

WANDA RENOE

My name is Andy. Wanda always introduced me as her Baby Brother. It was a valid introduction, even though you can plainly see I am no longer a baby.

Our mother gave birth to ten babies, all at home, and raised nine of them. Wanda was the first girl and I was ninth child. I am now the last surviving of the nine. There was eighteen years between Wanda and me. I was a teen during the 1950's, but my older siblings, including Wanda, were members of the Greatest Generation. Her generation suffered the Great Depression and World War Two. That's why I wanted to tell her story.

Wanda Ruth Dexter Nichols Renoe was born August 18th in the year of Our Lord 1920. Her first breath was taken in Bridgeport, Nebraska close to her maternal grandparent's sugar beet farm. The Dexter family soon relocated close to Lagrange, Wyoming.

So you can better understand how poor and destitute our family was, my mother, Hannah, told me, in those days, she had to go out in the field and collect dried cow pies to burn in order to keep her family warm. I have no doubt, my older siblings, including Wanda, had to help with that.

Our family didn't keep very good records, however, we know that the family moved to Palisade, Colorado, not far from Grand Junction. It was there that Wanda completed her high school education at age sixteen.

The great depression was starting. One of our all time great presidents, Franklin D. Roosevelt, created a program called the *New Deal*, which included the *Civil Conservation Corp (CCC)*. Young men were recruited and put to work for the government doing physical work on government land. The CCC Boys as they were called were required to send some money home, but none were allowed to work close to home.

Wanda's first husband and the father of her three children, was a CCC Boy from Oklahoma. The two met in northwest Colorado and when Wanda was not allowed to attend college she married Henry Taylor Nichols, also known as Shorty or Bud, on July 16, 1937.

The happy couple lived a short time in Oklahoma with the groom's family. Their first child, Buddy Orin was born May 30, 1938. Just thirteen days before I was born.

In the hopes of a better life and being sponsored by Henry's sibling, the Nichols family moved to King Hill, Idaho. It was here that Wanda gave birth to her two daughters. Carolyn Jean in 1940 and Marolyn Rose in 1944.

In 1943, World War II was raging and the shipyards on the West Coast were hiring and promising good paying jobs. Wanda and three of the older siblings were already out of the house. So my parents decided to relocate to the Willamette Valley of Oregon, for better opportunities, and, to be close to two of Hannah's sisters and their families.

After Marolyn was born, Wanda was in very poor health, so Henry took the children to Oregon to be cared for by Wanda's parents. After Wanda regained her health, they relocated to Woodburn, Oregon. Henry was soon drafted into the army and served for about a six months. During his army time, Wanda moved her and the three children to her parent's farm.

After the war, Wanda and her family moved back to Woodburn, where both Wanda and Henry worked in a cannery. During this time, Henry built a large mobile home. Wanda again moved her family. They now lived in Milwaukie, Oregon and Wanda obtained employment at a woolen mill. Henry decided to start working heavy construction. Following her husband, Wanda had to relocate several times. They lived in Bakersfield, California, Cougar, Washington and several locations in Oregon.

In 1957 Wanda saw her son off to the Army and he died a year later in Arkansas. A few years later her oldest daughter, Carolyn married William Howard. My sister became a proud Grandmother to three children, but suffered the loss of a grandchild, one of Carolyn's infants. A few years later her youngest child, Marolyn, married Harry Slater.

Suffering the empty-nest syndrome, Wanda and Henry moved to Stanfield, Oregon. After thirty-two years, they decided to divorce.

Wanda was single for about five or six years before she married Douglas Renoe. The couple lived in Irrigon, Oregon, until Douglas passed in 2001. Wanda continued to live in Irrigon for several years until her age and dementia made it unsafe to live alone. She moved to Portland and lived with her two daughters. For the last four months of her life, Wanda was moved to a care center where she passed at the age of 96.

Wanda, like the rest of the Greatest Generation, had a hard life. From the time she was old enough to care for her younger siblings until she moved in with her daughters, she worked hard. She not only worked most of her life outside of the home, but also raised her three children while making a home in a very mobile society was hard. Relocating her children to new locations, new schools, and new friends is a difficult job for a mother. She also had to make new homes in strange environments and had to find new jobs to supplement the family income.

Several of Wanda's male adult siblings also followed the construction trade. Wanda was frequently called on to house their families between jobs. This was very stressful, but Wanda handled it with grace.

During her years in Stanfield, Oregon, she obtained the college degree she had so desperately wanted when she finished high school thirty-six years earlier.

Wanda, as I have said, was a worker. But, she always found time to attend her churches, teach Sunday school, and organize Vacation Bible School. Among the many volunteer projects she was involved in, one of her favorite was leader of a Girl Scout Troup.

Wanda is survived by:

Me, her baby brother and my wife Sharon.

She is also survived by:

Her daughter Carolyn Howard and husband William.

Her daughter Marolyn Slayter.

Her Granddaughter Wannetta Bernard and husband Bill.

Her Grandson William Orin Howard

Her five great granddaughters

Her eleven great, great grandchildren

Her one great, great, great grandson.

She has too many nieces, nephews and cousins to count.

Wanda's immediate family and I would like to thank everyone who supported Wanda. Your love, prayers and especially the visits brought much joy to her.

In closing, I would like to say goodbye to another member of the Greatest Generation. These people lived through the hardest of times and made a much better life for each of us to enjoy. So each time you see an elderly person, like Wanda, if you can't say "Thanks," at least smile and acknowledge their presence.

So Wanda, as Freddy Fender sang, "Vaya Con Dios", *may God go with you*. I am eternally grateful to my sister and the many contributions she made to our family.