

# *Daddy's Boy*

Otis A. Etheridge

SITO Publishing Company  
PO Box 62305  
Virginia Beach, VA 23462

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## *Dedication*

*Daddy's Boy* is dedicated to the host of people who have touched my life, especially to my son Kenneth Allen, on whom the sun rises and sets, and his mother, Michelle; to my mother, Joyce and my sister, Carolyn, who both always believed in me; and to my brother Eric, who has been, and always will be, my mentor even though I am older than he. I give special thanks to Elizabeth who gave me the physical, mental, emotional strength and inspiration to complete my first novel, but hopefully not last. To my soul mate, Vickie, who was instrumental in getting this novel published. To my friend, Meisha, who guided me through the whole process of publishing this novel and placing me with my editor, Jessica, and cover designer, Tony. And most of all to God, who has given me this wonderful gift.



## *Preface*

After spending many hours, days, weeks, and years on this work, *Daddy's Boy* is finally complete. This novel is autobiographical fiction, if there is such a thing, in which the reader will have to decide what is real and what is fictitious. But reader beware, for what may seem true may in reality be false, and what appears false, may indeed be the truth.

The story is loosely based on the real life of a young man growing up in rural Virginia. Though the boy's father died while he was young, the boy eventually comes to realize that his father was always there for him, offering love and protection. He learns that all of the obstacles, disappointments, and adversity as well as the good times and successes he experiences along with the belief system his father instilled in him at an early age make him the adult he has become. Indeed, he comes to understand that the dominant male figure in any young boy's life can mold what type of an adult that boy becomes. In this instance the influence is so powerful, that the man comes to know that he will always be *Daddy's Boy*.



## *Chapter One*

I was born in the rural community of Blackwater, a section of Virginia Beach, Virginia, near the North Carolina border. It was a tight knit neighborhood where everyone was willing to help each other with food, transportation, and finances. Occasionally a kindly family would even provide a roof over some poor soul's head. I weighed in at three pounds, four ounces, Otis A. Etheridge, the son of a proud Otis Etheridge and Joyce Woodhouse. My daddy's family was well to do by local standards. He and my uncles Elwood, George, and Welton stuck together and were forces to be reckoned with in the community. If you crossed one, you had to deal with all four. Legend was they had killed over ten men between them and beat up too many to count. Uncle Welton was considered the meanest one and the best fighter. The older men in the neighborhood said my daddy was good with his hands and could keep his cool in tough situations. He did not go looking for trouble, but if it found him, he was ready.

My grandmother, Miss Queenie, owned over four hundred acres of land and she was the only one who could control her four boys. She commanded respect. Maybe that was because she carried a thirty-eight-caliber pistol on her person at all times. Some say she slept with it under her pillow and took it to church. Grandmother, often called Grand Mom or Grand Momma, was a very beautiful woman, a mixture of American Indian, black, and white; red bone to some. She had long, shining hair and

high cheekbones with piercing dark eyes. She had a soft, but commanding voice. Grand Mom owned a big two-story house with a porch that went three quarters the way around it. The kitchen was huge and her favorite room, because she loved to cook. Her specialties included crisp, southern fried chicken and thickly iced chocolate cakes. There was always plenty of food at her house. Sundays were reserved for dinner at Grand Moms. The house would be overflowing with kinfolk, exchanging stories about the past week's events and gossiping about happenings in the community. While the adults sat around the large oak table in the dining room, the youngsters ate in the kitchen and spilled out onto the porch and into the yard to have foot races or play baseball.

My mother also came from a well-to-do family. She had one sister and one brother. Her brother Marshall was the best baseball player on the community team. He and my daddy were good friends. Because of this friendship, my mother was introduced to my daddy and they ended up getting married. My mother, Joyce, was a beautiful, petite woman about 5'5" weighing only one hundred and five pounds. She had a light complexion and smooth, silky skin. Her sister, Annie Mae, was very attractive also. Momma's mother was a God fearing woman and went to church religiously. She attended the sanctified church where the women wore long dresses and no make-up. As a child, I spent many weekday evenings and most of the day Sundays there with her.

There were many families in Blackwater. It seemed that everyone was related to each other in some kind of way. The Mason, Armstrong, and Humphries families ruled the church with a strict hand. Straying from the word of God was not tolerated.

