

Praise for  
*Never Isn't Long Enough...*

"The rebuilding of the South after the Civil War brought industrialization, urbanization, and technological advances to rural American farms. Railroads spread commerce and opportunities to every corner of the land. In a saga set amidst these transformations, F. Diane Pickett captures how they affected a rural Georgia family. Life on the farm, the coming of the automobile, moonshiners, the Roaring Twenties, the movie house ... they're all here! A fascinating story."

—Dean Debolt  
University Archivist, West Florida History Center,  
University of West Florida, Pensacola

"Diane Pickett joins a distinguished parade of colorful Southern writers from William Faulkner to Fannie Flagg, who have managed to capture the inexplicable logic that is endemic to so many Southern clans. Written with great humor and insight."

—Robert M. Fulmer, PhD  
Author of *Newcomers in Paradise*

“A fun read of wicked Southern tales. I look forward to more from this author.”

—Shelby Hofer  
Actor, writer, director, producer,  
PushPush Theater & Film, Atlanta

“A pleasurable journey through the past to the present, accompanied by a kaleidoscope of colorful Southern characters and lots of solid history.”

—Candace Leslie  
Author of *From Forge and Anvil*

“A fabulous book. It feels as though the author is sitting in front of you and introducing you to amazing characters while sharing their stories.”

—Valerie Richard Auzenne, PhD  
Associate Professor, Florida State University College of  
Motion Picture Arts

# Never Isn't Long Enough

F. Diane Pickett



Miramar Beach, Florida

Published by: Uphill Publishing  
211 Eagle Drive  
Miramar Beach, FL 32550

Cover art & design: Brad Wallace Design  
Author photo: David Roth Photography

First Edition

Copyright © 2014 by F. Diane Pickett

All rights reserved. No part of this publication, except for brief quotations embodied in reviews or for other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law, may be reproduced, stored in retrieval systems, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

For bulk orders, please contact BookLogix at 470.239.8547 or sales@booklogix.com.

### **Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Pickett, F. Diane.

Never isn't long enough / by F. Diane Pickett. -- Miramar Beach, FL : Uphill Publishing, c2014. p. ; cm.

ISBN: 978-0-615-87659-7

Summary: A humorous Southern family saga spanning the years from the Civil War through World War II featuring the doomed romance between a young farm girl and a wealthy older man called to God and commerce.—Publisher.

1. Southern states—Fiction. 2. United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Fiction. 3. United States—History—20th century—Fiction. 4. World War, 1914-1918—United States—Fiction. 5. World War, 1939-1945—United States—Fiction. 6. Historical fiction. 7. Love stories. I. Title.

PS3616.I2854 N48 2014  
813/.6—dc23

2013956583  
1405

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

**To Pick ~**

**In loving and  
powerful memory**



# Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Author's Note	ix
1. Never	1
2. Pick	7
3. Starvation or Salvation?	11
4. The Road to Redemption	17
5. Pump and Circumstance	21
6. The Man Came Down from the Mountains	29
7. The Great Adventuress	35
8. Cars in My Eyes	39
9. A Long Empty Road	43
10. Mae's Beautiful Garden	45
11. Swinging a Pick	51
12. Pieorgis and Polkas	53
13. Dogs and Derelicts	61
14. Anchorage Away	67
15. Ice Pick	71
16. Laura's Lads	75
17. Gas, Glory, and Girls	79
18. Rich Men's Toys	87
19. Used-up Cars and Brand New Woman	93
20. Dancin' Dorothy	95
21. Faye's Fantasies	99
22. Another near Mrs.	103
23. The Rules!	111
24. The Farmer's Daughter	115
25. An Uphill Battle	121

