

## Chapter X

### Two Star Ranch

February 23, 1947 – May 30, 1947

Come Sunday morning, it was decided to stay home from services, as everyone had been through a very trying last few days. On Monday morning the kids were given the option of staying home from school. They chose to get ready and go because they didn't want to get any further behind. Besides, keeping their minds occupied would keep them from dwelling so much on their loss.

Craig drove his Buick, which he kept in the barn, to school. On the way, he stopped by to pick up Edith. Norma and Janet waited out beside the highway for the bus. Once at school, Janet beamed as she answered, "Present." when her teacher called, "Janet Brason?" when she read the roll. Each of their schools had been notified of their name change. That took a little more getting used to for Craig and Norma.

Sheffield picked up where his substitute had left off by giving a unit test on the presidency. After school, he met with the varsity wrestling team fresh off their win against Lexington on Friday. They had just one more match before the district tournament.

Ramona went to the Taylor home to get things ready for Goodwill to come pick up. As she went through the house, the thought crossed her mind that she could buy the house, have Ray fix it up some, and turn around and sell it. But then she thought better of it, she didn't want to appear to be trying to make a profit at the expense of Samantha and the kids. She decided to go with the original plan and clean it good and sell it as it was. The proceeds from the sell would go directly into the trust fund without her ever touching the money. After leaving the house, she went by the Roanoke Times to have a classified ad run in the newspaper, listing it for sale.

The kids struggled through the week as they adjusted to losing their mother and their new family. Each in their own way, they came to realize that they were more relieved that their mother was no longer suffering than saddened by her passing. Living with Sheffield and Ramona was very much like living with their mother and father. They had had time to get to know them and build a relationship with them, even before moving in. It all had been a calculated plan on behalf of Samantha in making the transition much easier for them. She would have been pleased to know that her plan was working.

By the end of the week, Ramona had already had two calls on the Taylor house and had looked at a couple of pieces of property that she was considering buying. With a little work she thought that she could turn around and sell them fairly quickly. On Friday, Jefferson High School hosted the final match of the season against Buchanan High School. The Magicians lost the match, finishing the season with eight wins and four losses.

During the next week Ramona bought both of the houses that she was looking at and had Ray Austin begin remodeling them. One needed it worse than the other so she had him start with the one that

didn't require as much work so she could put it back on the market. She had two showings of the Taylor house and one more inquiry.

The highlight of the week was the prom. Again, Sheffield and Ramona had been invited to chaperon the dance. Craig and Edith arranged for a double date with Craig's best friend and teammate, Mitchell McFleet. Craig and Mitch went all out in their preparations as this would be their last fling. Mitch would be moving to Richmond with his family in two weeks.

On the evening of the dance, they took their dates out to dinner at the Hotel Roanoke. Being a very popular place, they had made their reservations well in advance. Craig had saved his allowance money for weeks to afford it.

The prom was held in the school gymnasium which had been decorated in style and a small orchestra provided the music. Sheffield's job was to keep an eye on things and spot trouble before it happened. That didn't mean that they didn't have the luxury of enjoying themselves. From time to time they ventured out onto the dance floor.

At one point, they were sitting at a table when Craig and Edith came over and sat down with them. "Are you enjoying the dance?" Sheffield asked.

"Oh yes, but we don't like this song so we decided to sit it out. You two seem to be enjoying yourselves."

"As a matter fact we are. Its all done so nice and everyone seems to be behaving themselves." Sheffield responded. "Its like being back in high school again ourselves."

"Speak for yourself." Ramona said. "I never was asked to prom when I was in high school. For one thing, it didn't help that I was older than all of the boys in my class."

At that moment, the orchestra started up another song. "Do you like this one better?" Ramona asked.

"Yeah this is more like it. Since you never got asked to the prom, could I have the honor of this dance Ramona."

