

REMEMBERING MY GRANDPARENTS

~ by Janice "Jerri" Cox Brown

All my kin know how I love "family" and family history. Strong family ties have always been important to me.

As a child I have always considered my mother's people a close and loving family. Even though aunts, uncles and cousins lived a considerable distance apart, we usually managed to visit several weeks in the summertime at my grandparent's house when they lived just outside of Clayton, New Mexico, on what was then called "the old Rixie place." Uncle Webby told me once when he drew a map of the ranch for me that it was the biggest ranch in Union County. We usually rode the train to Clayton and I always looked forward to these visits and the good time we kids would have with our grandparents and all of our aunts, uncles, and cousins. Four of my cousins were near my age, Annette, Phyllis, Gwendolynne and Carolyn, and while we didn't get to see each other too often, we always had a good time together when we did. Della Kay, Cathy, Myrna, Laverne and my sister, Reggie, didn't come along until several years later.

Many things make these visits outstanding in my memory...such simple things as learning to play various card games, taught us by Uncle Richard and Uncle Webby, while sitting on a quilt-covered bed in what was called the "North Room." I remember that my grandmother's portrait, framed in an old-fashioned oval frame, hung on the wall in there. She was 18, wearing a beautiful, high-necked white dress with ruffles. She always boasted that when the picture was made, she could fasten a man's size 18 shirt collar around her waist. She never weighed much more than 100 pounds.

I remember very well the white stucco house my grandparents lived in on the Rixie Place outside of Clayton, New Mexico in the 1940s. The old stucco house with lightning rods on top had a cellar with two rooms – one where the milk separator was kept and one used as a pantry. It was lined with shelves for grandmother's canning jars. Steps from the dining room led down into the cellar and it was always a race among us kids to see who could go down the steps with grandmother and be the first in line to turn the handle on the stainless steel milk separator. The faster the handle was turned, the faster the milk and cream poured out into two separate containers, and the faster the little bell would ring as you turned the handle around. The cream was stored in five and ten-gallon milk cans that were hauled to the depot when they were full and set out on the freight dock. Grandmother was very clean with this chore and I remember lots of boiling water and white towels that she used, before and after, to wash and rinse the separator parts when the milk had been separated. She boiled the white towels later and hung them out to dry on the clothesline. I liked to watch her take all the separator parts apart and then store it away to be used again the next day.

And then there were all those windmills to climb – one at the house and one around each water tank in various pastures. We would climb up the ladder and look out upon the ranch land as far as we could see, from horizon to horizon. If we promised to be very careful, granddaddy would let us use his binoculars.

It was during those summer that most of us (however young) learned to drive the old Model "T" Ford. We drove about two miles from the house to bring up the milk cows in the pasture just over the hill. This pasture was next to the railroad tracks that we came into Clayton on when we rode the train and we always passed by the turnoff to the ranch before pulling into Clayton. The highway ran alongside the railroad from Texline to Clayton. Richard or Webby usually met us at the depot.

Anyway, when we went after the cows in the old Model "T," Uncle Richard would set the throttle to go about five miles an hour, and he would let us take turns at the steering wheel while he got out and rounded any stray cows back into line on the path to the house. Usually, there were about seven or eight cows to be milked so getting them back onto the path home only took him a minute or two. But when he was outside and we were inside guiding the steering wheel, we were really driving a car! There weren't any fences and only bare flat land between the highway and the house except for the hilly incline, so there was nothing that we could run into. I was about seven or eight then and he was about 15 or 16. We really thought we were big when we got to drive this old car that had to be hand-cranked to get it started.

Probably some of the best times my brothers, Bubba, Douglas and I had were spent riding horseback. We were taught how to put on the bridle and saddle and how to cinch it really tight so the saddle wouldn't turn. Usually when we visited, Uncle Dink, Aunt Alletha, and my cousins, Annette, Phyllis and Della Kay would drive up from Pampa so we could all be together. My cousin Gwendolynne lived on a nearby ranch with her parents, Uncle Webby and Aunt Sadie. There were about six of us near the same age. When granddaddy knew all his grandchildren were coming, he tried to have a horse for each one of the kids who were big enough to ride, even if it meant borrowing one or two from a neighbor. There was Brownie and Buck, and a mean black horse that they called "Old Nigger". (I cringe at using that name now, but that was the way it was. I'm pretty sure that was his name when granddaddy bought him.) We spent hours riding and roaming around the countryside playing cowboys and Indians. Sometimes we rode down to Perrico Creek and took a picnic and went wading. The only trees on that whole ranch, in fact the countryside in Union County, were the cottonwood trees that grew along the creek beds. Except, there were cottonwood and elm trees that had been planted around the house, garden and water tanks.

