

The Life of Norbert Jacob Wilde: An Autobiography

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Preface

From: Norbert J. Wilde

To: My Five Children and 14 Grandchildren

CHAPTER 1

Early Childhood

I am the 10th of 11 children, born of John Henry Wilde and Katherine Luttmer on May 5, 1919. My dad was the third oldest of 12 children. At the time of writing this autobiography, all my brothers and sisters have passed on, except for Anne Wilde Walterscheid, who now resides in Retama Manor in Harlingen, Texas. The Luttmers were also prolific Germans with eight children. My distant relatives, Stefan Luttmer of Germany and Sister Mary Beatrice of Oklahoma City, have recently provided me with family trees for the Luttmer, Wilde, and Bergman families. I learned that my great grandfather John H. Wilde came to America on a slow cargo sailing ship, steamed up the Mississippi to Cincinnati on a steam-driven paddle shallow draft ship, and probably took a covered wagon over to Lincoln, Nebraska where he got a job felling timber to clear land for new settlers. Is it any wonder that the sport of sailing came rather naturally to me, generations later? The intolerable social, political, and economic conditions in Prussia and Holland were the compelling

reasons for Germans to migrate to America, the land of milk and honey.

Do you know something about the circumstances of your birth? Like how you got named? How much you weighed? Where and when you were born? I tipped the scales at 13 pounds. My surviving sister Frances Kelley Wilde remembers changing my diapers and how I was old enough to be embarrassed to make such a mess. Diapers in those days were not disposable and had to be boiled and washed by hand. I was surrounded by a lot of love from my mother and from at least two of my sisters. It was only in 1981 that I discovered how my parents named me. The Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics in Austin has documented my birth as “baby boy born of John Henry Wilde and Katherine Luttmer May 5, 1919” (near Harold, Texas).¹ So I entered the world nameless until my Baptism, which occurred at Mt. Carmel Catholic Church five days later. Father Bender asked about the sponsors, and they are shown as Jacob and Hodwig Roessler, good friends of my parents. Norbert Jacoby, another good friend of my parents, couldn’t make it to my Baptism. When the priest asked about my name, (the 10th of 11 children), I can easily surmise Dad asking, “Kate, haven’t you named this one yet?” The impatient Fr. Bender (who gave hour long sermons on Sunday in German) suggested naming me after the sponsors or Norbert Jacoby. They came up with Norbert Jacob Wilde, and everybody calls me Jay now, instead of Norbert or Jacob. Also, people will ask me, “Who was St. Norbert anyway?” (the Superior of a new Religious Order, the Norbertines or Premonstratensians)

I can recall a tragedy in my early childhood that changed my mother and the

rest of us also. It was a cold Sunday morning a few days before Christmas in 1924 in Harold, Texas. Before we went to Mass, we had to warm the radiators with a gasoline blowtorch, so that the house would be warm. But the blowtorch was too cold to light. Antifreeze was not commonly used in radiators, which were routinely drained during freezing weather. My oldest brother Henry secured permission from my parents to place the torch on a wood stove of our farm tenants, the Wrights, so that it could thaw. But the torch exploded prematurely, spraying gasoline over him and some members of the Wright family. Henry ran out of their house afire in the direction of a stock tank, which was unfortunately also frozen. All his clothes were burned off, and he was burned over all his body. We then applied “unquinteen,” a home remedy, to him and bound his burns. The doctor was called from Electra but later told my parents that Henry could not survive such extensive burns. We all sadly were with Henry as he died late that same night.

It was snowing and cold on the day he was buried at Mt. Carmel. Many times, my mother cried on account of the loss of Henry. She revered his burned clothing as if they were the relics of a saint or martyr. Several years later in 1926, this would be one of the compelling reasons that Dad would encourage the family to move to the Rio Grande Valley. He wanted her to forget this traumatic event.

Keeping sunflowers and careless weed from mama’s garden was under my special care. As an older boy, I hoed weeds out of hundreds of acres of cotton or corn along with other hired hands. Later on, I’ll tell the story of how my Dad was “Carrot King

of the USA” with 2,700 acres. The whole town of Elsa was hired to weed and harvest by the famous Melvin Guisse, a New York produce shipper (with a Yankee accent).

Mother wrote letters to all our relatives. My dad had a third grade education in German, so he relied on us teenagers to write business letters for him and to figure out other farm math problems (like how much tonnage of silage could be stored in a trench silo 300 feet long).

I’ll close this chapter with some historical notes on the times of my early childhood. Dual tires on trucks made them capable of replacing much of the grain and produce normally shipped by rail. Trucks had hard rubber tires, which ruined the asphalt roads and did not last long with heavy loads. Pneumatic tires have improved vastly, with tubeless tires, etc. There would be a flat tire every morning with a slow leak in the inner tube. We repaired our own flats, even on the big truck tires. The telephone company was the chief communicator (with wires strung all over the country, and finally across the Atlantic). Wireless communication was only by radio waves. We did not have a television, until a primitive form in 1946. Much later on, I took a 300-level course in Radio Feature Programming taught by Louise Munch at St. Louis University. Some of her students became famous Radio and TV announcers. I did not have the background in world affairs to compete. At the time, America was the forerunner in vast improvements in trucks, autos, and diesel trains. The Germans were the first to use diesels in autos like the Mercedes Benz.

