

IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

RUTH VELIE WILLIAMSON

Written

By

June R. Brickhouse

DEDICATION

To my Grandmother, Rose Velie, who helped care for and love; Philip, Jeanie, David, and I, not only during Mom's lifetime, but after her death also. I owe her a debt I know I will never be able to repay during my lifetime or hers.

To my kids; Aaron Jason, Janel Ruth, (whom I named after Mom) and Christopher Gordon, who shared the memories of the grandmother they never saw, while I was writing this story. We laughed together and cried together. She will live in their hearts through this valuable experience.

Most of all, a big special part of my gratitude is to my husband, Gordon; who encouraged me to write this when it first entered my thoughts, and he encouraged me to finish it when I didn't think I could. I love him more than he'll ever know.

I hope this story will serve as a living memory to our beloved Ruth. She was certainly a special person to all of us in many ways.

IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

RUTH VELIE WILLIAMSON

She was born May 7, 1932, on Billy's Island; in the middle of the Okefinokee Swamp, Georgia. The first daughter and 6th child born of Lewis and Rose Velie. There were six more children to follow, but the youngest and last, Martha, died three days after birth.

My Grandmother told me Mom weighed 12 pounds when she was born. Some people thought she had been hidden for three months after her birth, and that Grandmother was telling a fib.

You would think that a child weighing 12 pounds would be a healthy and robust child all her life. But, for my Mother this wouldn't be so. Her life was filled with illness and poor health. I don't think she ever really felt good physically, but she seldom allowed anyone to know how badly she really felt.

At the age of 16, she became ill with Brights Disease. This is an infection that permanently damages the kidneys, eventually wearing them down to a point that they can't function normally.

It was during the first year of this illness, that she bore her first child. Philip was her pride and joy, her first born son. Philip almost killed her. The doctor told her if she had any more children it would kill her.

Nevertheless, she brought three more children into being and she loved us dearly. Jeanie, myself and David, our younger brother came into her life not too long after. Her life, though miserable at times, did not stop her from loving and looking after her kids.

After her divorce from my youngest brother's dad, her romances got slim. One romance I remember well. I can't tell you how she met him but, I do know his name and that he worked at "Floridaland". We got in free one time and had so much fun, we were hoping it would last. He took us many places and I recall sitting in the backseat of our car admiring the lovebirds and hoping he would become our dad. I so much wanted a dad.

The same day they were married, he disappeared; and we never saw or heard from him again. I know Mom was heart broken, but what could she do? She still had four mouths to feed and worry about, and no one to turn to, but her family for help.

To go into a little bit about her family, I have to explain. You see Mom was very close to her parents, and her brothers and sisters. Without their love and support, this story might have taken a different turn. She could always depend on them when a problem arose. One very good memory I still have is, we were never alone. Some families grow apart but this one is still growing strong, having a family reunion every year.

So back to my Mother's love life; I guess most men do not want a ready-made family, so the men she did date were few and far between.

She worked most of her life to support us. She was a housekeeper for awhile until she made a career as a cook. And a good cook at that! She took that after her mother, who was and still is an excellent cook! Mom is still known for her specialty "Italian Chicken". Some of my relatives wanted me to make it for them, but I never could get it right, the way she made it. You see, my Mother let my sister do most of the cooking. Jeanie had the responsibility of David and Me when we were a little older. I guess I was too absent-minded and "Prissy" to do much.

Mom had many wonderful talents. One of them was playing the piano and organ. She could play with the best. At one time, my Mom went to a piano teacher in town because she thought she needed to learn a little more. The piano teacher asked to "play a little so I can hear where it is you need help". Well, she did, and he stood there amazed. He said, "Lady you need to give lessons, you can play as good as any body I've ever heard."

My Mom was choir director, youth teacher, and played the piano and organ for our church services. Since she stayed on the platform for most of the service; Jeanie, David, and I, would spread out and find someone to sit with. Usually I wanted to sit with someone I could play with, but once she heard us being noisy she would mouth the words, "Wait until I get you home"-then I would have to sit with my grandma. Really I didn't mind, because she would let me root through her purse and play with her things or eat up her Sucrets. I learned to sing alto very well sitting with my precious Grandma.