One day we spent nearly an entire day riding our horses, picking up and stacking "green bones" of cows that had died out on the rangeland. Later granddaddy would come along in the pickup, we would point out where we had stacks, and we would load them up and take them to town to be sold for making fertilizer. Whatever money they brought, granddaddy gave it to us.

Another time I remember that my brother, Bubba, rode his horse down the railroad tracks near the highway. ("Bubba" was his nickname of course; his real name was Gilbert). Leaning way out of the saddle and barely holding on, he made it appear that his horse had run away with him and that he was about to fall off. Once when he tried this, a truck driver coming from the direction of Texline, stopped his truck, got out and started running back toward him. At this turn of events, Bub promptly sat up straight in the saddle and raced for the house. Although he often laughed about the great joke he had pulled, he never tried this trick again!

Then there was the time that Bub and I offered to help Harvey Walker, the hired hand who was not much older than I was (at the time I was probably 13 or 14). We were to help Harvey drive fifty of granddaddy's best heifers over to a better pasture near a place called Thomas, about 20 miles from the ranch house. Grandmother packed the three of us a lunch and we started out early, just as the sun was barely breaking the horizon. We took our time, plodding along the narrow roadway between two fences most of the time, and driving the cows at their own pace. It was really a simple thing to do and we didn't have a bit of trouble moving them.

It was nearly lunchtime when we reached Thomas, and granddaddy met us there with a trailer so we could load up our horses and go home. However, Bub and I decided that we weren't very tired so we would just ride our horses back the way we had come. I think Harvey was probably relieved because there was only space enough for two horses and he would have had to ride his horse back home if we had loaded ours. So Harvey loaded up his horse and he went home with granddaddy. Later, we wished we had too! By the time we got home at late dusk, we were so weary and saddle sore that we could barely get off our horses. We rode in those saddles in every possible manner to change positions – sideways, front ways and backwards. And we did quite a bit of walking now and then, leading our horses along the caliche trail. I distinctly remember that I didn't wear a hat that day and I only wore a short-sleeved blouse with my jeans. About 12 or 14 hours of hot sun that day turned me as brown as a pinto bean, and for the rest of the summer, I had very little desire to get on a horse.

When we were very little, I can remember that all of us grandchildren had to take naps on quilt pallets spread out on the living room floor. I always did hate to take naps. I think I was afraid I would miss something important the adults were talking about. Anyway, I had to pretend that I went to sleep so I would be sure to get my share of the candy granddaddy always passed out when we woke up. I expect, more often than not, I really went to sleep. But I always told my cousins that I didn't.

Granddaddy usually went to Clayton once every other week or so on Saturday and brought back whatever grandmother ordered in the way of staple goods and groceries. When granddaddy went into town, he always came back with a pretty good-sized sack of hard candy – lemon drops, orange slices, peanut butter logs, and peppermints, to name a few. It was always enough to give everyone some for the rest of the week, I think!

For the most part my grandparents were always pretty self-sufficient. Grandmother canned from her vegetable garden, and they had any kind of meat they wanted from the ranch – beef, pork, rabbit, turkey, squab, and chicken, and plenty of eggs from the henhouse. We ate steak a lot for breakfast instead of bacon. Granddaddy and my uncles, as well as the ranch hands, worked so hard around the ranch everyday that they had to have something substantial. Sometimes they didn't come in to eat at noontime because they were working so far away on the ranch somewhere. The men went fishing when time permitted and occasionally there was a fish fry.

Something else stands out in recalling my childhood memories and that is how we all learned to milk cows. Mother insisted that we learn how to help out. The barn was real long, with a tin roof, and was out from the house for quite a little way. There were a

number of milking stalls. No milking machines of course. In fact, no electricity out to the ranch. Those were the days when you milked by hand.