CHAPTER 2

Life on the Farm until Age 17

Born on a wheat farm near the Red River and Harold and Electra, Texas, I had fun those seven years before my parents were persuaded by Harding and Gill (land agents) to move to Lasara, a pioneer town in the Rio Grande Valley. One Christmas, my dad went to the market and brought home some oranges and grapefruit from the Valley. He said some day we would be moving to the area where they grow. He contracted for a section of land north of what is now Delta Lake. While on the Red River farm, I remember making some of my own toys of wood and climbing the windmills for pumping water and generating electricity.²

We had a ram sheep on the Red River Farm, which seemed tame to us, as if it just wanted to be petted. But one day that rascal had enough petting for some reason and butted me down, not once, but every time I tried to get up and run away. This went on until my older brothers came to my rescue. I never knew what made that sheep change his mind. Later on he became lamb chops.

In dealing with farm animals, we learned that the Jersey bull, even de-horned, is a dangerous animal unless you deal with him every day and remind him with a club that you are his boss.³ Later, on several occasions, my brothers and my dad were knocked down and would have been seriously injured, had not my brother Edward and I come to the rescue. This took a lot of courage. We purposely took a club to the bull about weekly to prevent its cantankerous behavior to Edward and me when we milked the cows.

Many accidents happened on the farm, and I was involved in four different ones at ages 4, 5, 7, and 13! At age four in 1923, it was late one day when my oldest brother, Henry, pulled a mole board plow to the field with a Moline front-wheel drive tractor. I loved to follow the plow barefooted to see how it turned over the soil. My bare feet encountered some sand burr stickers, and I had to stop in the middle of the furrow to pick them out. I decided to wait until Henry came around again, but it was dark by this time. I had then fallen asleep, so he did not see me until he had run over me with the lug wheels of the plow! I didn't remember any of this until I regained consciousness ten days later with a broken leg, fractured ribs, a broken collarbone, and a skull fracture—I haven't been the same ever since! One spike lug just missed my spinal column; and now you have to look hard for scars. I was in the hospital about three months under the care of Nurse Nickels and Dr. Ogden. The doctor thought my full recovery was miraculous. Even then, I was brought home in a cast on much of my body. My dad was instructed on how to saw parts of it off

from time to time.

I was a pretty handy boy at age five, because my brother Herman asked me to open a gate for him so he could drive through a truck loaded with wheat. I was so anxious to get back to my homemade toys, that I tried to close the gate too soon. The rear wheel of the truck then caught my leg and threw me down. It scared the wits out of me, but my leg was not broken. "Miracle!" said my parents. I think that it might have been about this time that my parents were thinking that I should I should be the one of 11 children to become a priest some day to keep me out of mischief!⁴

Being German, my dad knew how to brew beer and how to make grape wine. We always grew our own vineyard. Sometimes, the mix of the home brewed beer was not quite right, and the bottles would explode. One cold day my brother Albert and I were in the cellar (at the Red River Farm), and he thought it was time to sample one of the bottles of wine with me. It tasted pretty good, but I made the mistake of later reporting to my mother that I had a headache. She put me to sleep, and Albert received a good lecture about alcoholism, to which none of us were ever addicted. Our garden also grew good strawberries, and it was my job to harvest with my sister Anne.

Later in the Rio Grande Valley, my dad got a patent on grapefruit wine, which now probably sells under an expired patent formula of today's "Thunderbird." By the time I was seven, Dad sold to Frank Weddle our home, mules, and farm equip-

ment on the Red River farm, and he bought new Farmall tractors to be shipped by rail to the Rio Grande Valley, which is about 550 miles from the Red River Farm.

The roads to the Valley were so poor in 1926 that it took us about three days to visit back to Muenster, Texas, where my uncles Joe, Hubert, and Frank Wilde lived with all our cousins. In Muenster, we stayed with various uncles and cousins, but mostly at Uncle Joe and Aunt Loretta's house. Uncle Joe B. Wilde owned the prosperous Chevrolet dealership. His son, Ray Wilde, got a new bicycle for Christmas, and he let me learn to ride it; but it rained so much that the tires got muddied. I tried in vain to get all the mud off. Ray was upset, but he was nice to me about it because he saw how much pleasure I got out of learning to ride his bike. Later, I frequently dreamed, as all my young boys did, to have some kind of two-wheel motorized transportation.

When we moved to the Valley in February 1926 (I was seven at the time), we had never seen a citrus tree, a mesquite tree, or a cactus—or even a Mexican. Our new house was unpainted. The furniture and farm machinery had not arrived by rail in Raymondville (ten miles away), and there was no motel for miles, no running water in the new house, no gas, and no electricity (until 1936). The seven acres at the Lasara residence was newly plowed, and thorny cactus lay all around. At my age of seven, this cactus was a curiosity, and I slipped and fell, sitting on one! The family had to pick out thorns from my rear for most of the night with only a Coleman lantern as a source of light. What a let down from all the comforts of the Red River

farm! This was truly pioneer living, and mother was not fond of it. She had to be a loving saint to put up with it!

