't like to fail at anything, and divorce would have meant failure.



MRS. WILLIAM THORESEN
Of her marriage, she remembers "good things"

She did file for divorce "two or three times," she said, but went back to William each time because he needed her to help with pretrial work. Both were arrested in 1967 in San Francisco for illegal possession of automatic weapons and ammunition — some 15 tons of it that they kept in their mansion at 2801 Broadway.

(The huge house is for

sale now. Mrs. Thoresen wouldn't quote the asking price, but in 1970 it was valued at around \$200,000.)

They were convicted of a variety federal firearms violations in Fresno in 1969.

Thoresen had a record of trouble with the law that ranged from beating up a neighbor who had kicked his dog, to stealing \$26.36 worth of posters from a ferry

She never got a divorce because 'I loved him'

terminal in Maine, for which he was convicted of a felony. The weapons and ammunition he amassed, albeit illegally, were to have been for a gun museum at Fisherman's Wharf, according to his wife.

A year after their conviction in Fresno, and after days of beatings and verbal threats by Thoresen against his wife, she killed him. (The night before his death he had told her that he had hired a man to kill his brother, Richard, who died of gunshot wounds in 1965. Thoresen said he had later killed the hired assassin.)

"The hardest thing about it was knowing I was killing someone I loved," she said last week. "And knowing he manipulated me to the end to do what he wanted."

Thoresen had wanted to die, she said. He had tried to hire someone to kill him once in Los Angeles but failed.

"He knew if he had asked me to do it, I would have," she said. But he didn't — maybe, she believes, because he knew his wife would have gone to prison and left their son, Michael, in custody of his parents, whom Thoresen hated.

Michael, now 11, attends school in San Francisco and

lives here with his mother. Mrs. Thoresen runs an antiques - finding service and is planning to open a plant and antiques shop here.

It is for Michael and for her late husband that she has written the book, she said.

"William and I talked about doing a book. He had a lot of experiences in boarding school before I met him. He always said he could write a book that would make 'Catcher in the Rye' look like kindergarten."

Her son, Michael, had a lot of questions about his father after he died.

"One day I said, 'Michael, what would you think if I wrote a book?' And he said, 'I'd love to read it.'"

Louise Thoresen described herself as a different person from the one who fell for William Thoresen. She has outgrown her "young and dumb years" and survived a marriage that she thought "totally destroyed me."

"I've learned that no one has a right to control your life," she said.

"Now no one tells me what to do. I'm not accountable to anyone . . . It's my life and to hell with everyone else."