After the service, my Mother usually invited family and friends over for a light snack, so her threats hardly ever came to pass. Once in a while she would whip us for good measure, just when we thought we were getting away with something. A few times I would fake being sick just so Mom would feel sorry for me and not spank me. It worked, but not always. After awhile Mom caught on.

My Mother could also draw good, write music, and plays.

One play she wrote, brought the house down. It was about a mother who had teenage children who were sinners. The play took place on a night during Young People's Service. It started out with the Mother (played by Mom of course), talking to her teenagers about the Lord, and pleading with them to give their heart to the Lord, before it was too late. They laughed and mocked her and said they were still young and had plenty of time.

I was in the back with my uncle. We were right behind the platform doors prepared to sound-out a car crash. My uncle was to break a glass jug and I was to throw an armful of pots into the air-to come crashing down for a full effect.. We got our cue-my cousin was outside revving up his car engine. I heard a screech, so I threw the pans up and my uncle broke the jug with a hammer. Wow, it sounded so real that I got goose bumps all over. As my cousin, my uncle, and I, went back into the church, the alter was full and it didn't look like there was a dry eye in the place. The Lord used my Mom that night, I know.

Through her lifetime, when my Mother needed faith and courage, it was there; as simple as that. I know God had his hand on my family. That I cannot ever deny.

One morning, when I was eight years old, my Mother came in my room to awake me for school. What met her eyes was disheartening. As she put it latter, "June, you were swollen twice your size." She often told me later "from the moment I saw you that morning, I knew what it was, the doctors couldn't even figure out what was wrong with you." It was like scenes from her girlhood coming back before her... I had Brights Disease."

I was kept out of school for about three months, my bare feet hardly ever touching the floor. I had to either be carried or wear slippers when I went anywhere. I remember my Grandmother being there to watch me so I wouldn't get out of bed. I still don't remember being in any pain, if anything, I was sore from getting shots in my behind every time I went to the doctor. The shots were to bring down the swelling.

My Mother knew then that the only answer was prayer. I can recall her often telling people what happened the day I was healed. "I was at work in the restaurant," she said, "and while I was cooking, I was praying, worried so much about June and what would happen to her. I was bent over the oven when I heard a voice, just like you and me talking say-I'm going to heal June tonight. It came out of the vent as plain as day."

That night, I remember being carried up to the front of the church for special prayer, and you know... God healed me! I could feel it! I will never forget the tears and prayer my Mother suffered for me over that period of time.

The fear of losing my Mother came early in my life. Often she would have 'fainting spells.'

She was playing the piano one morning for church service, when I heard a 'plonk'; she had fainted on the piano. All I could see was the men trying to lift her head off of the keyboard, and help her somewhere to lay down. The parsonage just happened to be built on that church, thank goodness.

Another time, I will never forget. It was a weekend when Mom had to work and she gave all of us strict orders to clean the house. But as you know, kids have a mind of their own and the work wasn't done. I knew what was coming so I went over to my Grandmother's (who lived next door) and was helping her when I heard Mom come home. I know my sister and brother still hold it against me for that, but, that is something I can't change unless I could live my life over again.

Both my brother and sister got a hard whipping, and I just knew I would be next. Just when I thought Mom was coming to get me, I saw her come out of the house, down the steps, and fall right there in the front yard. All of us ran over to see what happened and were worried sick about what we would see. She had fainted. Little did we know that through the years she would get progressively worse.

If I dwell on the sad things that happened it wouldn't describe Mom's life the way it was. Troubles were the farthest thing from her mind; or so it seemed. My Mother was young at heart, and cheerful most of the time.

When my Mom, her mother, and her sisters got together, you would think they were a bunch of school girls. When they went shopping they stopped everywhere, sprayed perfume, sized dresses to their figure, (usually with a lot of laughs) tried out recliners, sampled bakery goods, and the list goes on.