We soon learned most neighbors were militant Protestants; and the Klansmen hounded the Catholic priest out of Raymondville, so we had to go to Mass and Mission Sermons in San Benito by muddy dirt roads. Being Catholic and German, my parents were about the only Democrats to vote for Al Smith for President in 1928. The Hoover voters disliked us more.

This move was a serious social change for my older brothers and sisters because they had many friends on the Red River farm and at the Mt. Carmel community. It was hard for them to meet, date, and marry nice boys and girls in this pioneer area. My mother and father anguished about their dating. Also, there was so much work for them to do on the section of land my Dad bought. At this time on the farm, my older brothers became fluent in Spanish, which they learned from “wetback” laborers who preferred to live in the “monte,” a mesquite brush area. Frances, the twins Alois and Tony, and Albert were in need of additional education, so my parents decided to send them to St. Joseph’s Academy, a Catholic school in Brownsville, which could also board students. This lasted for only one semester because they were lonesome and were also needed for farm work. They wanted more education, but public schools anywhere near Lasara left something to be desired.

The last accident of my youth happened when I was 13. On the way to Sunday Mass (to Raymondville) one Sunday morning in 1932, Dale Watson was late to get to

the train in Lasara to get the mail (on the fly). He broadsided us on the right side of our car where my mother was riding and flipped our Model T Touring Ford upside down. All were pinned underneath except me—I went flying out with only a bump on my head. With the help of my adrenalin and Dale Watson, we up-sided the Ford to rescue my injured mother and the other members of the family in the car. My older brothers and sisters had preceded us to Church in the other Model T Ford. My back is still no good for lifting heavy objects.

I don't know the particulars of Dad's auto insurance or our health insurance, but I doubt that either Dale Watson or my dad had any coverage. Typically, everyone paid cash for their auto purchases and were self-insured. So my mother suffered for many years on account of the injury to her right leg.

CHAPTER 3

My Education and Life in the Seminary

In September of 1926 at Lasara, a temporary one-room schoolhouse was ready for us smaller children. When asked if I wanted to go to school at age seven, I probably uttered a firm “no” to my mother. I was just too busy with my toys at home. The first grade teacher, Mrs. Kinser, would tap me on the head with a pencil to get my attention. I didn’t like school until I began **educating myself** by reading many books in the sixth grade. I started with *Robinson Crusoe*, *Huckleberry Finn*, all of Zane Grey’s Westerns including *Riders of the Purple Sage*; *Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens, *Oliver Twist* and many others.

Do you remember some of the really great teachers you had as a student? Laura Crowder taught me fourth grade English and writing, and we had to join a Book of the Month Club, which cost 50 cents per month (this was a lot of money during the Depression). We had to read a book a week by lantern.

I became the star and “cut-up” of my fourth grade class, but I began to stutter

when the spelling teacher, Elsie Gillette, got alphabetically to Wilde and requested me to spell “start.” The anxiety and anticipation in performance was too much, and the other students laughed at my first time to stutter on the “s” of “start.” Teachers rarely called on me afterwards because of this handicap.

Much later, when I just started in the seminary at about age 19, I visited Sister Theresa Martin, a speech therapist, at Our Lady of the Lake College for speech sessions on Sunday afternoons. The vowels troubled me, but she told me that it was impossible to stutter on them. Practicing my reading got me over this handicap, but the damage in class permitted by Elsie Gillette was probably one of the reasons I later abandoned the idea of delivering sermons and becoming a priest. Fr. Tom Quinlavin and Fr. Eddie Burns taught us English and Composition in the seminary. Fr. Cozad taught elocution. We had to memorize “Sparticus to the Gladiators,” which required a forceful delivery. This helped me get rid of my speech problem. My legacy will be my “Letters to the Editor” because of all I learned from these great Oblate priests.⁵

Fr. James Smith, O.M.I. (Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate), recruited me for the seminary with his persistence. He was truly a friend of the family, and he loved to play “42” dominos with my parents during the Great Depression. The first time he came out to our home was to talk to me about going to a seminary—I pulled a disappearing act by letting myself down in a new underground, unfilled cistern. To this day, no one ever knew how I disappeared. At age 16, I was too busy driving

trucks and tractors for Dad and playing football in Raymondville High School.

My mother Katherine Luttmer passed away from typhus fever in 1934, and the family of ten adults and children was more than my dad could handle. Family coherence without my saintly mother was impossible for a busy father. My older brothers and sisters were getting married. No strangers or friends could replace my mother's cooking. My sister Anne went off to Our Lady of the Lake College in San Antonio, and my brother Edward, to A&M College in College Station. My chances of going to college during the Great Depression grew slimmer.

I completed two years at Raymondville High School, where my brother Edward and I played football every Friday night and practiced daily before we went home to round up and corral 10 to 13 Jersey cows to milk (from a mesquite and cactus pasture, so they frequently had thorns in their tits). Next morning these corralled cows had to be milked again by hand before we drove ten miles to school in Raymondville. We had no electric milking machines. Edward and I would sell some of the fresh milk to "wetback" Mexicans for a nickel a quart. We made enough spending money during the Great Depression to buy a baseball, gloves, a mitt, and a bat; later, a bicycle too. We organized the first baseball competitions in Lasara between the black cotton pickers and the local Mexicans. They played every summer Sunday afternoon and had a ball poking fun at each other!