"Why Craig, I'd love to." she said as she stood up and took his arm. Craig was a tall young man, and still growing. He was much taller than her, but the three inch heels that she was wearing gave her the advantage.

While Craig lead Ramona out on to the dance floor, Sheffield said to Edith, "It looks like its just you and me. Would you care to dance with an old man."

"Sure Uncle Sheffield, I'd like that very much. Besides, you're not that old."

For the next two or three numbers, Craig and Edith held on to their partners before returning them to their table. Before joining Sheffield at their table, Ramona stepped out into the hall and called home to check

on the girls.

Before going home, they went out for a treat. They had been home for a while and were ready for bed when Craig came home.

“How was your date? Did you have a good time?” Ramona asked.

“We sure did. Afterwards we went over to Mitch's house and played some games for a little while. Then when I took Edith home, her mother invited me in for some cake and ice cream.”

“You really like Edith, don't you?”

“I guess you could say that.”

“What are you going to do when Mitch moves away?”

“I'm going to miss him. I guess I'll have to find someone else to chum around with.”

“Craig, I want to tell you, it meant a lot to me that you asked me to dance tonight.”

“That's because you mean a lot to me, Ramona.”

“Oh, that's so sweet. Now hurry off to bed, we have to get up in the morning to get ready for services.”

“Good night Ramona. Good night Sheffield.” Craig called over his shoulder as he headed upstairs.

During the next week, the Taylor house sold and Ray finished with the one house and Ramona placed an ad in newspaper. Meanwhile Ray got started on the other. The whole week lead up to the district wrestling tournament on Friday and Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. Jefferson High School hosted the five other schools in district as each hoped for a berth in the state tournament in two weeks.

Prior to the match, The Admiral gave his team a rousing pep talk, encouraging them to do nothing less than the best that had in them. They went into the tournament having already beat four for the five teams during the regular season. Before leaving the locker room, he asked for a volunteer to lead the team in prayer. This time, three hands went up. Whenever someone other than the Rowan cousins volunteered, Sheffield would call on that person, since Dean and Wade did it the majority of the time. At the conclusion of the match, the Magicians were heading for the state tournament. Although Craig won his match, the junior varsity team was through for the year.

With the coming of spring, the grass in the pasture began greening up. It soon became obvious that pasture grass around the house would not do. Sheffield arranged for someone to come in and till the ground around the house and smooth it out. Then one day after school, Sheffield and Craig scattered grass seed all around and lightly raked it into the soil. There were a few bales of straw in the barn that they scattered on top of the ground. Typically there was enough rain to keep things moist, but with no sign of rain for a few days, they soaked it down with garden hose.

Before the horses could be turned loose in the pasture, the house needed to be fenced off. Sheffield

decided on a pole fence to match the one around the coral. He and Craig measured out the placing of the fence posts and commenced digging the holes. Over the next few days, as the neat row of holes got longer, the grass had sprouted and a was beginning to grow.

When the holes had all been dug, the Austin Brothers delivered a load of treated fence posts, poles, and a couple boxes of spikes. Having never planted a fence post or built a fence before, the driver who delivered the material showed them how. He set the first post and then watched as Sheffield set the next one, and Craig the third one.

They quickly learned that you don't just put the post in the ground and fill in the hole with dirt. They had been shown how to add a little dirt and tamp in down with the shovel handle then add a little more dirt and tamp it some more. Even after the post was standing solidly erect on its own, the process continued until the hole was full. Sometimes it took more dirt to fill the hole than what came out of it. The posts were treated with creosote to assure that they wouldn't rot in the ground and remain for decades to come. After getting the knack of planting fence posts, they were shown how to attach the poles. Confident that they could manage on their own, they got started on the fence.

While Sheffield and Craig had been working on putting in a lawn and fencing it off, Ramona and the girls were busy planting flowers and shrubs and putting in a garden. They got a lot of starts from the family as well as from the local nursery. Ramona hadn't been around a garden since she was a little girl. Samantha had always planted a garden so Norma had a pretty good idea as what to do, but it was Emily who was the garden expert in the Brason family. She came over and helped get them started. She showed them how to space things and when to plant what. Ramona and the girls marked out the rows with a hoe and got it ready to plant.

