

WILLOWS IN THE WIND



By Bill Renfro

WILLOWS IN THE WIND

April 29, 2019

Printed in 2019

Dedication

This book was written in loving memory of my wife of 70 years. She was loved, not only by me, but by all who knew her.



Wilma L. (Babe) Renfro
March 8, 1932 – December 13, 2018

Husbands, love your wives. Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. Ephesians 5:25

CONTENTS

WILLOWS IN THE WIND	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
ABOUT THIS BOOK	6
CHAPTER 1: FAMILY	4
CHAPTER 2: SCHOOL YEARS	10
A WORD FROM THE WRITER	42
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	43

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is the second of two which show my life as simply as possible from birth to the time in high school when I met my future wife. The title of the other book is From Cotton Patch to Paradise and tells in greater detail the things told in this book.

As you will see as you read these two books, I was not trained as a writer, but am just trying to write a story that can be passed on to the generations which may follow, the story as a book of remembrance of Bill and Babe (Pool) Renfro.

These books have shown me that once you have found your God selected Life Mate, you cannot take them for granted. You cannot miss a day without kissing them, looking them in the eye, and telling them that you love them with lots of hugs and touching them when they walk by. The last words my wife ever said to me was, “You never kiss me enough,” Don’t let that happen to you.

Do not let your lives be as Willows in the Wind, just swaying to and fro.





CHAPTER 1: FAMILY

I was born October 17, 1930 to a mom and dad who were share-croppers. To those who may not know what that means, a land owner furnishes the land, the farmer (or share-cropper) does the rest. At harvest time, the farmer gets to keep 2/3 of the cotton and 3/4 of the grain.

Our farm was located about 10 miles from the little town of Dawson, Texas, located 18 miles from Corsicana, on Highway 31 towards Waco.



The farm my parents worked was only about 60 acres, so life during the “Great Depression” was not easy. My mother worked in the fields along with my dad for the first 13 years of their marriage. Then, I came along, unexpected I guess, because now dad had to do all the work by himself.



BILLY RENFRO

We lived in a small three-room house, which was built in the cheapest method of the times; which was, that the outside wall was also the inside wall. There was no framing, except the walls to support the roof. The inside walls were covered with pasted on “building paper,” if you could afford it, to keep out the wind and cold. There was no

electricity in the country in those days, so we used kerosene for cooking and heating. We also had a “state of the art” ice box. The ice only came by once a week. The ice man stopped his truck at the road and cut from his large block of ice that he carried, the

amount that mom required posted on the front window each week on the day she knew the ice man would be there. Ice delivery day was a big day for us, because we looked forward to seeing a car that came down our road.



Between the old, dilapidated house and the barn sat an old dilapidated garage. The walls were leaning so that the door wouldn't fully open; and, because of its size, was probably built for a buggy, but we used mainly to store junk.

Down from the garage and even with the house was the barn. From my earliest memories, it was home to two large and scary animals that dad called mules. They were his only help in running the farm. I know that we had all the other animals: chickens, pigs, cows, and whatever was



**BILLY RENFRO AND HIS
GRANDMOTHER**

needed, including a garden, everything we needed to be self-sufficient for our small family to survive. Times were hard, I know, but I thought we were ok because everyone was just like us.

I am now an old man whose memory fades a little each day, but this lowly beginning seems like yesterday.



Four years after I was born, along from somewhere, came a little brother. For a long time, I thought God had sent him just to take away some of the attention I was getting. Maybe so. But I soon learned to put up with him and we had some good kid times together.



BILL RENFRO AND HIS DOG FIFI





THE RENFRO FAMILY: CHARLES, JENNIE, DEWEY, BILLY

Yes, we went to church, every time the doors opened. My mother was the main pianist for a church for 72 years of her life, beginning at age 13. Of course, when I was in a baby carrier, I was too young to remember each word and song. There is lots of information still stored in my head, if I could just get it out.



JENNIE RENFRO WITH HER LITTLE DARLINGS WAITING FOR DAD SO WE COULD GO TO CHURCH

CHAPTER 2: SCHOOL YEARS

FIRST GRADE

I started school in Dawson first grade when I was seven years old because my birthday fell in October. I remember being in class there, but I don't recall how I got there. I know that we had some sort of old car, but I think that my dad would have been in the fields instead of driving me to school, and I would have remembered riding a bus.