Granddaddy and grandmother always had several cows to be milked because grandmother sold cream in big ten-gallon cans that had to be taken to the depot regularly. Once when all the cows were lined up in their stalls and my mother and her brothers were milking, they started a “milk fight.” I think my uncle Richard started it by squirting milk on my mother, who returned the favor by squirting him and then turning to the other side and squirting milk on Uncle Webby, who was milking in the stall next to her. Then he squirted it back on her and on Uncle Dink, who was on the other side of him. They all went to it with gusto. Before they stopped they were each soaking wet with warm milk, and there was very little left in the milk buckets to take to the house. We kids laughed a lot and jumped up and down at seeing such a spectacle! Grown people hollering and laughing and behaving like a bunch of kids!

I recall another time when some of us tried to ride the cows around the barn lot until granddaddy came out and put a stop to it, saying that they cows wouldn’t give any milk that night. The barn was also a great place to play hide and seek. I remember that granddaddy had nailed about 10 nail kegs along under the eaves of the barn for the pigeons to roost and nest in. Sometimes we would climb up on the rooftop and rob the nests of pigeon eggs and young squabs that grandmother would cook for our breakfast. We liked the pigeon eggs because we thought they were cute and were so much smaller than a hen egg.

Nobody else in the world could make biscuits exactly like my grandmother. We have always lamented that we did not get her recipe. Of course, she didn’t have it written down and I’m not ever sure she had a recipe book of any kind, anyway, biscuits made today would not taste like hers without being made with fresh buttermilk straight from the churn, or using a dollop of lard out of a bucket. She kept her flour in a flour bin, a slanted pullout drawer from the cabinet. I always liked to watch her make biscuits. She made at least two cookie sheets full every morning and more when there were hands to feed. She kept the leftover biscuits in a breadbox on the cabinet. (All my married life I always had a breadbox just as my grandmother did.) I always thought her cold biscuits were just as good as her hot ones. I liked to make cold “chow-chow” sandwich biscuits and Richard liked to spread his biscuit with mustard and put sliced onions on it. We kids also liked to help churn the milk and help her make butter to put on those biscuits!

Being the oldest grandchild, it may be easier for me to recall the old sideboard in the dining room where grandmother kept all her dishes. She had a lot of plates, each with different pictures on them, and as soon as we arrived at her house, we all picked out our own special plate to eat in at each meal. The same with her spoons. She had a variety with differently designed carved handles and we each claimed one for our own while we were visiting. For as long as I can remember, she always kept her spoons in a big thick glass mug in the center of the long dining table, along with the sugar bowl, so they would be handy for anyone who sat down for a cup of coffee. Having it there saved her a lot of steps and kept so many from tracking through the kitchen to get a cup and spoon. (To this day, I keep a stand of spoons on the bar, handy and waiting for the coffee drinkers. I always think of my grandmother when I wash the spoon mug.) I remember that her dining table was always covered with red and white-checkered oilcloth that could be

easily wiped clean. There was too much work going on around the place to be fancy, although she occasionally used a white tablecloth for Sunday at dinnertime.

Grandmother was an excellent cook, not only when she was cooking for her family, but even when she was cooking for as many as 10 or 15 hired hands at branding time, sheep-shearing season, or butchering time.

One summer they built a bunkhouse to be used by ranch hands who were there for several weeks at a time. When it was empty, we would go out there and read or play cards where it was nice and quiet. Lillie and H.B. Altman worked for granddaddy one summer and maybe for a year or two, I'm not sure. They lived in the bunkhouse, which was had two rooms, I believe, and it was pretty large. H.B. was Uncle Launcie's son, and my granddaddy's nephew. H.B. helped granddaddy outside and his wife, Lillie, helped Grandmother with her chores. He and Uncle Webby were about the same age and were always good buddies when they were growing up. Later, Harvey Walker lived in it during the summer when he worked around the ranch and broke horses for Granddaddy.

At one early period of time granddaddy had several greyhound dogs that they used to go rabbit hunting with. Grandmother cooked the jackrabbits they killed in a big pot and mixed them with big pans of bread that she made to feed the dogs. If they killed cottontails, those were cooked for us.