Their work was interrupted by the long anticipated state wrestling tournament in Richmond on Friday and Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>n</sup>. The entire season of training and matches came down to this. In addition to the team, many of the parents of the wrestlers and others who enjoyed the sport traveled to Richmond. Craig went along, but Ramona and the girls stayed home. At the end of the two days match, the Magicians finished in second place, although the Rowan cousins both won in their weight classes. Their wins assured them wrestling scholarships to the junior college in Idaho that they had applied to.

With the season over, the pace slacked off considerably. The two hour practice sessions everyday devolved into a one hour physical education class on Mondays Wednesdays and Fridays. That freed up a lot of time for Sheffield to devote toward getting the ranch ready for spring.

The place was really beginning to look nice, but Sheffield decided something was missing. It needed a flagpole. He didn't want just a plain and ordinary flagpole, he wanted one that looked like the mast of a ship. He had to have it custom built and when it was finished and standing in the front yard, it was just as he

had envisioned it. Four feet from the top, a cross arm extended four feet to either side, each with a pulley at the end and line of rope. At the center of the junction, another four foot arm extended at a forty five degree angle from the front. It too had a pulley and a rope. A fourth rope went to the pulley at the very top. That was where he hoisted his two star flag. The American flag and the flag of the Commonwealth of Virginia flew from the angled arm. From the extended arms, he hoisted a random assortment of signal flags.

After admiring his flagpole, Ramona said, pointing to the blue flag with the two white stars, "Its obvious who's in command here. This is a two star ranch."

"I like that." Sheffield exclaimed as he put his arm around her. "I was wondering what we would call this place and you have come up with the name. Two Star Ranch. I really like it."

The lawn was doing well, and there had been enough rain to bring it along, The pasture was growing as well and it would soon be time to turn the horses loose. Over the next few days, the fence was finished and Red and Roxy were happy to be let out of the corral. The alfalfa was greening up and growing too.

In the meantime, Ramona had sold the one house, making a few hundred dollars on the deal. She was really getting into her new career. She was constantly looking for homes to buy. She began looking for foreclosures and sheriff's auctions for homes that were in good shape that she could buy for well below market value. So far, she had made good money with very little effort. That was the kind of job she wanted so she could devote her time to raising her children.

Sheffield and Ramona were surprised at how well the kids were adjusting to living with them. The kids realized how fortunate they were and didn't give any real challenges regarding being a family, other than the normal issues that come along in raising a family, teenagers in particular. Craig teased his sisters and Janet in particular got her feathers ruffled by him from time to time. For the most part they were willing to help out. Emotionally, they had their times. Fortunately not all of them at the same time. When one was having a hard time, the others would rally around and buoy them up.

They continued to do things as family; going out for pizza or bowling, or to a movie, or whatever. With the coming of spring, the horses got ridden quite often. The kids actually did more as family living with Sheffield and Ramona than they had with their parents. At first, they tended to be a little standoffish in showing affection, but as the weeks and months passed, they were much more free with their affection. They still called Sheffield and Ramona by their names rather than mom and dad. Perhaps one day that too would come, if not, it was alright.

The kids had their friends from school. Now they were attending services in Salem, they had new church friends as well, most of whom attended Andrew Lewis High School in Salem. After Craig's best friend moved away, he began gravitating toward Read Rowan and doing things with him. They kids would have their friends over and also go to their homes. Sheffield and Ramona were always happy to have the kids'

friends over. They had good friends and they didn't worry too much about them getting into trouble.

One evening while Sheffield and Ramona had some time to themselves, Ramona brought up something that had been on her mind. "The kids seem to be settling in pretty good, but do you know what I think would really help us to jell as a family?"