Before the next school year, the land owner, who was the father of my dad's best friend at school, moved us to a larger and better farm that had been his father's first land purchase and the beginning of his family's wealth. We had it much better there. This place had a much larger and better house and also a windmill which pumped tank water from the tank behind the barn, up to a large storage tank behind the house.

By this time, I was old enough to begin taking on some of the family chores. One of my jobs was to run down to the tank and turn off the windmill when the storage tank was full. I must admit that there were times that me playing made me ignore the windmill, and the backyard got flooded. I thought this was fine,

and the chickens liked it. One of my other jobs was to go to the barn, before daylight, and feel around in the dark to find enough corn to feed the pigs while dad milked and fed the mules. I must confess that those big ole' ugly-looking and mean creatures scared me to death. As I grew larger, it was my pleasure (ha, ha) to get to ride behind on one of these lovely creatures on the roller, at planting time. Our crops were bigger and better at this place and soon dad was able to buy a used tractor and get rid of these dreadful beasts.



SECOND THROUGH SIXTH GRADES

I was now to begin my second grade of school at a small country school down the road about three or four miles. In those days, the country was full of homes, families we all knew. Looking out of a window which faced toward my new school, I could count seven farm houses, some of which had kids which would soon become my new classmates and friends.

Today, all the homes, barns, fields, trees, and everything notable or fillable have all disappeared. Only the land, now farmed by the large corporations, is still there. The country as I knew it, now only exists in this old mind of mine, but it's locked in forever.

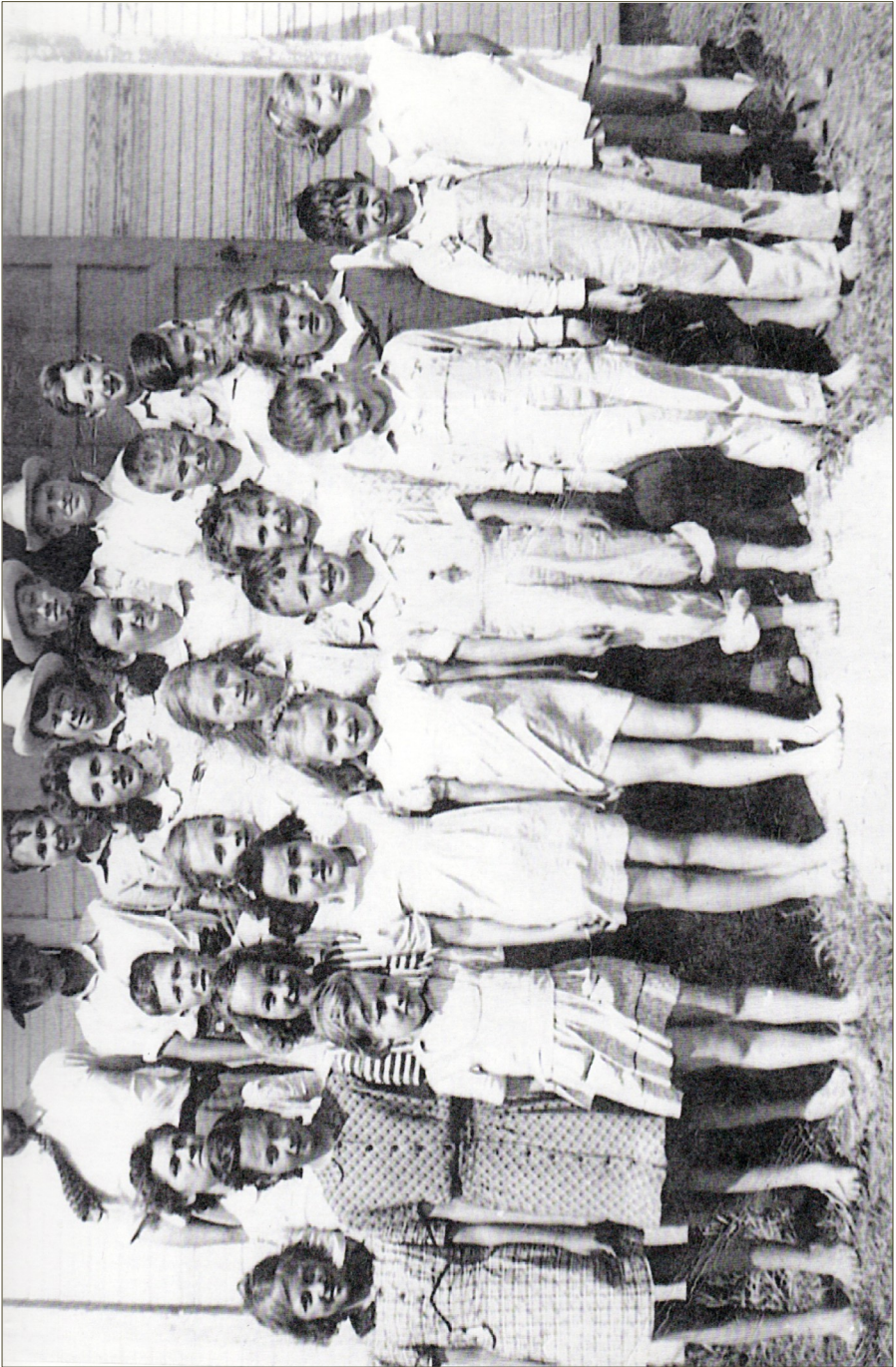
The school where I would be going was named "Headquarters" and was located in what was the headquarters of a large ranch. The school was a large white wood building, square in shape, with windows all around, a large front with a covered roof, and stairs up the front with the necessary rails along each side of the porch.