I know most all of the grandchildren of Bertie and Regina Altman will remember helping grandmother fill the kerosene lamps. Kerosene was called coal oil back in those days. There was no electricity out on the Rixie place – as with all the other ranches around – it was too far out of town and the REA (Rural Electric Association started in the Roosevelt era) hadn't made it out there at that time. I used to like to help grandmother trim the wicks and shine the globes when they got smutty, which was just about every night if they were used very much. Even now when our electricity goes off and I have to light my two kerosene lamps, the smell that comes from the oil when they are first lighted never ceases to remind me of my grandmother's lamps.

Coal oil was not used for strictly lamp oil back then. Anyone who stuck a nail in their foot or got a bad cut went looking for the coal oil can to pour a little into the wound. For some reason, it seemed to prevent infection.

Having no electricity out on the ranch also meant there was no radio and thus not much to do in the way of entertainment. When we weren't out riding horses and exploring part of the 11,000-acre ranch, we were reading or playing cards. We played cards a lot. And pitched horseshoes some. That's all there was to do. A time or two I think we went to Clayton with Richard in the old pick up truck and went to the show. But I don't remember doing that more than once or twice over all those summers.

Sometimes, in looking back on those days, my mother and I wondered how my grandparents could tolerate so many people converging on them at one time. But they never complained. In some ways, I know it made a lot of extra work for them, but we all tried to pitch in and help do the chores around the ranch, like going for the cows, feeding all the hound dogs, carrying five-gallon cans of slop to the pigs, gathering the eggs, milking the cows, looking for turkey nests, and bringing in buckets of water for the kitchen from the windmill by the garden fence. All the Altman kids and grandkids were

workers and we tried to help pay for our room and board when we went visiting. I know we made it a lot easier for grandmother because we kids took over all her outside chores and she could stay in the house and visit with the other ladies in the family. Living in so remote an area, they didn't have a lot of company and women for her to visit with, so in some ways it was a treat for grandmother to have a chance to visit with her daughter and daughters-in-law and talk "woman talk." Besides, grandmother never learned to drive a car so she didn't go visiting at other ranches very much. Sometimes when she needed something for herself or broadcloth for a new quilt, she would ride into town on Saturday with Granddaddy to make her purchases. Most of the time she sent for things by Richard or Uncle Webby.

Later on after Uncle Webby and Aunt Sadie married, they lived over in another house on the Rixie ranch about two miles from Granddaddy and Grandmother. We always liked to go over there and visit because they had an orchard of apple and apricot trees, and in season there was fresh fruit growing on the trees. Their water tank down by the windmill had the largest goldfish in it that I had ever seen. There were several different colors and some weighed a pound or more. They used the baby goldfish to go fishing with.

I don't want to leave out something about grandmother's garden down close to the water tank near the windmill. How peaceful it was there with the wind rustling through the leaves of the cottonwood trees that surrounded the edge of the garden. No other sound can compare to the wind blowing through the leaves of a cottonwood tree, and they have their own special smell too. I used to take an old quilt and a book and spend pleasant hours down there reading. Webby and Richard read a lot of westerns – *Western Romance*, for one – and I really liked to read those when I was a teenager. In that day and time magazines didn't contain the smut they have in them now.

We all delighted in helping grandmother irrigate her garden by digging little trenches and turning the water in – a few rows at a time – and watching it trickle and run all the way to the other end of the row. It was fun to watch the dry brown dirt grow dark as it absorbed the water. I expect my grandmother had the most weedless garden in the county because she worked some in it everyday. Early in the morning after the breakfast chores were done, she would put on her bonnet and head for the garden. Richard and Webby kept it plowed for her, but she did most of the hoeing. I especially remember the rhubarb she grew there and the delicious pies she made.