"I'm listening."

"I think we need to go on a family honeymoon. You know, like how newlyweds get settled into married life. I think it would help us all really settle into being family life."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Spending a month at my beach house in Hawaii. We need to take advantage of it anyway. I've made enough money already to almost cover the whole trip. What do you say?"

"I think its a terrific idea. We can take off for a month. How about between Memorial Day and the Fourth of July."

"Thats what I was thinking, too. I'm excited just thinking about it. When can we tell them?"

"How about when they come in. Now since we're talking about whats on our minds, can I have my turn?"

"Sure Babe, whats on your mind?"

"If I'm going to take care of this place properly, I'm going to need a few things."

"Such as?"

"For starters, I can see that I'm going to need a pickup truck. It doesn't have to be a new one just something to haul things with and go out in the field."

"That sounds reasonable. But I get they feeling that there's more."

"There is. I'm going to need some farm machinery. Mainly a tractor and some hay equipment."

Ramona laughed. "What? I can just see you on a tractor. Have you ever driven one before?"

"No. but I have flown airplanes. How hard can it be? A tractor doesn't even leave the ground."

"Aren't you talking about a lot of money here."

"Again, it doesn't have to be new. I have all of the money I earned during the war just setting in the bank. I never had a chance to spend it, now I do. What do you think?"

"I guess its something you need. After all I bought this place expecting you to take care of it."

"Good. There's a farm sale this Saturday down in South County. I was going to go see what they might have. In the meantime I'm going to look for a pickup."

"Oh look." Ramona said. "Here come the kids. Lets tell them."

When the kids were all there, Ramona said, "There is something we want to talk to you about."

"Are we in trouble?" Norma asked.

“No, not at all. Quite the opposite. We were just talking about taking a family vacation this summer. What do you say?”

“Yeah, that sound fun.” Craig said. “We hardly ever went anywhere because of Dad's business. Where are we going?”

“What would you say to a month in Hawaii.”

Norman and Janet screamed in delight. Craig simply grinned from ear to ear and nodded his head. When they settled down, Ramona continued, “I have a house over there that is right on the beach. We can go swimming in the ocean and all kinds of things.”

Over supper and the rest of the evening, they talked about Hawaii and all of the things they wanted to do.

On the first Tuesday in early April, Sheffield gave Craig a ride to school since they didn't have wrestling. After school they went to look at a pickup that Sheffield had called on earlier. Sheffield liked what he found. It was a 1942 General Motors three quarter ton long box pickup. According to the serial number, it was one of the last ones to roll off the assembly line in June 1942, before production was curtailed during the war. It was green, with a decent paint job, despite a few scratches and a couple of dings. Other than that, it was in good shape and handled well on the test drive.

With its straight six engine and five speed transmission, the thing was made for hauling, exactly what Sheffield had in mind. Brand new, it sold for seven hundred fifty dollars, the asking price was three hundred fifty. After some haggling, he got it down to three hundred. Craig got to drive it home.

With one item checked off his list, the Saturday after Easter, Sheffield and Craig went to a farm sale in South County to look at farm equipment. The sale was an annual event with equipment from a number of sources. Some had been brought by farmers and some from the various implement dealers in the area. There were a number of tractors and all kinds of equipment on hand. Sheffield didn't need anything real big, but he didn't want something too small either. He ruled out the Ford 2N tractor like the ones they used on the Reprisal to pull airplanes around. He found a 1940 Farmall Model H row crop tractor with narrow dual front tires that he thought would do the job. He figured the M next to it was too big for his needs. He hoped that most of the bidding would be for the newer and bigger tractors.

As he and Craig were looking at haying equipment, they ran into Roger Rowan and Read. Roger was surprised to see the Brasons there. “What are you doing here, Sheffield?” he asked.

“Oh hi, Roger. I'm looking for some equipment.”

“I didn't know that you were into farming.”