My Mom's humor was a natural gift. Out of the blue she would say something funny, and finally she'd get it, after we were rolling in the aisle.

One day she, her mom, and sister were riding up town when she spotted a black policeman. She thoughtfully said, "you know, that cop has been black for a long time." Of course, Mom never lived that one down. They were still telling it months later and still laughing about it.

When I was about eleven, my Mom grew a little independent and we moved to Palm Bay; about five miles from Melbourne, Fla. where I was born. This was when we got to really know my mom as a person, not just a "mother". Those three short years of living in that rambling two story house was filled with good memories.

This house was huge compared to the small two bedroom, cinder-block house we just moved out of. It had three big bedrooms upstairs and three large rooms and an entrance hall downstairs, with a front and back porch.

It was situated on three and one half acres of land with one side leading down to a large creek. The property was loaded with mango trees and vine covered oak trees. It was beautiful; perfect!

My Mother's talents went to work right away on this home. In no time it was made into a cozy, lived-in house with her special touches. Her love for flowers, as shown in her creative arrangements were put all over the house. She especially loved roses. Her love for decoration took on a festive mood at holidays. The whole downstairs would be transformed into a winter wonderland. This was our home and for once we could have our Mom all to ourselves.

Soon it was to become home for some of our cousins at various times during our few years there, which, as my Mom felt, "the more the merrier". My Mom seemed to have a special place in her heart for young people and they knew it. When they had problems or just wanted to talk, she could always take the time to listen. Our cousins who came to live with us all grew to love my mother very much, and I can see why.

One of our cousins, Mike Velie, learned a hard lesson in respect for my Mom. You could say she was little, but she was mighty! While he was staying with us, he used to start this little song, along with his brother Steve, everyday at the dinner table. "No body likes me, everybody hates me, so I'm going out and eat worms"...and course Mom, having a weak stomach anyway, would tell him to stop. After a couple of nights of this Mom really got tired of him not listening. She abruptly stood up beside the table and proceeded toward him. Now picture this...a big teenage guy about 5'8, and 180 lbs. being chased around the kitchen and living room and cornered in the hallway by a 5'2.150lb. woman. I don't know how she did this, but she got him down on the floor with his arms behind him and she was sitting on him!! He was yelling, "give, give, Aunt Ruth, I give. I won't do it anymore, I promise!" And of course he didn't sing that song any more after that, but he still loved teasing her. A lot of kids loved teasing her-- but know this one thing, she always got em!

Her love for people far outweighed her love for material things. She had a heart of gold, as was put to the test many times through her life time. There was a lady evangelist and her assistant that used to visit our church about once a year for a revival.

One night my Mom invited them over for her specialty, "Italian Chicken" squash, mashed potatoes, iced tea, ect. My Mother had received a nice coat and was so proud of it she wanted to show it off. So, after supper she asked the lady to come upstairs so she could show her something. Once there, Mom took out her coat and held it up so the lady could get a good look at it. To my Mothers surprise she said, "Ruth, what an answer to prayer. How did you know I needed a coat?" She went on and on while Mom stood there dumbfounded, not knowing what to say. She finally told her it was quite alright, and that she hoped she enjoyed it. That was my Mom! Giving away the coat right off of her back. If I remember right, the Lord gave her another one just as good, or better than the one she gave away. Even if that lady had told her that she needed one; without even seeing the coat, Mom would have given it to her, no questions asked. My Mom had a good heart and the Lord blessed her for it. And then there are other times when things happen to us; things we can't explain, that only God knows the "why".

Mom came home one night with what looked like grease, all over her face. We knew something was wrong just by looking at her. She said she had been the only one at work, because she had to close up the restaurant and clean the kitchen. The oven's pilot had went out and Mom went to light it. The fumes must have built up, for it blew up in her face. Her eyelashes, eyebrows, and the front part of her hair had all been singed to a crisp.