Then along came Fr. Smith, O.M.I., again. He easily persuaded me to get a good "classical education" at St. Anthony's College, a minor seminary in San Antonio,

Texas, even if I did not become a priest. Because these minor seminaries were adequately endowed at that time, many of the students were recruited from poor Irish families in Chicago, Detroit, and New Jersey.

The few Texas boys were a curiosity among the “citified” boys, but the studies and football were challenging; and I did an outstanding job at right tackle. I was known by other teammates and the press as “the Texas Tornado.”

We were appreciative in those hard times to pay little or no tuition, as we were being groomed early to be sent to the poor Oblate Missions. When my dad had a good year on the farm, he paid the entire tuition for me at St. Anthony’s. Fr. Seidel gave me an honorable mention for this unusual donation.

During the Great Depression, we lived more comfortably than most other folks in the area because of my parents’ ingenuity (after my mother’s death, my dad remarried). The Dust Bowl Oklahoma Yankees and the religious Holly Rollers speaking in tongues were a source of entertainment for us and for some other neighbors. They were poor, but my dad helped them with their farm problems. We smoked cigarettes on the sly because my parents said it would “stunt our growth”. (Cigarettes were only 55 cents for a *carton* of Camels or Lucky Strikes, and many people smoked). Many people went hungry, but we fared well on the farm with chickens, hogs, and cows; and always a vegetable garden in my special care. About the only groceries my stepmother had to buy at Brenner’s Grocery in Raymondville were beans, salt, pepper and a 100-pound sack of flour. (“Bakery bread” was a

treat). Shoes were always sent to the cobbler at least once before a new pair was considered. A railroad was built from Raymondville through Lasara in about 1928. Three trains went right by our house every day. The trucking industry was only in its infancy, and trains were the chief mode of freight and passenger transportation. Train engineers threw candy to us children nearly every day. Many bums dropped off the train and begged my stepmother for food to eat. Sometimes, she would require them to work in her flower gardens to make them feel appreciated.

My dad always had some hired hands living with us or on the premises. I liked black folks most because they had many stories and jokes to tell, and my Dad offered them labor before the invention of the mechanical cotton picker. On rare occasions, our whole family also used to pick cotton, to which I was allergic. Joe Sitarski, an orphan from Ohio, stayed with us for many years helping to drive the tractors and trucks. W. M. Reynolds, a bankrupt businessman and inventor, lived with us for about six years during the depression (a bit of this was before my mother passed away). He was an inspiration to us, not only as an inventor for my dad in the blacksmith shop, but also for his homespun Mississippi humor. A cultivator attachment for cultivating delicate vegetables is still in farm use today. Patent rights have long expired.

Despite having only a third grade education in German from Muenster, Texas, my Dad became a renowned farmer with the many acres of land he owned or rented. International Harvester factory representatives used to come out to see what he

had improved on his tractors, planters, and other machinery. The Willacy County Chronicle published articles about his innovative farming. He had to quit school in the third grade in Muenster, Texas, when his father passed away of pneumonia at age 50. Those nuns in Muenster must have taught him (in German) all his farming ingenuity too. Dad's mother and his 11 younger siblings were partially dependent on him even when he married Katherine Luttmer. When his mother (Agnes Phiefer Wilde) passed away, the land and home were later divided among his brothers and sister Anna, but he retained only the mineral rights which were passed *per stirpes* to his descendants (this included me among 16 descendants).⁶

Dad was the first to use rubber tires on his five Farmall tractors in the Valley, and he was the first to plant vegetables on the top of berms. Sorghum and corn were grown for seed, sold for green corn, or packed as ensilage in trench silos, a first in the area. The silage provided feed for starving cattle trucked from the Dust Bowl (west of Alice, Texas to our pastures). We fed out and trucked the feeder cattle to the Livestock Market in San Antonio for cash. One year Dad had 1,300 acres of carrots and became the "Carrot King of the USA." He sold the carrots for \$100 per acre to the F. H. Valzing Produce shippers of Elsa, Texas. This provided employment for most of the town of Elsa because weeding and harvesting the carrots had to be done by hand. He paid off the notes on the farm.

When I was home from the seminary for the summer, at age 17, I drove a Ford V8 truck 18-wheeler loaded with 30,000 pounds of cottonseed from the Lasara Gin

Company to the cottonseed oil mill in Corpus Christi. This was about 110 miles by way of Highway 281, the only road out of the Valley at that time. On one trip, I was stopped by a plainclothes person from the Texas Railroad Commission and fined \$200 for exceeding the seven thousand pound law. Of course, Dad came to my rescue and had Fidencio Garza, the attorney in Falfurrias, Texas bail me out. This would be my only encounter with an unfair and unjust Texas Law. Driving the underpowered sixteen-wheeler back empty at night, I went to sleep at the wheel and landed in a ditch. Luckily no harm was done, and I drove the truck from the ditch undamaged. I said a prayer of thanksgiving. That is when I decided there must be a better way to make a living—the trucks were without air conditioning and without adequate power.