The school had four large rooms down each side of the building with an auditorium down the center of the building running to a stage area with the back door in the center. I guess that may be because if something bad happens, they might need a place of quick exit. The two classrooms each were for three grades. The school only had two teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Cox.

Mrs. Cox taught grades one through three. Mr. Cox taught grades four, five and six. They lived in a house on the school grounds.

The backdoor lead to a small porch with the only concrete walkway which lead to the long, covered horse stall building where we each tied our horses and where they remained tied, each in their own stall, until school let out. The walkway continued left, past the horse stalls down to the boy's outhouse, and to the right. The walkway to the right led to the girl's privy, which was located closer to the principal's window. I guess this was a safety location so that he would see any of the boys who may have figured out that girls were made for more than just to tease, and were trying to slip in.





ENTIRE STUDENT BODY OF
HEADQUARTERS SCHOOL: BILLY IS IN
THE SECOND ROW ON THE TOP ON THE RIGHT

School there was fun, our teachers were great, and we made many lifetime friends. One of the things Mrs. Cox did which I remember most, was she had each student buy a coping saw and get our grocery stores to save the apple boxes for us. Yes, in those days, almost everything came in wooden boxes, even cookies. The apple boxes were the best. They were about 3 feet long and about 1-1/2 foot wide. They were nailed together which allowed easy removal of the soft and really good sides. Our teacher got a large and low workbench, which she placed at the rear of the classroom. From somewhere, she came up with drawings of small projects that small kids could make using small tools. We would work on our projects on cold and rainy days to make our lucky parents some great, never to be used, things their little darling had made. I think that this remains one great idea by a teacher and was what gave me my life-long love of wood working.

School was not the only thing that went on. With kids who grow up on a farm, as I grew bigger, I also was elected, by my dad to keep an area of a crop that was close to the house and along the road that led to the edge of our neighbor's farm. Dad thought I could keep this area well-groomed in case a car drove by and happened to look in that direction. So, after school each day, when I got home, I had chores to do or cotton to hoe. I was told that this stuff would build a man of strong character. Seems sort of like that stayed a close thing to me.

SEVENTH THROUGH 12TH GRADES

Well, I finally “worked” my way through grades two through six at this little country school and was to go on to the 7th grade in the big city of Dawson.

Beginning the seventh grade at Dawson was not as bad as I thought it would be, because, as you may remember, I had gone there in the first grade and knew lots of my new classmates. Classes there were just the same as any other, just one dang thing after another. The only two things I can remember about the classes was 1). The lady teacher had the biggest butt that I had ever seen on a person. I will kid you not, I would bet that you could set a glass of water on her rear end and never spill a drop; and 2). One of the city boys that I had known from first grade and who claimed to be my best friend, told me one day that I was getting too big for my britches, and at recess, he was going to take me outside and teach me a lesson. I must have been getting more attention than he felt I deserved or something. So we went outside at recess and I, not knowing what to expect, soon learned that he was going to throw me to the ground and hold me there until I had confessed all my sins. His first mistake was forgetting that he was dealing with a country boy. After about five or so minutes, he said that by now I had “Learned my lesson,” so I let **HIM** up. That problem seemed to be solved, and we did become good friends. I must have learned something in this class I don’t remember, but the one,

most important thing that would change my life forever I missed, because hidden among all of the new classmates at this new school, I had overlooked the one little country girl who would later become my life mate for 70 years, mother of my children and the love of my life.