“I'm not really, but I have twenty acres of hay that I need to take care of and I'm here to see what I can find. I was looking at that older H over there and now I need something to go with it.”

"I see." Roger said stroking his chin as he looked around. "This mower ought to work for you." he said as he walked toward it. Sheffield and Craig followed. "It will fit that H you're looking at or any other Farmall tractor as far as that goes." Roger proceeded to explain to him how it worked. Then he asked, "Do you want to stack it loose or baled?"

"Baled. Its a lot easier to handle."

"Thats for sure. I don't know how we used to get along without balers. First you'll need a side rake. There are three of them over there. Any one of them will work. Now when it comes to a baler, you're going to want something a little newer, like those over there."

He took them over to the balers and showed him a 1946 McCormick Model 45 hay baler. He explained how the pickup worked and how the bales were formed and tied with twine. He pointed out that this particular model was driven by the tractor's power take off rather than its own engine like the older ones.

Sheffield and Craig stuck with Roger and Read since they were in unfamiliar territory, and they knew their way around. They came across a hay wagon, but the thing that really caught his attention was stock rack that would fit in his pickup. "We could haul our horses with this." he said excitedly.

"You have horses?" Roger asked somewhat surprised.

Before Sheffield could answer, Read did. "Yeah Dad, they have two of them. When I was over to Craig's one day we took them for a ride."

"Well, well. You'll have to bring them out to our place, we have all kinds of room to ride."

"Yeah Sheffield." Craig encouraged. "It sounds like fun."

"We just might do that." Sheffield agreed.

Soon it was time for the auction to begin. "Unless you're prepared to buy something, don't dare scratch your nose. Its best to keep your hands in your pockets." Roger warned.

The fast talking auctioneer began with some of the smaller items and odds and ends. One of the first things was the stock rack. The bidding started at five dollars. Sheffield's cane went in the air. When the auctioneer called for ten dollars, some one else did.

"Do I hear fifteen?" he paused. "Fifteen?" he asked again.

Sheffield thought about it for a moment and yelled, "Twelve dollars!"

The auctioneer repeated "Twelve dollars, do I hear fifteen? Fifteen dollars?"

Sheffield looked at the man who had outbid him. He simply lowered his head and shook it.

The auctioneer repeated, "Do I hear Fifteen dollars?"

There was no response.

The auctioneer said, "Sold for twelve dollars to the fellar with the cane." and moved on to the next item.



Someone with a clipboard approached Sheffield and got his name and put on the list next to the stock rack.

“Good job.” Roger said. “You've got the hang of how it works.

“That was kind of exciting.” Sheffield said.

As the crowd moved on to other items, they followed along. After a while, they got to haying equipment. Sheffield got the wagon and the mower he had wanted, but lost out on the first side rake up for bid, but got the second one. When it came to the baler, the bidding got pretty intense and Sheffield was in it from the beginning. Roger had told him what he thought the most it would be worth was. As the bidding got close to that threshold, Sheffield worried that he might not get it.

The bidding got to twenty dollars over that threshold and he had held back on the last four or five bids. He sensed the instant of silence before the auctioneer dropped his gavel and made a split second decision and waved his cane in the air. He got it.

Next they moved onto the tillage equipment. Sheffield's had no need for any of that, but Roger bid on and got a set of disks and some harrows to go with the grain drill he got earlier. Finally they came to the tractors. The smaller tractors went quickly without much bidding. Then they got to the one that Sheffield wanted. He waved his cane on the opening bid and was quickly out bid. Again his cane went in the air. As with the baler, Roger had told him what he thought it was worth. The bidding got to within fifty dollars and his competitor went silent. The gavel came down in Sheffield's favor. He had got everything he came after. The bidding on the newer tractors got very heated. As a spectator, it was actually kind of comical.