26.	The Daily Grind	127
27.	A Ripened Georgia Peach	133
28.	The Bride Wore Black	137
29.	Faye's Movie	141
30.	The Starlet	145
31.	Mother-in-Law and Marriage	147
32.	A New Star Is Born	155
33.	Sob Sisters	159
34.	A Rich History	163
35.	The Ladies at Lunch	169
36.	The Southern Charmer	175
37.	Take It on Faith	179
38.	Intermission	185
39.	Now Playing	191
40.	The Newsreel	197
41.	Movie Madness	205
42.	Supporting Cast	207
43.	A Double Feature	211
44.	The Child Stars	215
45.	The Director	219
46.	Flirty Faye	221
47.	The Director's Cut	223
48.	The Final Curtain	229
49.	The Last Curtain Call	233
50.	A New Beginning	239
51.	Dancin' Dorothy Again	245
52.	The Frail Friend	251
53.	Reprise of the Starring Role	257
54.	Mary, Marry Me	265
55.	The Unthinkable	269
56.	Grandpa Hill	275
	Epilogue: Never Ending	279
	About the Author	283

# Acknowledgments

I AM TREMENDOUSLY GRATEFUL TO MY DEAR AND LOYAL FRIEND Dewey Ray, who has been my mentor and guide throughout this long process. He has done all the heavy lifting on computer issues and the endless morass of publication details. Writing the book was far easier than the publication process, and without his help and support I would never have taken on the task. In addition, his thoughtful and insightful comments helped me give some of the characters additional depth. He added greatly to my courage in writing this book and is absolutely the world's best cheerleader!

My friend and most avid reader, Annette Robson, has been "with me" from the beginning of this work, constantly praising and urging me on. Her enthusiasm for the story and its characters has been immensely gratifying. It was rewarding to know she eagerly awaited the next chapter as it was constructed. We spent long hours together reading and refining. My only previous experience with fans was when I was queen at Mardi Gras in New Orleans, but that involved way too many beads and beer!

My concept editor, Lora Lisbon of Blessingway Authors' Services, has been amazing in her attention to detail and I am so thankful for her hours of patient labor and her expertise. Her fingerprints are on all the pages as she labored over the smallest word. I would also like to thank my wonderful illustrator, Brad Wallace, for the dynamic cover.

Many friends, especially Brenda Ray, Debra Channell, Bill Linne, Julie Lopp, and Malca Lebell, were very generous with their time and interest in previewing this book and adding encouragement and helpful comments along the way.

THANK YOU ALL. WE DID THIS TOGETHER.

# Author's Note

EVERYONE FANTASIZES ABOUT WRITING A BOOK THAT KEEPS readers turning the pages. To do so, you need interesting people to write about. I set about re-creating the lives of two Southerners and their individual journeys in an attempt to reveal who they started out to be and who they actually became. She had an intense desire to get out of poverty—at any cost—and never look back; he was called to God but answered the call to a different life. Although their paths crossed only briefly and chaotically, they were to forever change each other's lives.

Set against a playful rendering of almost a hundred years of Southern history, their saga raises fascinating questions: Did either of them get what they wanted? Could they have altered the course of events that changed their lives so dramatically?

Theirs is not a love story but rather a tale of betrayal leading one of them on a bitter journey that injects its poison into the character's every encounter. In the process of recording it, I have learned that not every

x Never Isn't Long Enough

story has a happy ending and some, like life itself, end with a question—in this case, Just how long is never?

# 1.

## Never

HILL EXPLAINED ETERNITY TO HIS CHILDREN. IMAGINE, HE said, an eagle that comes once a year to Stone Mountain to sharpen his beak and when the mountain is worn down *that* is eternity. They could understand it easily because they were born in the shadow of Stone Mountain at the start of the war. It was actually World War II, but in reality it was a war between their mother and life.

They learned about “never” from their mother. She was seriously absorbed with it. So, eternity and never became the same thing for them.

The first time they remember hearing the word *never* was when one of their beautiful aunts would say something like “That woman was no lady, and if you want to be a lady you must *never* do what she just did.” That had a huge impact, because in the rural South of the 1940s every female of any age was judged on beauty, manners, and a smile so gracious it would blind just about everyone within striking distance. All girls aspired to be a lady. To do otherwise meant you were stuck in that perpetual hell of husband hunting with no chance of getting one.

