

Life is a Journey

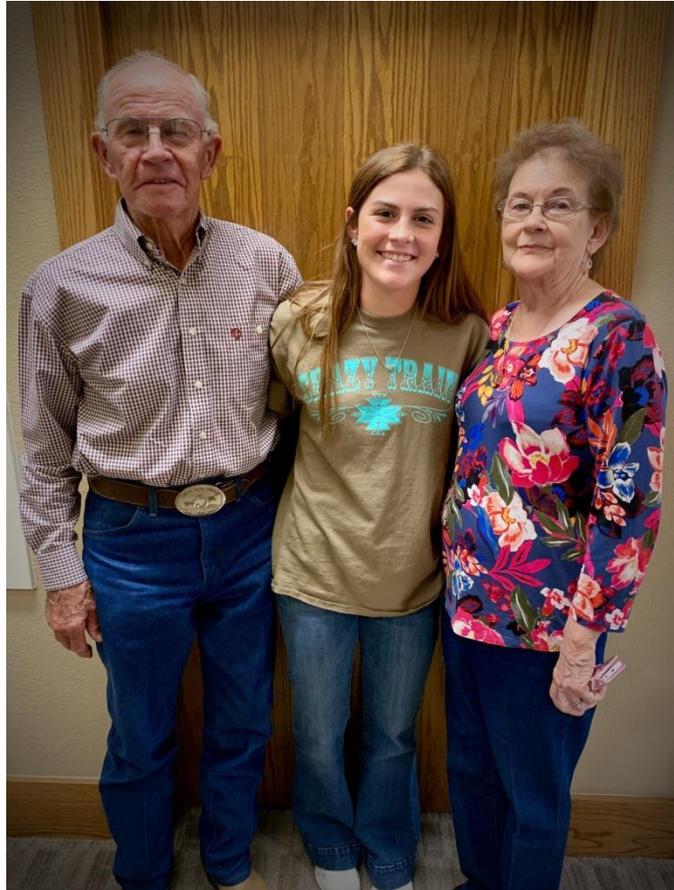
By Allison Hopper

“Life is a journey, and love is what makes that journey worthwhile.” The author of this quote is unknown, but the message is significant. It is the philosophy for happiness to life-long Mills County residents W. J. and Anita Hopper.

W. J. Hopper was born in Mills County in 1935 in a four-room box board house to Fritz William and Mary Agnus Wagner Hopper. The only boy of ten children he remembers chopping and picking cotton alongside his sisters. They farmed corn and oats and raised just about everything including turkeys, to feed the family. In those days, school would dismiss for two weeks so the students could pick cotton. W. J. and his sisters would stay out longer picking for others to earn extra money. The older sisters went to Washboard School, but eventually it consolidated into Priddy School. W. J. remembers his parents struggled to make the loan payments on their homeplace, but the bank capitalized the missed interest payments and extended the

principle. It was a time when nothing was wasted. They used up, wore out, patched, and repaired everything they owned. There was no extra money for entertainment. On Sundays everyone came to visit and took turns hosting the gatherings. W. J. talked about his sister Pauline. She got sick and the family took her to Hamilton to the hospital. The doctor diagnosed her with appendicitis but would not perform the surgery until they paid \$50. Her dad returned home and found someone to buy five hundred bushels of oats to raise the money. By the time he got back her appendix had ruptured, and she had died. Times were different then. Church members took turns digging graves by hand. County residents volunteered time – and mules, for roadwork. Everyone had party telephone lines, and there was an operator at the Switchboard House, which still stands in Priddy today. W. J. remembers his mother talking with neighbors on the party line, but they would speak in German, so the kids would not know what they were saying.

Anita Fay Marwitz was born in Mills County in 1944 in the Goldthwaite Hospital to Walter John Marwitz and Dora Augusta Nauert Marwitz. Anita was supposed to be born in Hamilton, but the Cowhouse Creek rose out of its banks and could not be crossed. Ironically, she has lived along the Cowhouse her entire married life. She was raised in Priddy. She remembers her parents’ drug store that had a soda fountain, juke box, pinball machine, and glass show cases with jewelry inside. The store sold medicines, vet supplies, magazines, and “funny” books. She remembers a domino table beside a wood heater. Her



W. J., Allison, and Anita Hopper

parents sometimes let her manage the store on her own. She would close up at the end of the day and walk home carrying the moneybox without worry. She also remembers the post office in the back of the store. Her dad was the Postmaster. When someone had a lot of mail to send, she would help lick all the stamps. She told me the town of Priddy was named after Thomas Jefferson Priddy, a pioneer preacher and Texas Ranger who was also the first Postmaster of Priddy in 1892. She recalls her home in Priddy had a large cement cellar and people in town would come over when there was storm. Anita's dad owned one of the first televisions in Priddy, and people would come to the house and watch it.

W. J. and Anita both recalled other businesses in Priddy: Dearson's Grocery, Ruth's Beauty Shop, Wagner's Grocery, Highway Garage, Stahnke's Grocery, Stegemoller Grocery and Feed, Jeske's Bank, Aunt Lou's Café and Assisted Living, The Feed Mill, Gromatzky Lumber Yard, along with a barber shop, two cotton gins, and two churches. W. J. Hopper and Anita Marwitz were born in Mills County in different decades and experienced different childhoods in part because of the two most important economic events in history. He grew up in the years following the Great Depression. She grew up during the final years of World War II. Some people know them as "Dub" and "Nita". I know them as grandpa and grannie, and I am very blessed.