CHAPTER 4

Chastity, Celibacy, and Marriage to Mary Walsh

My life with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at St. Anthony's College and DeMaznod Scholasticate, the major seminary, was a dream come true for an education in the classics: math, biology, European history, science, ethics, and history of the Church along with its saints and scholars. Philosophy, theology, and moral theology were taught in Latin. These textbooks were also in Latin. On entering St. Anthony's as a third-year student, Fr. Fritz tutored me in Latin and Greek to help me catch up with the other students in the Third Form (junior year). We even played football in San Antonio's Academic League for four years at St. Anthony's. I owe a great deal to the Oblate Congregation for my education and character training.

For eight years from 1938–1946, I was challenged and happy in the seminary, and I learned a lot about discipline.⁷ But then I began to have doubts about the

vows of celibacy shortly before time for my ordination to the priesthood. Though, I was encouraged to continue, and *along came Fr. Smith O.M.I. again*, as he must have heard I had doubts about my vocation. At that time, I could not reveal my doubts because I thought they would break his heart. So I hung on for another three months.

In 1945, one of my interests was the Roman Liturgy when it was all in Latin—I thought Latin was not a language for communicating the Good News of the Bible and the message of the Redemption in the Mass to Americans. So, on my own time, I decided to write a well-documented treatise or history about the necessity of Mass in the Vernacular. I later submitted it to St. John's Seminary in Collegeville Minnesota, which was the headquarters of a liturgical publication by Fr. Reinhold. He thought I was one of the first to take the matter seriously when all the clergy were still “pushing” Latin in the Mass. Much later, the bishops and cardinals of Vatican II agreed *to allow the Mass in the Vernacular (English)*! (This treatise is still in my memorabilia).

Writing this treatise had nothing to do with my requesting the dispensation from all my religious vows and orders. The official document, in Latin, summarizing my dispensation is also in my memorabilia and is available as the Sacra Congregatio De Religiosis #8266/46, Factus Romae, die 11 Decembris, 1946.

So why did I quit, particularly, when my spiritual director, confessor, and my professors encouraged me to be an ordained priest? I guess there is a certain charisma,

or grace, attached to this vocation, but something told me that getting married and being a father of five wonderful children would be my calling. Quitting was the most difficult decision of my life. There was a dreadful void created by the absence of the genuine friendships with the seminarians. I have never looked back to think this most difficult decision was a mistake. It was not until three years later that I met and fell in love with Mary Walsh, who completely filled this void.

Mary Walsh was a virgin before I married her, so the virtue of chastity came in handy before we married, as well as during marriage, for we abstained before marriage and during her fertility periods for family planning. She was as Catholic as the Pope himself and still a virgin when we married on December 28, 1949.

There is something that God does for good married couples that are serious about parenting. God literally *drills* them in the virtues of patience, charity, perseverance, fortitude, and courage. Your children will *make* you a good parent when you love them so much and when they respond to your good example. Then, it is not so much what you give to your children in money, education, and time, but all the great virtues they give you for your eternal salvation!

Celibate priests are set in their own ways and would make poor husbands and impatient fathers. Knowing “both sides of the celibacy coin,” I feel that celibacy is mainly for the most dedicated and busy priest, but some should marry a good woman schooled in philosophy and theology to make a helpmate to work in the missions. There are at least five Rites in the Church affiliated with Rome. Some

Rites permit a married clergy—the Roman Rite requires celibacy as a discipline. So, is this a lecture or an autobiography?

The five summer vacations in the major seminary were a good time generally spent in prayer, study, and sailing trips at a crude Oblate vacation dorm at Port Lavaca, Texas. I learned a great deal there about sailing, the wind, and the care of sailboats. This would later play an important part in the lives of our five children.

My class of ten seminarians was always having fun. One time Eddie Collins brought to Fr. Brockman's class a spring contraption with a rubber band loaded with a washer to be wound up and released on a chair to make a sound like perfect human flatulence, a fart, that is. The first time Eddie Collins made the sound in class, we all excused it; but the second time was much louder. When we students discovered the real source of the vulgar sound, everyone laughed but Fr. Brockman, who ordered him to go to the bathroom! Fr. Brockman never knew how Eddie made the fart sound, so he didn't think it was funny.

You might note that I was in the seminary during World War II. We seminarians were not "draft dodgers," although some left and joined the military. If you want to fight a war, try the fight with the devil when you practice chastity. You are the prey of the devil, but people honor your sublime sacrifice, your willing holocaust. After the seminary life, I missed the companionship of the seminarians. Life at home with a stepmother and my dad, now retired, left a lot to be desired.

At age 26, I bought my first car and got a job away from home with Tri-Pak

Machinery Service in Harlingen as an assistant sales manager, but I was a complete misfit with the girls in the office—I was between them and the manager, Lloyd Allen. I was reluctant to let anybody know my background as a seminarian. During this time, I boarded with an older widow, Lois Williams in Harlingen, where I was involved in playing “42” dominos with her friends in the evenings.

In 1947, St. Louis University offered me to do graduate work toward post graduate degrees in Education and History in the evenings. Working at Famous Barr Department store and dating various girls in St. Louis was a challenge as well as an education. One girl confessed that there was something different about me! She would not elaborate, but I knew she wondered why I did not try to “get in her pants,” like most boys who too easily forgot about obligations arising out of sexual intercourse.