The hair on her arms were singed, her face and her arms turned brown from the heat. She drove herself to the hospital where they applied some burn medicine, then she drove herself home. After all this, Mom thanked the Lord that it wasn't worse, as she explained to us what had happened.

We had many good times with my Mom and to mention them all would more than a book. We often went out at night for an ice cream, and one night in particular stands out to me.

WE were stopped at a red on a four lane highway. (U.S.1) Next to us were some teenage guys revving their like a hot rod. Mom revved her motor. In fun us kids said, "Mom lets race 'em. C'mon Mom, you can beat em." To our surprise, once the light changed--we were off, racing down this highway cheering my Mom on. "Go Mom, go!". She would laugh when they waved at us from the other car because she knew what was going through their mind. Here's this mama with kids, trying to beat us. There's no way Mom would come to her senses and slow down. The race was over, we gave it our best and got our thrill. We saw in our Mother something other kids couldn't see. She had class! There were several other times Mom did the same thing, and we loved every minute of it. Zooming down the highway, what a sight!

We went swimming a lot; one sport Mom loved. She used to get free tickets from her bosses to take us to carnivals. I think we went to every carnival and circus that ever came to town. I think Mom enjoyed them as much as we did. She also took us on trips, all over the state of Florida to various attractions.

We went to Wisconsin a couple of times, and she showed us where she went to school (only to the 8th. grade) and also pointed out the house where she was raised during part of her childhood.

The house was two-story and stood back from the road a little ways. As she looked at the house you could tell she was re-living the good memories of when she was growing up. It had a lot of yard that her brothers, her sisters, and her used to play in. The house was about two miles from the school where she went. She talked of walking all the way to school every day, through all kinds of weather, because she loved going.

All the memories of Wisconsin are good and still vivid to me after all these years. Every house we visited were filled with Mom's cousins aunts, uncles, friends, etc. Every arm was open with love, every table filled, I mean filled with food.

My best memories were the farms where we visited. While Mom was talking and catching up on old times, us kids were watching pigs and cows, riding horses, eating rhubarb, roving the barns and playing hide and seek in the haystacks.

One of Mom's aunts (Grandma's sister Lizzie) had a big farm, and the thing that stood out in my mind the most was that they had six meals a day! At every one of those meals, the table was filled with more food than I have ever seen in one place, at one time, except for our church dinners-on-the-ground.

My Mom's sister, Aunt Nancy, lived in Indianapolis, Indiana. So instead of going straight to Wisconsin from Florida, we used to stop by and visit Nancy a night or two each way.

I was 13 when my Mom met her husband. My brother was in Chicago, Ill. and on our way there we stopped at our Aunt Nancy's. My aunt and uncle owned a pizza shop named "Jobils" and Joe delivered for them part-time. Joe just happened to be single at the time we visited, so they introduced him to my mother. As Mom and Joe put it--it was love at first sight! Joe had told us about their first date and how Mom was playing "footsie" with him the whole time under their dining table at the restaurant.

She would blush and say, " Now Joe, you were the one that couldn't keep your feet to yourself." They would both laugh about it and look at each other lovingly.

So, back to Florida we went and after 6 or 7 months courting through the mail and on Grandma's phone, they planned their wedding. We were all so excited. Finally we were going to have a real live Dad! So we moved out of our big house and into Mom's brother John's house, until Joe could come down and take us back to Indianapolis with him. It was there also that Mom became Mrs. Joseph Williamson, and it marked the beginning of the happiest three and one half years of her life. It also changed all of our lives considerably. Besides a step-dad we acquired a step brother and sister too. So a new way of life began and our old way of life moved to the backs of our minds, but not our hearts. Our love for Florida never left us and the memories were often rekindled in many of our family talks.

For the next three and one half years, Mom's love for Joe grew very evident. It was more like discovering love for the first time and nourishing it with as much togetherness as possible. Even though we had a dad, we slowly started seeing our Mom in a different light. Now we had to share her, which had some getting used to. Sure we had our ups and downs with our Step-dad, but I learned later in life, a deeper respect for him, because he did love our Mom, and took us kids to raise despite what we thought of him.