After it was all over, Sheffield went up to the table and gave his name. The man behind the table tallied up the total and Sheffield wrote out a check for the amount. Now he had to figure out how to get it all home. The stock rack was easy, it went in the pickup and the hay wagon went behind it. It took four men to load the mower in the back of the the pickup and the side rake was lifted onto the trailer by a tractor with a loader. Finally, the baler went behind the tractor.

Before leaving, Roger asked, “Do you need any help unloading it when you get home?”

“No. I think we can manage. I'll call my one my brothers to come help me. Do you remember meeting Shenan from the wedding?”

“Yeah, I remember him.”

His son has a backhoe. We can get the rake off with that.”

“Now when you get ready to use this stuff, give me a call and I'll come and help you get started.”

“Thanks, Roger. I'll do that. Thanks for your help.”

“Thats what friends are for. I'll look forward to hearing from you.”

At that Roger and Read left them.

Sheffield asked Craig, "Can you manage to drive home with a trailer?"

"I think so."

"Okay then, follow me on the tractor with the baler."

Sheffield climbed onto the seat of the tractor and looked things over. He found the brakes and the clutch, but finding the starter switch took him a minute. Then he realized that it was the button just below the key. He started it, adjusted the throttle, and put it in gear. He slowly let out the clutch and was on his way. It wasn't quite like flying an airplane but he got the hang of it. When they pulled in the driveway, Ramona and the girls came running to see what they had bought.

Spring time brought added members to the the Brason Family, Ruth Ann had her baby, who she named Anna on March 17<sup>th</sup>. Emmaline had her baby boy on March 27<sup>th</sup>, the named him William Seth Casper, but called him Billy. And finally Glen Brason was born to Joe and Adele on April 27<sup>th</sup>. At the end of April, when Anna was six weeks old, Harvey brought Ruth Ann for a visit. He flew them up from Denison his Bobcat and landed his plane in the pasture next to the house.

While Ruth Ann, Joseph and the baby stayed with Shenan and Emily, Harvey, Marcella, and Winnie stayed with Sheffield and Ramona. They were the first to stay in the guest room. Sheffield and Ramona were proud to show off their forty acre Two Star Ranch. "I know that its nothing like your place," Ramona admitted, "but it is plenty for us."

"I like what you named the place." Harvey complimented. "Very appropriate for a retired admiral. You know what you need." Harvey observed. "This is way too much pasture for two horses. You need ten or twelve calves in there to keep the grass from getting overgrown. If I were you, I'd get a few heifers and couple of steers. The heifers I'd raise for breeding stock and sell the steers or better yet butcher one. It really wouldn't take much more effort than what you've got already. You have plenty of hay to feed them during the winter and then next year you can hire a bull then you'll have some calves to sell."

I hadn't thought about that." Sheffield said. "I suppose you're right. I bet I know where I can get some calves. I recently got acquainted with a rancher who has a place not far from here."

Sheffield gave Roger Rowan a call. Roger was more than happy to sell him a few calves. Sheffield and Harvey went to the Rowan ranch to have look. The Rowans raised registered Angus beef cattle for that very purpose. Harvey was quite impressed with their operation as the two men compared notes. The rainfall they got in Virginia was considerably more than what Harvey got in Texas so they had much better grazing conditions and could run more cattle on fewer acres.

Ten young heifers and two steers were cut out of the heard and placed in a holding pen. The next day, Sheffield and Harvey road out to the Rowan Ranch on Red and Roxy. With help from Roger, they

drove them home in a mini cattle drive.

“Now that you have a heard, you need a brand.” Harvey suggested. “Why not use two stars?”

“Thats a great idea.” Sheffield said. “But how do I go about it.”

“First you'll need to contact your local state brand inspector to get it approved. Once thats done, have someone make a branding iron for you and you're all set.”

During the few days that they stayed, Sheffield mentioned to Harvey that it had been some time since he'd been flying so Harvey took him up for ride. “You know, the military has some surplus planes that you can pick up for practically nothing.”