Such a girl would remain the pity of every Sunday school teacher in the South. Brains were not particularly necessary, but winning the bake contest at the First Baptist Church Picnic was absolutely essential. And every girl knew if she went to college she could drop out as soon as she captured Mr. Wonderful or some version thereof. He might not remain Mr. Wonderful for long, but he would have to do because divorce wouldn't do. Finding one husband was hard enough; getting a second one was next to impossible. No lady would ever divorce—unless, of course, it would result in a large chunk of money, a guaranteed place at the head table of the Woman's Club, and the right to talk about the wages of sin at every church function. Church was a mighty big deal and sin the number one topic, so you had to establish bragging rights right off the bat.

The goal for college was not to get an education but to get a husband, and Mrs. was the most popular degree offered. Even Ivy Leaguers had that curriculum down pat.

Their mother—known to everyone else as Faye—had taken a shortcut. From the moment she had slipped out of the birth canal and fixed her beady eyes on her surroundings, she didn't like what she saw. She figured she was destined for better things. She was not about to waste her life on farmhands and cotton fields. She was going to Atlanta. For every true Southern woman, Atlanta was the closest to heaven you could ever expect to get, and you had to bake a heck of a lot of cakes to get there.

Faye didn't have to bake as many cakes because she was gifted with flaming red hair, a great set of knockers, and a fierce determination to get off that farm. She also had a figure that was as firm as a casket. That comes with the territory of pulling corn, hoeing cotton, and picking peas. Playing baseball and football with her four brothers also helped. She later put that hand-to-hand combat practice to good use in the wrestling match of dating. She didn't like to

lose that one too often—but hey, Atlanta was the goal here! A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do. Faye was in a hurry, so she had to work fast.

In a family with nine siblings, somebody was always in trouble, about to be in trouble, or asking for trouble. Faye was just plain trouble. Her mother, Mae, used to say that Faye was born high-tempered. That was Victorian code for bitch. Her red hair dueled with her screaming outbursts that could explode into a volcano of outrage whenever her demands were not met.

She had watched three of her four sisters do the college thing and get husbands. Her fourth sister, June, still a child, was a work in progress and couldn't be much help to a girl in a big hurry. Besides, June's already budding dark beauty was in sharp contrast to the redheaded and fair-skinned girls in the family. She was obviously going to be a local tobacco queen, and Faye planned to have an Atlanta address by the time that particular competition started.

Faye knew everything about farm life, but what she wanted to know about was excitement. There wasn't much of that on the farm unless the heifer ran off with the neighbor's bull or the pigs got loose in the vegetable garden. She also craved attention. It was difficult to be noticed in such a large family, but Faye quickly figured out that red hair, temper tantrums, and attention went together.

She learned to be bossy and enjoyed her power over the younger children in the household: Larry, Wallace, Sara Mae, and Vernon in addition to June. She had two older sisters—Gwen and Garland—and an older brother, Ollie Jr. She didn't get far bossing them around, but the five younger ones were easy prey. She pounced on them like a flea on a dog. They went round and round through the house and out into the yard. They would run, and she would yell.

She came by the yelling naturally. It was in her DNA. She had also perfected it while learning to call the cows and pigs

from the pasture into the barn, and the skill did not desert her in later life.

It didn't take much to get her going, and once in gear there was no brake on her vocal cords. She resented her station in life and had plotted since early childhood to escape to a different world. She had envied her city-bred well-to-do cousins, who lived in a small town, *not* on a farm. To Faye's eye, they had lovely clothes and housemaids and were comfortable in what she considered gracious homes. Besides, there was not an entire basketball team of them, so they each got lots of attention.

Her own home was a small wood-frame house with a screened front porch and a back porch containing the well from which water was drawn. This typically Southern farm-home, with no running water or electricity, was too small for such a large family and offered no privacy. Sometimes you even had company in the privy at the back of the house. The little bedrooms were arranged in a row across from the equally small living room, dining room, and kitchen. When the entire family gathered in the kitchen for meals, it was akin to a crowd of food fanatics registering for a convention.