Jeanie, David, and I used to get a kick out of watching the lovebirds. They would start by laughing and kidding each other. Then they would start tickling one another and pretty soon they were chasing each other through the house, only to end up on the couch exhausted, but loving every of it. Just thinking of those times, still makes me smile.

Anytime Joe or Mom had a disagreement about us, it was discussed behind their bedroom door. They hardly ever argued in front of us. They often went off for a ride to be by themselves for awhile. Mom enjoyed being with Joe as much as she could.

Not long after we moved to Indiana, Mom got a job at the Waffle House. She liked it pretty good, after all cooking was her specialty. Mom got Jeanie a job there after she graduated. I remember us kids getting more hugs and kisses out of Mom and drawing closer to her more than ever. We were all very close, and she made sure it stayed that way.

Of the times that I really felt close was when Mom would gather Jeanie, David, and I around the piano to sing. We really harmonized well and I always enjoyed hearing Mom play. Her favorite song was " Dear Jesus, Abide With Me" and all of us including Joe (who was hoarse most of the time I knew him) would sing it. I can still picture my Mom's pudgy hands running across the keyboard, just like she was created especially to make music for people to hear.

Mom and us kids also got a nice tour of Indianapolis often. Joe used to take us all over that city. Museums, Statues, Malls Conservatories, the Indy 500, and sometimes through the suburbs surrounding Indianapolis during the summer and fall. We all loved going for rides through the country around fall, because the trees being so pretty that time of year.

My favorite place that Joe and Mom had taken us was the Children's Museum. I don't care how many times I went through it, I always seemed to discover something different. Mom liked the front part of the museum where they had antiques and clothes that dated back to the turn of the century.

Mom loved antiques and knick-knacks. She had a rose pattern set of China which she treasured and always had on display in our China cabinet.

She had numerous other glassware and Knick-knacks she treasured almost as much scattered through the house.

In the summer of 1970, two and a half years after Mom married Joe, she had to go to the hospital for some tests. She had been sick off and on, so the doctor had her go, so he could find out what was the matter. I know one test was to draw out some bone marrow. I still don't know what the results of the test were but I do know they wanted to put her on a kidney dialysis machine.

She hated being there, and when the doctor wanted to put her there again, she refused. She said, "June if I go back in the hospital, I know I won't come out alive." The doctor also told her she wouldn't live to see her next birthday, which was almost a year later.

That winter before Christmas, Mom wanted to go to Florida and surprise Grandma and Grandpa for their 50th Wedding Anniversary. When we got there, we discovered it wouldn't be until the following year. That didn't stop us from enjoying ourselves though. Little did we know the troubled times that lay ahead for all of us.

When we got back to Indiana, our lives pretty well settled back into a routine again. Jeanie graduated from high school mid term in January of 1971 and David and I continued on with our schooling. Philip, who joined the army and then had gotten married, was away. They had a little girl named Kathy, which was my Mom's eyeballs. She loved Kathy and adored her, especially since she was the first grandchild in our family.

We celebrated Mom's 39th. birthday and I still have a picture of her smiling really big with her gifts around her. We enjoyed it so much knowing we could make her happy, just by being there and giving gifts with our own hard earned money.

It seems that not long after her birthday she had to quit work. It was getting hard for her to work because she was getting sick more frequently. I can remember mornings when she would get up so sick. She would throw up until there was nothing left in her stomach, and she would be gagging. I got up and asked her if she was alright and she would laugh it aside and say, "maybe I'm pregnant." I thought at first she was serious, but then I knew it was worse than that.

On my birthday June 21st, Mom and Joe gave me a ring with a pearl in it as a birthstone. It was the best present I ever had. But deep inside I had another birthday prayer..that Mom would get well.

Soon, Grandma and Grandpa came to take care of Mom. Joe had taken so much time from work, he couldn't take any more. Mom's condition made it necessary to have someone constantly with her.