Grade eight was rather boring but I somehow got through it and was looking forward to grade nine, which would mean that I would become a high school freshman and get to be with the big boys. I could also join the football and baseball teams.

The school had a basketball team but did not have a gym. The team had to work out on the ground and had to play their games at the other team's school, so I opted out of that one.





THE OLD DAWSON SCHOOL BUILDING
THAT BABE AND BILL ATTENDED
FROM THE SEVENTH GRADE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

I played football and baseball all four years of high school but wasn't very good because it seemed too much like work to me. I got enough of that at home. The school only offered the basics, like most schools did, but because we lived in an agricultural community, they did offer agricultural classes for the boys (mandatory) and homemaking for the girls. I guess they thought we would all be farmers and housewives. I made it through agriculture because I was raised on the farm. Most of school bored me because none of the classes caught my interest. I remember that there was a locked-up room next to the agricultural room and through the door I could see dusty remains of an old, one-time, science classroom, and I thought, "*Now there is something I could get into.*" I have remembered this and decided that school had never given me a reason to want to go to college.

We were still living on the second farm, that I remember, which was the old "Leggott" farm that I mentioned was the family homestead.

A school bus picked up all the kids on our road unless it rained. The thick mud would not let the bus pass, so we were on our own. Thankfully, dad had an old "Ford Model A" which could make it through the sticky black clay, which seemed to want to suck you under. Dad would have to drive about 5 miles to highway 31, which was paved and where we could be picked up.



FRESHMAN

Not long into my freshman year of high school, dad was able to buy his own farm, which was only five miles from Dawson, and close to the paved highway, but our road was still dirt. The farm was only 120 acres, but it was HIS! The farm had cost him a whopping 10,000, which his friends told him he would never make back. By not having to share the crops with someone else, the farm soon paid for itself many times over and was sold after his death for six times what he paid. I wish I had been as smart.

The year I became a freshman was about 1945. The little town of Dawson was booming and where you wanted to be. You could go to the Ritz theater and see a western, a cartoon, a serial, world news, eat popcorn, all for about 25 cents. You were allowed to go outside the theater, while all of this was re-run for the second time, and then return and see the midnight movie, all for the same price. What a deal!! Between movies you could go to the drug store and get an ice cold “soda water” for 1 cent. Hamburgers were 15 cents.



The streets of Dawson were full of parked cars and you could hardly walk down the sidewalks for the number of people walking to and fro.

Saturday was the day when all of the country people came to town to get groceries for the next week or do all of their other shopping. Dawson, at that time, was home to 1017 souls during the week, but boomed on Saturdays. At this time, the town had four grocery stores, two dry good stores, one bank, two barber shops, two doctors, one drugstore, one post office, three filling stations, one saddle/shoe store, one hardware store, one pool hall and four churches.

The town may have been larger at one time because there was one block that had old abandoned rundown brick buildings with no roofs, still hanging on. Overall, it was a good place to have grown up. The town now is mostly gone and all that remains is the memory of a bygone era when life was good, and everyone was somebody.

Most of the old houses have been removed and replaced or still there, rotted and fallen down, with no one to remember their glory days or even who once lived there. So goes the days of our life.

As a freshman, I got to do some really fun things, like having football practice on the school yard where the ground was so hard you couldn't drive a nail through it, getting to walk the five miles home when practice ran late and I missed the bus, getting to take cold water showers after practice, etc. We all thought the school board had not yet heard of the invention of the water heater.





DAWSON HIGH SCHOOL "BULLDOGS"
FOOTBALL TEAM. I'M NUMBER 53.