My dad passed away in January of 1949, and I moved back to Harlingen, Texas. I was initiated in the Knights of Columbus, but I refused to become active because the Knights blackballed a wealthy prominent black owner of the Coleman tract, who was also an inheritor of the Coleman lanterns estate. He and his wife had each earned a Ph.D. (The Coleman Tract is still there). My association with black folks on the farm gave me a deep appreciation of this unusual couple, who were special friends of Fr. James Smith and became converts to Catholicism. I should have defended them more before the Knights of Columbus, but I was just a new member.

Later at a Knight's dance in the summer of 1949, I met Mary Walsh, just discharged as a Second Lieutenant from the Army Nurse Corps and still looking for the right boy. We liked each other very much and dated for six months, even though she lived in McAllen, 35 miles west of Harlingen. She had many friends and relatives, one of whom was her own brother, the famous Fr. and Col. Emmett Walsh. He was Chaplain at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, where we were married December 28, 1949.

After she mailed the wedding invitations in Mission, Texas, I was informed on December 5 that Tri-Pak Machinery sold the Flexform business, with which I was associated, to American Machinery Corp of Buffalo, New York. Go to Buffalo in winter? No way, but Mary and I proceeded with marriage plans. We lived in Lawton, Oklahoma, near Ft. Sill, where I worked in Civil Service "shuffling paper" during the Korean War. When the war ended, my job ended also. My job in Parts Inventory was tedious and unfulfilling.

So we then moved back to McAllen, Texas. I worked for Mission Gin Co. (owned by my brother-in-law, James P. Walsh) until the cotton season ended. This led to a clerical job with Randolph Scott & Co. (a cotton broker) in Harlingen, Texas. This ended after about two years because cotton prices were declining.

CHAPTER 5

My Legacy: Five Wonderful Children, 14 Wonderful Grandchildren, and Letters to the Editor

It did not take me long to find out that the 208 hours of university-level coursework I had completed in the seminary without having an official degree did not help toward making a living—the Church did not feel that academic degrees were necessary for mission work, unless a seminarian could be groomed to study in Rome to qualify for teaching at a university. The Church has now changed this policy, and most seminarians now can attend other universities for degree certification before ordination.

My nine classmates all became good priests. Two received Doctorates in Rome. The Oblate Rule discourages priests to associate with defectors of the Order. But I have noticed that some classmates have died prematurely because of hard work and

dedication.

My educational background gave me a different perspective or insight as a layman on many social, political, and ethical issues. So I felt the need to use the news media to vent my feelings. When I began to receive many compliments and accolades from friends and prominent people for my endeavors to express my differing points of view in the local paper, I realized a certain fulfillment and justification for my unusual education. My first contribution was in 1977, and I have saved most of my Letters to the Editor, which will become a part of my legacy.

My first son, Gregory Emmett Wilde, was born May 1, 1951 in Lawton, Oklahoma. We then moved back to McAllen, Texas. With Mary's insistence, I found out that I could be admitted to St. Mary's University in San Antonio. I scheduled all my 18 hours in the mornings so I could manage Dr. McMahon's Dairy Queen on West Commerce St. from 2pm to about 10pm. This was not too time consuming because the two semesters were between the cool September of 1951 and June of 1952. I roomed and boarded with the Earnest Noce family on Waverly St. in San Antonio, and I had to travel between the two locations by bicycle to go to work. I caught a bus to go to St. Mary's University in the mornings, and many times the weather in winter time was not conducive to traveling by bicycle. Time to study was limited. I hitch-hiked home to Mary and baby Gregory about once a month. I made enough money at the Dairy Queen to support myself and to send a little home. Mary did private duty nursing and left Gregory with Mama and Papa Walsh, who became

attached to Gregory. I graduated with a major in History and a minor in Education in 1952. I needed nine more hours in Administration and a thesis to get a Master's Degree (and a career in teaching). Though, this was then not a consideration because the graduation celebration was the occasion for the conception of our second baby, Denise.

In McAllen, I worked for Sears for more than five years as an appliance salesman. My 29 years with The Prudential as a District Agent began in 1958. My task was to sell an "intangible," and this was almost impossible, unless you liked people as I did. High pressure selling was not my kind, but I liked to ask my clients simple questions to discover their needs and potential solutions. Manager Clyde Chally hired me, and immediately I doubled my income over that which I was making at Sears. My clients did not die easily (so I could provide the benefits to the widow and family), and most of my clients were teachers. Selling Tax Deferred Annuities to teachers was difficult because they lived longer than most people those days! Mac McCarty with Southwestern Life was my only competitor. Prudential was a more well-known company, and I had a more intelligent line to help teachers plan for an early retirement. This was finally my "niche."

In 1965, I became "District Man of the Year" by the amount of quality production in the San Antonio District. As a member to the Upper Valley Life Underwriters Association, I won the "Texas Leaders Roundtable" and the "National Quality Award, 15 Years." My policyholders kept the protection they bought from me. I

won many company trips to exotic places, which Mary and the children enjoyed. My insurance education was with Prudential, or through the insurance industry “Life Underwriters Training Council,” and I needed to complete other courses to get other prestigious degrees.

Everything went well until management thought I would be needed more as a Staff Manager over five poorly trained agents. It did not take me long to go back as a simple District Agent, with adequate income and reportable only to my wife and children.