Kaye, (Philip's wife) and baby Kathy came to stay with us too, which I know brightened Mom's life a lot at that time. We sure had a house full, but we kept making room for more and more. Joe kept asking Mom if he could take her to the hospital, but she refused.

Mom's lungs started filling with fluid and she couldn't lay flat to sleep anymore. Her old boss from the Waffle House had a hospital bed sent over so she could adjust the way she laid, but she couldn't lay in that either. She said she felt like she was suffocating. So, the only way she could sit was straight up in a chair; the same with sleeping except she used a pillow to lay on the table. Her legs broke out in little water blisters from the knee down, and eventually started oozing. Grandma started putting bandages on her legs and had to change them often during the day. She also did the cooking and made sure us kids did what we were supposed to do.

I remember taking turns with Jeanie and my sister in law, sleeping on couch cushions on the floor which was beside the table where Mom would sleep. This way we could listen out for her in case she needed any thing

The worse Mom got, the more relatives came; to help, console, or just be there in case we needed anything. My brother, Philip took leave from the army so he could be near Mom too. But he left to go back the day before she died. Kaye and Kathy left to go back to Kentucky to her family. None of us even had any idea that Mom was going to last very long.

Also, the day before she died, my aunt Nancy had asked me to baby sit at her home across town. The next morning I called to see how Mom was doing, and they told me she was doing a little better, and that she had eaten a good breakfast. It eased my mind for a little while, until a little later Jeanie called and told me to come home because Mom was getting worse.

I asked a friend to come and get me and take me home and on the way we stopped and got something to eat. you see, I didn't realize how much worse she had gotten.

By the time I got home, Mom wasn't really comprehending anything. Nancy and Jim arrived and were upset because they weren't told sooner. But I really didn't know Mom's condition either until I came home from babysitting. Joe recently told me that when he was with her that day, around noon, my Mom had lifted her head and told him that she loved him. She laid her head back down, never to lift it again.

I went into the bed room to lay down, but really couldn't sleep. I heard Joe and somebody trying to make her comfortable, so she could breath better. I wasn't in there long before Jeanie came in and told me Mom was now dying.

I went into the dining room where she was sitting, with her head down on her arm on the table. She was breathing very shallow, and I got down and tried to get her to talk to me, or anything. She looked at me once, then looked around the room at everyone that she could see.

She took a few more breathes and that was all. Mom laid still. She had quietly, peacefully slipped away. They carried her over to the hospital bed and called for an ambulance to take her away. It was then I had to leave, I couldn't bear to see them take my Mom away, knowing I would never see her again in this life.....

My personal thoughts and notes;

Mom died on Sunday, July 18th, 1971 at 6:00pm. There were quite a few people there as I recall; Grandma and Pa, Aunt Nancy and Uncle Jim; Jeanie, David, Joe, his son Bill, and his daughter Nancy; an Evangelist, and his wife, and I. If there were anyone else, I just can't remember.

At Mom's funeral, there were so many flowers, one sent by her brother in Korea, which was a heart shaped wreath filled with orchids. My brother Philip, bought her a little white cross with some precious little rose buds on it, and placed it in her hands.

Several of Mom's brothers sang her favorite song. "Dear Jesus, Abide With Me." There were many people that paid their respects including my friends.

My Mother was well loved by many, and her memory will always be with my family. We have all mourned her in our own ways, ways that would only touch those close to us.

The last part of this story was very difficult to write. It was so much a part of me, that I felt, I was there living it again. This story was not written to point fingers, to dredge up any past, or to throw guilt on anybody.

We all do things through-out our lifetime that we later regret, especially when we are young.

But once we are grown and matured we should put our past behind us, and live for today. We can't bring those years back and change them even if we wanted to.

Mom knew she was going to die, and all of us will one day go to the grave. Mom's death reminded me of a babe going to sleep, so peaceful, as if the Lord was standing there assuring her that we would all be taken of.

This story is dedicated to my family. My Mother while she was living did not like to see us sad, and I know the same goes for now. We all played an important part in the memories that we created. Let them all be good for her sake.....

Love to all who read this. June Brickhouse.