“I guess I hadn't thought of that.” Sheffield said.

“Yeah, their mostly trainers and utility aircraft. You ought to look into it.”

“I think I will.”

“You've even got room for your own landing strip, like I do. Then you could buzz down and see us anytime as well.”

After landing in the pasture, Harvey and Sheffield surveyed the ranch and decided a narrow strip right along the road would be perfect for the prevailing wind and would be plenty long enough for a small plane, and it wouldn't take up much land.

A day or two later, they all flew back to Denison. Their visit had been very productive for Sheffield. He had a pasture full of calves and now he was considering buying a plane. After all, flying was in his blood. While he thought about a plane, Ramona had one house on the market and was looking around for other investments.

Mothers Day had been a day that Ramona hadn't paid much attention to in the years since her mother died. After marrying Sheffield, she became vaguely aware of it since Sheffield always sent a card to his mother and signed her name with his. So it caught her off guard when the kids presented her with a homemade Mother's Day card. Each of them had written a short note telling her that they loved her and thanked her for all that she had done for them, both before and since their mother died.

The rest of May passed quickly and before long school let out for the year on Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Sheffield had made it through his first year of coaching and teaching and quite enjoyed his new career. It was gratifying to attend the graduation of his students and some of his wrestlers.

During the last week of May, the hay was ready to cut. Roger came over one morning and helped him get started. It took that afternoon and the morning to mow. The aroma of fresh mown hay was intoxicating as it permeated the air around the house. Again Roger came over that afternoon and got him going with the rake.

After drying for a few days, Roger was good enough to come back early on Monday morning and

showed him how to run the baler. He explained the need to bale while the dew was on so the leaves wouldn't fall off. That morning he got half of it baled. That afternoon he had Ramona drive the pickup with the hay wagon behind it. Craig walked along beside and picked up the bales and put them on the wagon. The girls, working as a team, drug the bales to Sheffield, who stacked them. Once the the bales were three or four high, too high for Craig to lift, they hauled it to the barnyard. The kids thought it was a lot of fun to ride on top of the load. It took two loads that day.

That day happened to be Norma's fourteenth birthday. The work was finished by mid afternoon, in plenty of time for a little birthday party with some of her friends from school.

The next day, the rest of the hay was all baled and stacked . The experience had proved the value of buying the ranch. It gave the kids an opportunity to work and helped them pull together as a family as much as would the trip they had been planning. The only thing that stood in the way of the trip was Memorial Day. That year it was on Friday.

During the morning, Ramona and the girls cut flowers and blossoms and arranged them into bouquets. They met up with the rest of the Brason clan at the cemetery to decorate the graves. When they got there the cemetery was full of color as many had set out flowers the day before. In addition to all of the flowers, hundreds of flags fluttered in the light breeze. The VFW had been out early that morning and placed a flag at the graves of those had served their country, those who wore the gray uniform of the south had Confederate flags.

That morning at the cemetery, Sheffield was approached by the local VFW commander, who recognized him, and asked if he'd consider joining the VFW. He said, "We could really use a man of your experience and ability."

Sheffield thought about it for a moment. It seemed like a worthwhile endeavor. But he looked at Craig, Norma, and Janet and realized that he needed to put all of his effort into his family, his new career, and the Two Star Ranch and politely declined in invitation.

It was an emotional time for the kids as they placed flowers on the grave of their parents. They knew how blessed they were to have Sheffield and Ramona. As Sheffield placed some flowers on the graves of his family, he realized how blessed he was to have a new family in Ramona and their kids.

For the first time, the annual Brason family picnic wasn't held in Emmett and Ellen's front yard. Rather it was held in the stand of trees down in the pasture along the river. Everyone was there, except for Ruth Ann and her family, but they had been there earlier in the month. Having Sheffield host it took the load off of Emmett. Since being diagnosed, Parkinson's had made things more difficult for him. It was nice to just come and enjoy the picnic and his family.

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