Many men fail dismally at sales work. Most young people think a selling career is below their dignity. They are so wrong, for you simply have to let people know that you like them and that you can solve many of their financial problems. I was proud to have many friends. Sales to many clients were becoming easy, but something happened to Mary, which changed everything.

After a fight with leukemia, she passed away on February 2, 1991 at age 67. Our five children and 14 grandchildren are our pride and joy. She wanted so badly to live at least another ten years. Her funeral was one of the biggest that Our Lady of Sorrows ever had, for she touched many people in the schools as a Registered Nurse, as a friend, and as a wife and great mother. Her death was a source of grief for all of us. On December 19, 1990, we knew that the doctors in M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston had misdiagnosed her form of leukemia, and she could not survive even with chemotherapy. So we called all the children and grandchildren,

who came to see her during the Christmas holidays. On January 15, 1991 Mary wrote: “My dearest family, today I am not feeling well, so I will only drop you a note. Your Dad and I have loved you all so much. Please stay in touch and love each other. I hope you will love God above all.” She and her brother Thomas Walsh at that time (an attorney of Homestead, Florida) were the last of ten children of Scotch Irish descent. Her brother, Father and Colonel Emmett Walsh, predeceased her by only six months. Someone should have written his biography, as he was an inspiration to all my children.

We cannot say enough about the wonderful support my family received from the whole Walsh clan throughout all the challenges we faced. Papa, Mama, Bill, and Gladys Walsh practically raised Gregory while Mary and I were busy trying to survive. Uncle Bill’s frequent visits to our home were a special blessing; and pictures he has taken of our growing children are highly cherished for generations to come. “Son”, or James P. Walsh, provided employment for me at a critical time of my life before I received a degree from St. Mary’s University. The other Wilde brothers and sisters? They had problems of their own in another section of the Valley, so we seldom visited with them, except with my brother Herman and his wife Audra. Herman was a successful farmer.

It was hard for me to forget Mary’s passing, so I traveled with the McAllen Chamber of Commerce in March of 1991 to Guadalajara, Mexico. In April, my niece, Dorothy Wilde asked me to accompany her and her daughter to Europe on a Eurail

Pass for 30 days. I bought the pass, but I parted with Dorothy while spending ten days in Rome, mainly with the Oblate Fathers. Being in an audience with the Pope and 6,000 cheering people and being in the great Basilica of St. Peter on Ascension Thursday 1991 were experiences that increased my undying faith in the Catholic Church. Italians and Poles are crazy about John Paul II. If Jesus Christ returned in person to Rome, I am sure the faithful would say, “Who are you? We have the Pope!”

After Mary passed away and until the present, volunteer work occupied much of my time, probably as much as 4,000 hours total. I volunteered for the McAllen Independent School District as a tutor for English Impaired Hispanic students. I volunteered my knowledge of Spanish to the outpatient surgery departments of the McAllen and Edinburg Medical Centers. I currently volunteer nine hours weekly for the North Austin Medical Center for transport of patients and for public relations.

All of our five children earned university degrees and much more by their good grades and scholarships and their own earnings while in school. Of course we helped financially, but Mary and I simply gave them no choice: they had to get a degree. They all learned to accept responsibility of all kinds from early childhood, and they loved it! Beyond age eight, we talked to them as adults, and never as children. Instead of commands, we asked them leading questions, like, “What do *you* think?” We would like to write volumes about each one and more about

Mary, but space here is limited; each child should add a codicil or a comment to this autobiography.

All the grandchildren are university material also, and most are Catholic or good Christians. Gregory Wilde Jr. earned a full scholarship to Georgetown Medical School in Washington, D.C. His brother Mark will earn a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. James A. Peykanu⁸ earned a scholarship to become a doctor at Creighton University of Omaha, Nebraska. He recently married a doctor and both are now interns in Baltimore. Jean Marie Wilde graduated from the University of Texas, and Brandon Wilde will graduate from there on December 12, 2004. Jennifer Wilde and Catherine Barrera Wilde attend Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas while Elizabeth Wilde is at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Benjamin Peykanu was in his third year at a Jesuit University in California, but he is now attending CACC.

CHAPTER 6

Marriage to Mary Frances (Fran) Rigling

About two years after Mary passed away, I began dating other nice ladies, whom I met at singles clubs and dances or through referred leads. Carmen Probst was a sweet lady from a classy family in Mexico, but as a widow, she did not want to surrender her veteran's income from her deceased (Anglo-American) husband, in case our relationship went further. Besides, most of my children and friends thought I could do better. I dated many women one time only—I knew there were many choices.

While singing in the choir at Our Lady of Sorrows, Yvonne Foard suggested that I should meet Fran Rigling. Fran drove 11 miles from Alamo, Texas to the Red Lobster in McAllen where we dined and chatted at length. We wanted to see more of each other, as she seemed a pretty classy lady and willing to travel with me. *Fran was the only one!* I have not desired another woman since knowing her; and I am thrilled that she is happy with me. When she decided to become Mary Frances

Wilde, a big affair was arranged at Resurrection Catholic Church in Alamo and at the community hall at Fran's Alamo Palms on December 29, 1994. My daughter Denise Peykanu played the organ, and Vickie Sanchez sang our favorite songs beautifully. I used to play the organ for Masses and weddings at Our Lady of Sorrows, while Vickie Sanchez sang. Fran plays the organ better than me.