SOPHOMORE YEAR

Up to now, I had never been interested in girls., but a friend of mine from the old country school days, who was two years older and two grades up, had his girlfriend get me a date with her best friend. I don't know why, there was nothing to do for kids of our age in Dawson except go to the picture show, so I thought my friend was old enough and trust worthy. His parents let him drive the family car. On date night, he picked me up at home and we drove into town to pick up the two eagerly awaiting girls. We picked them up at his girlfriend's home and headed for the movies. This was my first date ever, so I did not have a clue what to do, so once we were seated at the back of the movie room and had finished out popcorn, she reached over, got my hand and held it for the rest of the show. Man! I thought there is nothing to this dating stuff. What I didn't know was this was just a warm-up round. When the first show was over, we all went outside, where we got into his car and drove to a dark secluded place in a seldom traveled back road. When we stopped the car, lights were turned off and she grabbed me and started kissing me. Wow! I never kissed a girl before, so I didn't really know what to do except enjoy it, but I soon got the hang of it.

This girl and I dated until she graduated two years ahead of me and went off to college. She was nice enough for dating, but I never thought she was the one that God had picked to be my life mate.

JUNIOR YEAR

Summer was over, the crops were in and it was now time to start my junior year of school. I couldn't wait. At least it was better than farm work. Little did I know that this would be the year that would change my life forever. This was the year that I struck gold.

The school year started off with as much fun and excitement as all the previous ones had, until one day in English class. The girls usually sat at the front of each class and the boys at the back, where they thought they were out of the teacher's view, so they could listen if they wanted, or could just goof off. Well, one day, when I was goofing off, for some reason, I noticed a girl in the front row that I knew was dating one of the guys in the class, and had never really paid any attention to me, except that she had gone to the little country Baptist church next to the Methodist church about 100 feet away. I have no idea why she had turned back and looked directly at me, and I have no idea why I winked at her, because I had never really noticed her, and we had been in the same circles since the seventh grade. I was really confused when she winked back. I thought she must have been just another girl who was smitten by my good looks and my being on the football team. But, because she had winked back, I thought the manly thing to do was to ask her out. I asked the guy over on the row she

was on to pass a message down to her asking if she would care to go to the picture show with me on Saturday night. I was shocked that when she had gotten my most generous offer, she again turned to me and shook her head “Yes.” This really shocked me because the note that was sent up the line to her had passed through her boyfriend. But I guess that when you “got it, you Got It.”



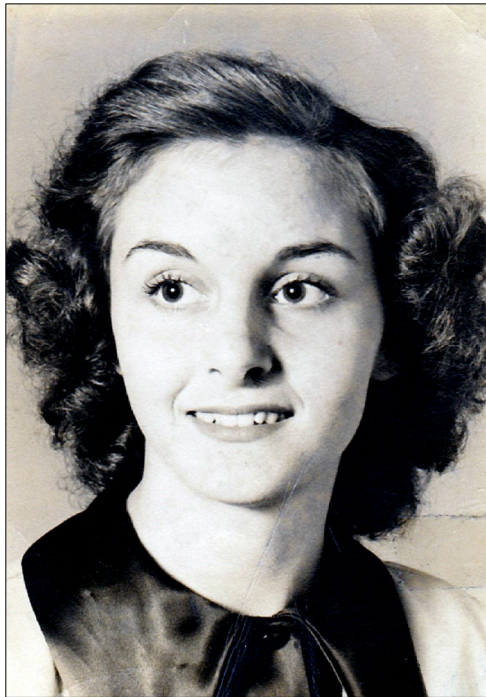
Well, when Saturday night finally came, wouldn't you know it, it rained, and we lived on a dirt road. I missed the most important day of my life. But the sun came out on Sunday morning and I walked the muddy road up to the highway where my friend picked me up and we headed to the city. My friend told me that my date had been smart enough to spend the weekend in town and was waiting to make our Saturday date into a Sunday date. "*Wow, what a Gal,*" I thought. Turns out I was right. We picked up my friend's girl where my date was staying. She jumped off the car and ran to the door and got my gal. As soon as she got in the car, I grabbed her and gave her the biggest kiss that I knew how. I must have been a born lover. She must have liked it. She didn't jump out of the car.



We spent all afternoon driving the area, kissing, driving and kissing, stopping and kissing, kissing and kissing, what a gal! It only took this one date to know that we had fallen in love, me with her and she with me. I knew that I wanted to spend my whole life with this, still a girl of sixteen, that I had seen who had lived just down the road where we had both brown up. I think that this was a God thing. My life was changed forever.