Since Grandmother couldn't afford machine-made carpets, she made her own durable handmade, braided rugs to add warmth to her household. She braided these rugs out of rags, and later out of old nylon hosiery, which she dyed in dark reds, browns and blues. The tight knit of the braids made them strong, and for longer wear, they were reversible. These rugs were practical, and kept out the cold and covered the cracks in the floor of the old house. She gathered rags of all colors, shredded them into strips, and plaited them like pigtails. Then she took the braided sections and hand-stitched them into oval or circular coils. It usually took her about a week to make a rug, depending on how much outside work she had to do. Her rugs provided a little bit of color in an otherwise

stark room. Most of the time, they were placed beside the beds so no one had to step out onto a cold floor in the wintertime. Her rugs and the heavy quilt-covered beds were extra welcome in the freezing winter months of New Mexico, when fierce northern winds were howling around the corners of the old house. To this day, when I hear the wind whistling and howling around the corners on our house, I instantly think of my grandparent's home on the Rixie Ranch.

In addition to the many quilts she made, which is quite another story, she made her own pillows and bed ticking. For many years at least one of her beds had a feather mattress and pillows, which she made from bed ticking and filled with feathers from geese and ducks.

She told me once she never did learn to crochet, but she liked to do embroidery work when she could find the time.

When I was about eleven years old, she gave all her granddaughters a surprise Christmas present. She made each of us a doll quilt, patterned just like her big ones, using the "Trip Around the World" pattern. Mine had a royal blue backing. She made white sheets and pillow cases to match, trimmed with royal blue to match the quilt. In addition, she made a matching size mattress out of new blue-striped mattress ticking with two pillows. A complete ensemble. I think she made these for her five oldest granddaughters – Annette, Phyllis, Gwendolynne, Carolyn and me – and we had only to furnish the doll and doll bed. Mother and I made my doll bed out of wooden orange and apple crates, painted white with decals on the headboard. I was so proud of mine because I still played dolls a lot. When Reggie was born, we took her outside and made her picture lying in my doll bed. She was about a month old.

When Conrad and I lived with Grandmother and Granddaddy later on in the 1950's, I went several times to the dry goods store with Grandmother to buy material for quilts. She chose the best kind of broadcloth to be sure it wouldn't fade and which of course would stand a lot of wear and tear. Once I helped her "put up a quilt" in the quilting frames suspended from the ceiling, and we pinned the fabric to the frames, basted in the cotton filler, and pinned the quilt on. Then she taught me how to quilt. I could never quite get my stitches as small as hers, which were the most minute stitches I ever saw. Several times she made me take mine out and start over so it would resemble hers as nearly as possible. The design was her favorite "Trip Around the World."

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THE 1950'S

I have a number of memories during this period of time. Conrad and I lived with Grandmother and Granddaddy from the summer of 1950 to the first month or so in 1951 when his mother became ill and we had to move back home.

One of my favorite things to recall was helping Grandmother make cheese one day. We made two kinds – cottage and yellow cheese. We stuffed cheesecloth bags full of the curdled milk mixture and hung them over the clothesline to drain, then, we turned and squeezed the bags until all the “whey” was out. It was the best cheese I have ever put in my mouth! Her cottage cheese could not be compared to cottage cheese like we buy at the store today. And her yellow cheese had a nice creamy texture and was easily sliced once it was cooled. It was wonderful and tasted better than any I have ever eaten since. Making cheese was an experience I will always remember.

Grandmother took a cup of coffee to Granddaddy while he was still in bed every Sunday morning. It was his one day to stir a little later in the morning. He didn't believe in working on Sunday unless it was absolutely unavoidable. She also made pancakes for breakfast every Sunday morning, cooked to perfection on a griddle in the middle of her stove. Each pancake was about the size of a silver dollar. Her recipe that I asked for at the time is written down in one of my cookbooks, and I have included it in several other cookbooks, including one recently published at Southside Bank, where I work. I still use her recipe to make pancakes for my family. Like Grandmother, I usually cook them on Sunday morning.

While living near Clayton on the ranch, I also went to my first auction sale with Grandmother – something I knew absolutely nothing about. I had never attended one before. It was an estate sale and since she couldn't drive a car, Grandmother asked me to take her. It was a fun thing to do. There was something she thought she might buy, having read an ad about it in the newspaper, but the bidding went too high and she finally gave up. I can't for the life of me recall what it is she wanted.

Grandmother and I did a lot of things together and I learned a lot from her. I took her to buy groceries when needed and we went shopping at the department store to buy cotton broadcloth fabric, which she used to make her quilts. However, we didn't go to town very often, only when necessary. She taught me how to cut the fabric squares for quilting. She always used to same quilt pattern, called “Trip Around the World” and she used bright, solid colors for her squares.

