# Sweet William to the Rescue!

By Maxine Harris, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

ALTHOUGH I've never had a green thumb, I've always loved flowers.

After my husband, Mel, and I married, at Alcester, South Dakota, in 1943, and started farming near Harrisburg, there was never enough money left for unnecessary things like flowers. Bank payments came first.

Springtime is always extra busy on the farm, and every time I looked out the window, Mel was either going at a dogtrot to plow or plant in the fields or across the barnyard to milk the cows.

One early spring morning, I was hanging our new baby's diapers on the clothesline when Mel rushed by me, patted me on the shoulder and said, "Bye; see you at noon."

"Where are you going to be working?" I yelled above the roar of the old Case tractor.

"Mowing the road ditches down by the gravel road," he answered and, with a grin and a wave, he was out on the road as fast as the tractor would go.

I'd better not stand here moping, I thought to myself, or he'll be back for dinner before I'm through washing.

I sighed, suddenly remembering those long, romantic kisses he used to give me at the door. Now he's always in a hurry, I thought, and, with the baby, I'm always tired.

It wasn't long before I heard the tractor coming back.

Oh, no, not another breakdown!" I muttered under my breath. "I haven't time to go to town for parts today…and the baby is just waking up. I haven't even started the meat and potatoes."

He jumped down and hurried over to where I was hanging the last diaper.

Silently, but with a half-embarrassed grin on his sunburned face, he brought his arms around in front of him and was holding out a large bouquet of purple phlox—sweet William, as we always called them —my favorite wildflower.

He hadn't had a knife to cut them, so he had pulled them out, mud, roots and all.

"Thank you, hon," I said, with tears in my eyes. "This is the most beautiful bouquet I've ever had."

With a pleased smile and a wave, he was on his way to finish the mowing before noon.

I've had flowers of all kinds and colors in my 83 years but never as lovely as those purple sweet Williams, clumps of dirt and all, that Mel took time out of his busy morning to bring me.

Sixty-three years later, taking him for a ride from the Bethany Nursing Home in Sioux Falls, where he has been for 2 years, I told him again about that bouquet and how much I loved them.

In his dementia-clouded mind, he asked me twice, "What kind of flowers were they, and were they purple?"

"I'm so glad you liked them," he said softly, patting my arm… and with the same smile my young Mel gave me 63 years ago.