Bedtime was a bit like musical chairs since there were eleven people and only five beds. They slept two or three to a bed, and Faye made sure she got to the biggest one first to claim her space. The sisters and brothers bedded down in separate rooms, and no one had a room of their own, not even their parents. Faye didn't like going to bed early, but there was little to do in the evenings except more chores, which did not interest her since she was already tired from the day's work.

Her day began at dawn, helping get breakfast cooked for all eleven of them on the wood-burning stove. Then she had to make enough biscuits for breakfast, school lunch pails, and after-school hunger pangs. After breakfast, she helped dress the younger ones. In addition, tiny June and Vernon

needed changing, feeding, and bathing. Gwen and Garland, meanwhile, made the beds and washed the mountains of breakfast dishes in a tin pan. The water for washing was brought in by pail from the well on the back porch.

The older boys, Ollie and Larry, had no time to spare either. Their morning chores consisted of one of them chopping and bringing in firewood for the stove and getting it hot enough for cooking while the other took the younger boy, Wallace, out to the barn to feed the chickens and hogs.

Usually Faye left for school feeling more like a housemaid than a student. In the summertime, the days were longer and harder since instead of going to school she had to work in the fields alongside her brothers and sisters. There her fair skin burned in the sun, causing freckles to mar one of her best assets. She wanted out and thought of little else.

She had heard the story endless times of her mother's misfortune in giving up the teaching profession to become a farmer's wife. Faye had absolutely no intention of going that route. More than once she'd said, "I would rather ride to hell on a one-wheel bike than make that mistake." Every time she heard that story she winced and became more determined than ever to be a glamorous woman in the city.

Faye's mother, Mae, was an educated woman who had been born to teach, but her life took a side step when she married a farmer. Nonetheless, she still taught—even if it was only her own large brood of children. Faye paid enough attention to her lessons to at least learn how to write because she planned to send lots of postcards home from Atlanta.

"But how am I going to get there?" she would ask herself. The farm was five miles out in the country from Brookfield, a candy store whistle stop for farmers on their way to slightly larger Tifton, to sell their cotton, tobacco, corn, or peanuts.

Cotton was king, and "whacky tobaccy" had not yet been invented. Yet the post-Depression rural South was awash in golden tobacco that was auctioned off at the end

of every summer. It was an exhilarating time for farm families. Auctions were almost like fairs, and each year's beauty queen was named the Tobacco Queen of Tift County. Sara Mae, the seventh child in the family, was a three-time winner. Mae Mae, as she was often called, was a petite and intelligent replica of her beautiful mother, right down to her red hair. Only Sara Mae didn't wear her hair in a braid; instead, she let it flow in long, saucy curls down her back. After her third win, someone shouted, "She's just too damned beautiful—why don't we try hogs next time? Maybe Myrtice can stand a chance. She bakes a damn good pound cake, too!"

Tobacco time was not only for tobacco queens but for cash registers as farmers brought their golden goods to bulging warehouses. Long rows of bright leaves were bundled and tied into big white sheets looking like plump ghosts waiting to be brought to life by the tongue-twisting auctioneer with his singsong litany of prices.

A successful auction meant that the farmer had cash for supplies, seed, food, and equipment. Faye's father, Ollie, didn't have a tractor yet; he was still plowing with a mule. He wouldn't get his first tractor until his son, Wallace, came back from the war with a fistful of dollars—soldier's pay saved out of four long years of grueling combat. Ollie always said he would have done without a tractor if it meant keeping his sons safe. Four sons went to war, and four came home. But Ollie Jr. came home in a casket.

Cash-heavy farmers attracted all sorts of salesmen from far and wide. Eager to part the farmers from their money, car salesmen were among the frontrunners in the competition.

Enter Hill Pickett, also known as Pick. He was a first-class ticket to Atlanta about to be punched.