One day Grandmother broke her reading glasses and asked me to take her to the dime store to find some more. She tried on several pair before she found some that suited her and that she could read through. I had never known before that eyeglasses could be purchased at the five and dime store. Another time, Granddaddy dropped his hearing aid in the pig trough and I took him to Amarillo to get a new one. He had to have a hearing

aid because he was absolutely deaf without one. When he was trying to start his pickup, unless he had his hearing aid on, he could not hear when the starter caught and he would sit there and grind away on the starter, and all the time the motor was already running, but he couldn't hear it.

Another time, I took Grandmother to the furniture store and she bought a new oak bedroom suite, which had been repossessed. It was exactly like a brand new one and had not a scratch on it. It was blond colored which was popular at the time. She was so proud of it when it was delivered; we put a new bedspread on the bed and she just sat back in her rocking chair and admired it for a long, long time. It completely changed the looks of her bedroom. It had a double bed, a chest of drawers, a dresser with four drawers and a large round mirror, and a night stand to match. She said it was the first time in her married life she had ever had a complete matched set. *(In 1992 after my mother died, I gave this bedroom suite (which had been in storage) to my nephew, Walter Turner, when he bought his new house in Florida. Walter has always loved antiques and was very proud of it, and I was glad for him to have it.)*

One fall day, Grandmother asked me if I would help her recover the seats on her dining room chairs that matched the kitchen table. It was another new experience for me and turned into quite a job. We repainted the chairs and table white, and then covered the chair seats in a pretty dark red vinyl. It turned out to be a difficult job because the screws were so hard to get out of the chair bottoms. We had to unscrew each chair seat, carefully fold and tack the vinyl covering, and then screw everything back together again. She was so proud of them when we finished. Grandmother was an energetic little woman, barely five feet tall. For years, she wore her gray hair twisted into a knot at the back of her head, but in later years she had it cut and got a permanent. Her mornings usually started out in the kitchen and she stayed busy all the time. There was always something to do on the ranch.

It was while we were living with grandmother and granddaddy that Jennifer took her first step to granddaddy when he held out a red ball to her. He played with her down on the floor every single night for about an hour after supper. He really enjoyed rolling the ball and playing with her and of course she loved it too.

Our daughter, Teresa, reminds me a great deal of her great-grandmother. Teresa was born two years after Jennifer on January 9, 1952. She is about the same build and weight and stands a certain way, just like Grandmother used to do. Teresa is also full of energy and fortitude like Grandmother. Both she and Jennifer were fortunate enough to know and love Grandmother and Granddaddy in later years.

I have always regretted that our third daughter, Amy Elizabeth, did not have the opportunity to know Granddaddy and Grandmother Altman. Amy was born November 8, 1969, two years after my grandparents died. But she was fortunate enough to get to know Uncle Webby and Uncle Richard, Aunt Alletha and Aunt Mary, so she has heard many of these stories I am setting down here.

Also that fall, Grandmother and Granddaddy, Uncle Dink and Aunt Alletha, Uncle Webby and Aunt Sadie, and Mother and Daddy planned a trip to Los Angeles to go see Uncle J.L. and Aunt Mary, David and Carolyn. Reggie was just a little girl about six years old. Just after Mother and Daddy arrived at Clayton, they discovered Reggie had the mumps so they didn't get to make the trip and stayed with us.

While the others were gone on this trip, Conrad borrowed a truck and we gathered all the hegari that had been cut and stacked in bundles, shaped like teepees, in the field. Conrad drove the truck, and my daddy and my brother, Bubba, drove two pickups. My brother Douglas was along on this trip so we had plenty of help. We loaded the bundles of grain and hauled them to the ranch where we unloaded and stacked them in long stacks 10 to 15 feet high about 40 or more feet long. By the time we got through stacking, which took the better part of two or three days, the haystacks were higher than our house at home. We have a picture of Douglas with a pitchfork standing on top of one of the haystacks. Granddaddy had a big smile on his face when he came home and saw that it was harvested and stacked next to his barn lot. He thought all this work would be waiting for him when he got back.

