

**Rags to Riches**  
**From There to Here**  
**Glendal Leon Reeves, an Autobiography**

It was a chilly night a few days after Thanksgiving, Tuesday, November 30, 1943. A fire was burning in the wood stove to keep the small farmhouse warm. Jeff and Helen Reeves were anticipating the birth of their third child. There was no doctor present, nor had there been, nor would there be. Helen had experienced this twice before and was sure it would work out.

My name is Glendal Leon Reeves and that is the way I entered the world. My parents lived on a farm in Southeastern Oklahoma, ten miles in the country from the small town of Stuart, Oklahoma in Hughes County about seven miles of that was a dirt road which would sometimes become impassable after a few inches of . The nearest grocery store was part of a gas station about seven miles away on a dirt road. For banking and major shopping we went to Holdenville, about 36 miles away.



This is the house where I grew up, however it had been vacant for some time when I took this photo.

When I was born, my family had no electricity, no running water, which meant no toilets, no telephone, and none of the comforts that we think all people have now. When Emeril refers to the icebox, I know what he is talking about. That is what we had. We could not have a refrigerator because we had no electricity. In fact, I was about 6 years old before we had electrical power. I still remember the heavy machinery coming to place the poles before stringing the electrical wires.

I spent the first 17 years of my life on that farm. In all of those years, for some reason or other, we never had running water in the house, nor did we ever have a telephone. We got our first TV when I was about 15 years old. You can call it poverty, or give it any name you wish.

I started school in first grade at the age of five. There was no kindergarten. Each morning the bus would pick us up and take us to school in the community of Gerty, Oklahoma. It took almost an hour for the bus to make its route and get us to school.

The process was reversed in the afternoon. When weather conditions were bad, it took even longer. When I attended school, the elementary, junior high, and high school were in the same building. That is not so difficult when there is only one small class at each grade level. Most of my classmates were the same throughout my years of education. My high school graduating class had 16 students. Is that almost unbelievable?

Farm work at that time was difficult for our family. A majority of the work on our farm was done with a team of mules. We eventually got a small tractor. I knew at an early age that living on a farm was not something I wanted to do. Milking the cows, feeding the pigs and other animals before and after school was only part of it. The most difficult part was working in the cotton, corn, and peanut fields after school and on Saturdays. Almost never on a Sunday though. That day was reserved for attending church.

No one in my family had ever attended college, but I did not let that deter me. If I wanted a better life, that is what I had to do. My high school Biology teacher was one of the most influential people in my life. He convinced me that I could, and should attend college. East Central State College, which is now East Central University, in Ada, Oklahoma, is about 52 miles away. That's where I decided to go. When I graduated from Gerty High School at the age of 17. I immediately moved to Ada and enrolled in summer school at East Central. I also got a job working at the local Woolworth's store earning \$1 per hour. Yes that is ONE dollar. With a few dollars and student loans, I persevered. My parents were not able to help pay for my education. You can guess that I did not have all of the amenities that most other students had. Life was difficult, but I knew there was something better in the future.

Three years and four summers later, at the age of 20, I graduated from East Central with a B.S. in Education, and was ready to begin a new life which would hopefully be much better. I had decided earlier in my life that I would like to live in California. I had aunts, uncles, and cousins there. I accepted a position in Fontana, CA teaching 5th grade. I had never seen a class of 36 students before, but there they were. What a challenge! After spending 3 years there, I decided to move to Orange County. I accepted a position in the Santa Ana Unified School District, 5th grade again. It was during this year that I met my future wife, Janyce.

I had no idea that before that year was over I would be drafted to serve in the United States Army at the age of 24. (Does anyone remember the draft?) No, I didn't want to go. Did anyone? I spent the summer walking precincts for Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign. I had strong anti-war feelings and thought he was the right person for president. It was such a tumultuous time in our country's history.

Early in September, I was whisked off in a bus with many other long-haired twenty-somethings that felt the same as I did. A few hours later, we arrived in Fort Ord California for Basic Training. What a pile of hair on the floor of the barber shop when they finished with this busload of future soldiers! Ten weeks. Ten weeks of hell and then on to something worse.

In November, after Basic Training was over, I was sent to Fort Sill, in Lawton, OK for artillery training. I had spent all of my younger days trying to get out of Oklahoma yet here I was again! It was cold, probably one of the coldest winters in Oklahoma history. What made it worse was that everyone knew what came next. If you were a warm body, you were going to Vietnam. It was during a short leave at Christmas that Jan and I were engaged, just 5 weeks before I shipped out.