BILL IN HIS OLD FORD TRUCK



BABE

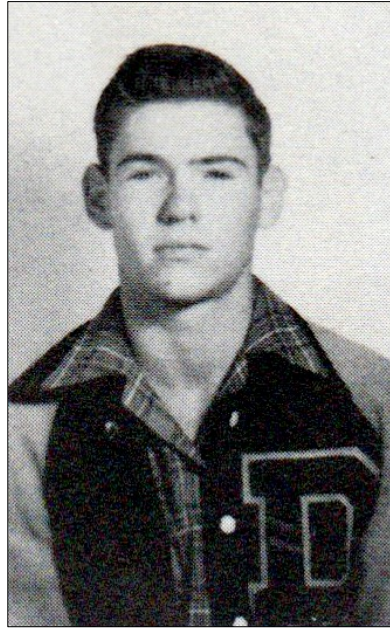
SENIOR YEAR

We continued to see each other through our junior and senior years of high school, seeing each other as often as we could, which was in school time because most of our classes were together. I think we spent more time looking at each other than at school work. I remember one day I was called to the superintendent's office, who went to the church where I went and was a friend of my dad's, where he told me that the first grade teacher had informed him that she had caught me hugging my girlfriend in the first floor hallway, and he asked me what did I have to say about it? I told him to tell her that this was the girl I was going to marry. His cruel and unusual punishment was to tell me that from then on, to find a better location to do my foul deed, not near the first floor.



My sweetie was an “A” student, which always made me wonder why she chose me? I was a B+ “with an occasional “A” but I hated to study and learned mostly from hearing. I looked forward to graduation. School was a penitentiary to me.

About two months before the end of our Senior year and graduation, I went to Waco and bought the prettiest wedding ring set with the money that she and I had saved from our lunch money all year. It wasn’t much to excite a girl over, but it showed love.





DAWSON HIGH SCHOOL GIRL'S PEP SQUAD

Wilma L. (Babe) Pool is the pretty one
on the right end of the first row.





BABE POOL AND BILLY RENFRO

Two kids who couldn't stay away from each other long enough to have their graduation pictures taken. We knew that we would marry.

Graduation was over and school was out. We spent the summer at home with our families working the fields and bringing in the harvest and seeing each other as often as we could.

I was offered free scholarship to the new county junior college if I would drive the bus from Dawson to the college each day. The deal was good, but at that time in my life I had all the school I could take. I had decided to farm with my dad. She was hoping I would take the offer I had because she wanted to be an English teacher, but I was afraid that if she went off to school, she might find someone she liked better and I could lose her. Later we got a big rain, which made it impossible to work the fields. This, I told her, would be a good time to get married. I should have known she would be disappointed about school, and she was wearing my engagement ring. She said OK. I married Wilma L. (Babe) Pool on August 7, 1948, a marriage that lasted 70 years until she passed away on December 13, 2018.

We farmed at Dawson for five years before moving to Houston, where we lived and worked for 55 years before retiring to Dallas, where I still live.



MR. AND MRS.
BILL J. RENFRO,
MARRIED
OCTOBER 8, 1949



BABE (POOL)
RENFRO



OUR FIRST SON,
DARRYL L. RENFRO



BABE (POOL) RENFRO
WITH OUR FIRST SON,
DARRYL L. RENFRO



BILL RENFRO WITH OUR
FIRST SON,
DARRYL L. RENFRO





BABE RENFRO

She grew more beautiful each year.



BABE RENFRO



BABE RENFRO AT HOME IN RICHMOND, TEXAS.



BILL AND BABE RENFRO



**BABE AND BILL RENFRO AT HOME
IN DALLAS ABOUT 2015**



A WORD FROM THE WRITER

I am Bill J. Renfro, age 88 and the husband of Wilma L. (Pool) Renfro, who passed away December 13, 2018. We were married for 70 years.

I have written a book in her memory in which I try to give the story of her life as a loving wife, mother and grandmother. In many, many ways I know that I fell short of the expectations she had when we married as teenagers and these memories will haunt me forever, but she loved me anyway. The name of the book about her is titled From Cotton Patch to Paradise and is our love story and her legacy.

This book is about my life and how it led me to the one God had picked to be her life mate, mother of my children and the love of my life.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the following, without who's help and support, I could not have made this book:

Darryl Renfro

Luana Stodghill Vaupotic



In Memory of

Wilma L. (Babe) Renfro
March 8, 1932 -
December 13, 2018



Ephesians 5:25
Husbands, love your wives,
even as Christ also loved the church,
and gave himself up for it;