Grandmother and Granddaddy always kept rabbits in a pen wherever they lived as far as I know. Sometimes grandmother made rabbit meatloaf and sometimes she fried young tender rabbits just as you would fry a chicken. They had several large rabbit pens with about 20 or 30 rabbits, counting the little ones. Every other day or so their pens had to be cleaned out and this was one of my jobs. We have a picture of Jennifer standing beside the rabbit fence, holding the little hoe we used for raking. Actually, she had not learned to stand alone yet and the rake helped keep her balance while I took the picture with my camera. If she had not had the hoe to steady her, she probably would have sat down before I could get the picture made. Jennifer just loved to watch the rabbits through the wire of the pens.

One day it turned really cold with temperature dropping below zero by nightfall. Granddaddy had two old sows who had just had a new litter of little pigs born that day. We had to gather these little pink baby pigs up in two boxes and take them to the house by the kitchen stove so they wouldn't freeze that night in their pens.

Conrad learned a lot about cattle raising, tending and doctoring them from Granddaddy while we lived on this ranch with my grandparents. He still talks about the things they did and things he learned from Granddaddy. Probably the thing he mentions most often is that granddaddy thought a man wasn't worth his salt if he didn't wear a hat. One time while cutting hay a guy came by looking for work, but Granddaddy said, "Shucks, he wouldn't have been any count. He didn't have a hat on."

Conrad's mother, Trudie Brown, and his little niece, Judy Gilliam, 5, came to see us in January to help celebrate Jennifer's first birthday. Grandmother and Granddaddy wanted to take Trudie on a picnic to the Rabbit Ear Mountains, which had once been an extinct volcano. It was sunny and only slightly cool when we left Clayton one Sunday morning, but by the time we got to the mountaintop, the wind was blowing fiercely and it was so

cold that we had to sit in the car to eat our picnic lunch. We made a number of pictures on this outing. I remember that Granddaddy and Conrad had to hold their hats on the keep them from blowing away.

In February, Conrad's mother was diagnosed with cancer and given only four months to live. Of course, we packed up and moved back home to Summerfield to be with her, as they had not told her how bad things really were. She lived only two months after her surgery and died on April 16, 1951.

My brother, Bubba, moved to Clayton and lived with Grandmother and Granddaddy when he graduated from high school that summer in 1951. Uncle Webby called and told him there was a job opening in Safeway that would turn into a manager's job if he wanted to come and see about it. Bub was tickled about this opportunity and hitchhiked to Troup to catch Daddy while his engine was in the siding there to get his permission to go, which was given.

Bub worked in the store during the day and helped out with the chores around the ranch. He stayed at Clayton until the man who had previously had his job came back from the Korean War and wanted his old job back. Bub moved home then and Daddy helped him get a job on the Missouri Pacific railroad as a fireman. We have several pictures of Bubba on the ranch, especially one of him and David Altman. Bubba is dressed in his National Guard uniform with all his gear laid out on the ground. He joined the National Guard while he was living with Grandmother and Granddaddy in New Mexico.

Granddaddy kept this ranch for several years, but later moved into Clayton. Webby and Sadie bought it and turned the ranch into a dairy. Myrna and Laverne grew up on this ranch. I think Gwendolyn was already away at Baylor nursing school when they operated the dairy there. Myrna and Laverne have a lot of memories from this ranch that they have told me about and that I have recorded on tape. One of these days soon, I will share them with the other members of the Altman bunch.

Now you have heard my stories. Each one of the grandchildren of Bertie and Regina Altman will have remembrances of their own that they can add to the pages of this book. I firmly believe that each of us has a certain responsibility to provide a heritage link for oncoming generations. Our memories will last as long as we live, but what happens to those stories after we are gone? I like to think that many years down the way, some of our children will be truly interested in what we can tell them.

Please try to resolve and keep some kind of diary to record your family's events for twelve months. You can do this by simply jotting down short notes on a calendar, marking a particular happening of the current week so that by the time December comes around, you can re-read about your own family circle.

I urge you to start a “family tradition” of writing something about your lives, even if it is only two or three pages, to be finished at the end of the year as you get time. These stories will make several chapters to be added to your book each year...to be passed on to your children and to your children’s children as a record of the family circle.