On February 11, 1968, I departed from Oakland, CA for that long and unforgiving trip to Vietnam. Some of those same people that were in Basic Training were on that seemingly never-ending flight. From the cold winter of Oklahoma to the hot, humid climate of Vietnam. What a change! But the climate was the least of my worries. There was a never-ending war going on here!

I was luckier than a multitude of people. I returned to the U.S. exactly 1 year later—with all of my body parts intact. Yes, there was difficulty readjusting to civilization, but that is another story. I was just happy to be home alive.

While I was in Vietnam reluctantly participating in a war that no one understood and most people were opposed to, Jan was planning a wedding which was to take place in Okeene, Oklahoma on February 21, 1970. That was only 10 days from the time that I was to return home.

On February 11, 1970, I was on that long flight home. It seemed much shorter than the trip over. I wonder why? I returned to Fort Lewis near Seattle Washington with no one to greet me. No one was there to greet anyone else either. Is it possible that lack of recognition is one reason that many Vietnam Vets are still bitter over that war?

After a change of clothes, I was soon at the airport waiting for standby tickets which resulted in a long trip to Oklahoma. From Seattle, to Los Angeles, to Dallas, to Oklahoma City. What a trip! Would there be someone to greet me there? My lucky day! I knew I could count on my future wife, Jan.

Jan and I had only a short time to get reacquainted. The wedding was coming up soon. It is amazing how a year and a war can change a person. Needless to say, we should have allowed more than 10 days, but everything worked out in the end. After the wedding, we spent our honeymoon in New Orleans. What a place and what a difference from the culture I had experienced only a short time before.

Now it's time for the newlyweds to look for a place to live. Remember, I am still a soldier until September and it's only March! I have now been assigned to, can you believe it, Fort Sill in Lawton, OK. Will I ever be able to get back to California? Military pay plus the few dollars that Jan would earn as a substitute teacher would not pay for much. We searched and finally found a place that had one thing to offer. No, it wasn't the kitchen. Nor was it the bedroom, bath, or garage. The only thing it had going for it was that it was close to the base. Who would have thought of that as being a plus, but hey, it's only for a few months. And maybe with a little luck I could get out a few days early to return to my job.

In the following months, I played soldier and Jan worked a few days a week as a substitute teacher. We counted the days. I applied for an early out to return to California and got lucky. Uncle Sam's Army allowed me to terminate my service about 3 weeks early. Start packing!

On August 21, 1970, I checked out of the military and we were on our way to California to find a real place to live. We found an apartment in Garden Grove that we thought we liked. It was spacious, comfortable, and close to my new job with the Garden Grove Unified School District. Little did we know how noisy it would be living above the Recreation Room and overlooking the pool. By the end of the month, Jan had gotten a job in the Santa Ana Unified School District where she had worked before quitting to plan a wedding. We had had enough of the noise so we moved to an apartment in Tustin, CA where we lived until we purchased our first house in the new master-planned City of Irvine in 1972.

Moving to a new house was exciting. Everyone around us was a new resident in a new city. Irvine was only incorporated on December 28, 1971. A new house also meant a lot of work. We kept busy at work and at home.

Six years later we sold our first house and moved to our present home. If we had known about all of the rain and construction delays, we might have waited awhile. We had to move into a motel with our pet Shih Tzu, Tisho, for 2 1/2 months while the house was being completed. It rained almost every day during that time. Luckily, we

were close enough to Jan's work so she could come "home" at lunch to walk the dog. We finally moved into our new house on March 17, 1978.

On November 2, 1979, our first and only child was born. I guess you could say Glenda changed our lives significantly. We had been married 10 years and were used to doing as we pleased whenever we pleased. Needless to say, that changed immediately. We found that you are never too old to make adjustments! Glenda is now married and enjoying a career as a music educator.

After teaching elementary school since 1965, Jan decided that was enough. She retired in June 1998. I soon decided that I had done my part as an educator, and I retired in February 1999. It was the right decision for both of us since it allowed us freedom to do things that we had postponed for many years.

After retiring, I developed an interest in website creation and started learning from scratch. I did research, joined forums, and spent countless hours educating myself. It became a labor of love and I know I spent way too many hours developing Glen's Place, [www.glensplace.com](http://www.glensplace.com). It started simply and grew to over 500 pages. I started a monthly newsletter related to the site and that consumed more time. That venture came to a conclusion after several years due to diminished vision caused by macular degeneration.



This is our present home in Irvine, CA.

Along the way during these 17 years of retirement, Jan and I have been able to do many things that we had never had time to do. We have enjoyed road trips and extended vacations like never before. We discovered California's Central Coast and the wine country around Paso Robles. We love spending time in Cambria at least twice a year.

From There to Here has been a long and winding road, but Life is Good!