She sold her home, and I sold the home at 1300 Fern in McAllen. Pooling our finances, we bought a home on the golf course in Alamo Country Club, which was still near Fran's ill sister in Alamo Palms. We learned to play golf. Fran is a loving person, and I am growing accustomed to her ways and a little jealous of her affability and popularity.

The ancient philosophers claimed that we all fall into four different temperaments: sanguine, bilious, nervous, or phlegmatic. Fran is essentially sanguine, while I am phlegmatic. She is fast to arrive at decisions, while I am slow, but (hopefully) wise. From the beginning, we knew it was a good combination, complementing each other's personalities. She prides herself in not needing my financial assistance. A Pre-nuptial Agreement helps us mind our own financial business, and separate Wills and Living Wills drawn up by Attorney Scot Walsh provided for our separate properties to be paid to our respective children, except one insurance policy of mine will be payable to Fran to take care of my Last Expenses. The Living Will provides authority for someone to make decisions in case of our mental incapacity.

In the nine and half years we have been married, we have been on about five

Elderhostels, five Grand Circle Tours, and an equal number of Cruises. There are a number of jokes I love to tell each group we meet, but Fran is getting tired of hearing them over and over. She has pleaded with me to forget the Alzheimer's joke! Before we were married, she told me she does not like to cook—so, if she cooks, she has to use a cookbook for most any dish. I have lots of leftovers to eat. She prefers to eat out, but for me, it is a waste of time; at home, we can eat and watch television together.

She has many great Christian virtues, and she is just a good and likeable person. I joined the local Kiwanis Club, a friendly small group of people who meet weekly at the Senior Citizens Activity Center here in Austin, Texas. We also play “84” dominoes there every Thursday and Friday. Everybody hugs her and loves her, and now she would rather play 84 than Bridge because it is so interactive. Sometimes, I think they just like me because of Fran! Even the smaller grandchildren like her better because she seems to be so interested in them. I guess it may be because of my many aches and pains of renal failures and arthritis at age 85.

My family has written instructions to call a certain number at the Medical Education & Research Institute when I die, so that my body will be donated to medical science before final cremation of the cadaver. Memorial services (without my body) may be held at the Renaissance (by a priest), or at St. Louis Catholic Church: then in Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church in McAllen. My Ashes will be placed by Mary Walsh Wilde's grave at Valley Memorial Gardens. Instead of a sermon by the

priest or Deacon, the same time may be used by relatives and friends who may want to say some words, tell a joke, or read selections of this manuscript.

NJW

Notes

¹If I had never obtained an official Birth Certificate in April of 1991, or if I had not gone to Europe three months after Mary Walsh Wilde, my wife, died of leukemia, it is doubtful that we would ever really know how I was named. It was the best way to get over the grief of her loss.

²My older sister and I played in the wheat fields. She tried to get me into trouble by having me play doctor, and she the patient to be examined, but I pretended ignorance.

³Being born on the farm is also an education in animal sexuality among horses, bulls, pigs, dogs, chickens and sheep. Does it occur to you that female animals insist on being celibate except during fertility periods (in order to propagate the species)? We humanoids are not quite the same. Sex outside of marriage was irresponsible and a sin in those days.

⁴Because of all this and yellow jaundice with high fever at age eight, undulant malaria fever at 15, mumps with complication of encephalitis at age 39 and a coronary bypass at age 72 you may be getting bored? In May 2001 Dr. Terreson tried to unclog my arteries and ruptured the artery between my heart and my lungs. This was supposed to be as an outpatient, but I was flat on my back for four days with hematomas and infiltrations in the leg, scrotum, and abdominal areas (which remained for months). Should I expect anything better than backaches and legs clogged with cholesterol at age 82? Is this my grace period? I decided not to sue the surgeon, as he was only “practicing” while medical students and I were watching the novel procedure on a video screen from a distance. (It was several years before Medicare and Prudential paid off the claim. Do you wonder why?).

⁵About 14 years ago, I attended the Funeral of Fr. James Smith, O.M.I. (Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate), who had retired in San Juan, Texas. I learned a great deal more about this convert to the Catholic faith and why so many other priests attended his funeral. He was the greatest recruiter of seminarians and was responsible for the ordination of 28 priests!

⁶Many years later after Dad died, I was taken by complete surprise when a lady from Dallas representing the oil interests, wanted to lease the Wilde 270 acres east of Muenster. One sixteenth of the leasing and royalty amounted to about \$1,000 for me—icing on the cake! Some relatives may have retained ownership of their royalties, but with the advice of my petroleum engineer son James, I sold the ownership.

⁷Chastity for nine years for a teenage boy is a great discipline for anyone who really wants to practice many other Christian virtues, or even to become a dedicated professional. We used to pray in the seminary that temptations go away; now at age 82 I sometimes pray the temptations return! When I was about 10, my older brothers taught me about self-stimulation “if I wanted to become a man.” This was damaging to my self-esteem. Fr. Smith knew all about this because we had to confess our sins every Saturday afternoon at church. He also knew I would have problems in the seminary because I did not even know how to serve Mass.

⁸Just today, October 14th, 2004, James and his wife Jessica are the proud parents of my first great grandson, George Ali Peykanu. James is the oldest of my grandchildren.