Unmarried women who became pregnant were banned from the church. If a family were disliked, the church officials would talk badly about them. Some families became so fearful that they did not dare to darken the doors of the church. The irony of it all was that some of the powerful people in the church were just as bad with their morals and values as those who never attended.

Generally, the people of the community were honest and worked hard for their wages. There were several men who had whiskey stills hidden away in the woods surrounding Blackwater. They made the moonshine that was sold in the local nip joints for between \$.25 and \$1.00 a shot. The moonshine or white lightening, as it was also called, was as clear as water and strong enough to make a man stone drunk in a short heartbeat. There were two buildings, called crap houses, where men would idle away their time gambling. Playing cards or shooting dice was the name of the game. Lots of guys lost their wages, their life, or got away within an inch of their lives. The biggest card player in the community was Luther Winfield. Never did an honest days work, but wore a suit and tie everyday. People knew that with his winnings, he was running most of the whiskey stills within ten miles. Willie Rogers was a master at shooting dice and always had money in his pocket. Then there was poor, old Leroy Azeberry who was the joke of the town because he never won much of anything. Every week he would lose almost all his money, but come the next Saturday night, there he would be shooting dice and playing cards. In spite of the carryings on in our close-knit community, life was good.

Two miles down the road to the west was the neighborhood of Long Ridge. The Cuffee and Sivels kin lived there. Most of the Cuffee girls were pretty enough to make a boy dream,

but their mothers watched them like hawks. After school they mostly stayed in their houses reading or learning to sew and the like. Needless to say, they were a very intelligent bunch. A few miles down the road from Long Ridge was Fentress. The folks in Fentress did not get along with each other and they really did not get along with outsiders. This may have been because Fentress families had plenty of money, big homes and thought they were better than everybody else. Not too many men from our neck of the woods ventured there, especially after dark because there were often serious fights with folks getting hurt. The men who did go into Fentress were the big spenders who hung out at the dance hall there. The rumors were that all kinds of beautiful women went there, even white women.

Past Fentress was Great Bridge. This was a white community and you hoped and prayed you were not caught there after dark. The Ku Klux Klan was active in this area and there were plenty of stories about what had happened to blacks, including beatings and lynchings. Beyond Great Bridge was the city of Norfolk. Both blacks and whites lived there and there was more tolerance by both races than in the country. Blacks from rural areas went there to shop. Some Saturdays, Grand Mom would let my younger sister, Carolyn, and I go with her into the city. We would get so excited seeing all the sights and if we were really good, Grand Mom would let us pick out some penny candy or get a soda pop at the drug store.

Leaving Blackwater and going east took you past Back Bay and Creeds into the city of Virginia Beach. Virginia Beach was part of a very large area called Princess Anne County. Plenty of jobs were available and there was money to be made. A few people worked in the city and some worked on the farms in the

county. Folks who worked in Princess Anne County had to get up at the crack of dawn to go to work. Doing this on a daily basis was not appealing to most. Generally, the people in Blackwater grew their own crops or worked on farms closer to home. My granddaddy, Cecil Mason, and Alfred Foreman were known for growing the best crops because they had the most modern equipment with which to farm.

This is life as I remember it. All in all, Blackwater was a good place for a young, black child to spend their childhood in the 50's. Money was good and the living was easy. People watched out for each other and everyone felt safe, for the most part.

My first vivid memories as a child were of the church revivals, which took place from August to October. Beginning on the third Sunday in August during my sixth year on this earth the Blackwater New Oak Grove Baptist church held it's weeklong revival. This was a time for baptisms. Women, men, and children came to be saved and accept Christ into their lives. This particular Sunday Tony, Alexander, Alfred, Cecil, Clint, Big Man, and I were to be baptized. I was afraid because we were to be dressed all in white and submerged into water. We had to wear white gloves, white shirts, white pants, white socks and large white handkerchiefs over our heads. I felt like we were dressed as members of the Ku Klux Klan. As the baptism progressed, I felt my fears subside and began to feel very bold about wearing white from head to toe. In fact, on Halloween of that same year, Alfred, Big Man and I dressed all in white, hid in the fields and threw eggs, taken from Cecil's daddy's henhouse, at every car that came by! We got a big kick out of the fact that many folks in Blackwater thought it was the KKK throwing those eggs! To my knowledge, none of the culprits have ever told the real story.