

Always too soon  
*to* Quit

Always too soon  
*to* **Q**uit

Nancy Bramlett  
with Tula Jeffries

Copyright 2005 Nancy Bramlett

All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured from the publisher to use or reproduce any part of this book, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Printed in the United States

**Cover designed by Adrienne Renae Rogers**

**Beach Portrait-Courtesy of Gallery One Portrait Studio-Destin, FL.**

Scripture quotations are from THE KING JAMES VERSION of the Bible.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Bramlett, Nancy.

Always too soon to Quit : the Nancy Bramlett story / by Nancy Bramlett with Tula Jeffries.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Bramlett, Nancy.

I. Jeffries, Tula, 1921-

II. Title.

## *Acknowledgements*

The writing of this book has been the hardest achievement in my life.

There is no way to express my love and appreciation to Tula Jeffries for writing my story. She wrote John's book "*Taming the Bull*," and probably knows more about us than anyone. She is a godly and giving woman, and is beautiful on the inside and the out. The Lord truly sent her into our lives to tell our stories of what Jesus can do in impossible situations.

Through tears and laughter, I have opened my heart to each one who reads this story.

I also want to especially thank Joyce Morton, for her many hours of recording so many of my thoughts. She was a blessing and helped make this book a reality.

I also want to acknowledge the many friends (I call them my cheerleaders) that have stood by me and encouraged me with finishing this book.

Last, but not least—my family. I was blessed to be raised with much love and security from my family. This, I'm sure is one of the main reasons I was able to endure my turbulent marriage for those many years. I'm very grateful for my heritage and so very thankful for my family today.

I had many reasons for choosing the title "*Always too Soon to Quit*." I know through the years in my own life, and many of the women I have counseled, that we can not control the choices of others. We need to always be careful not to judge others actions if we haven't walked in their shoes.

My story was not an easy one to share, but felt in my heart, if it could help one person come to the Lord or to walk closer to Him, I was glad to bare my soul.

I first heard the title for my book from a Godly Bible teacher, Faye Hardy, over 20 years ago. She is a very special friend and someone that every time you are with her you learn more about the Lord Jesus. "Always Too Soon To Quit" spoke to my heart and spirit and I quickly wrote it in the front of my Bible. I never imagined at that time it would be the title of my book, but He who understands us best, always knew.

## *Foreword*

Always too soon to *Quit* can be a life-changing book. It has certainly been a great blessing to me.

This book will be a great encouragement to those in desperate situations. (Facing an unwanted divorce, discovery of an unfaithful mate, living in an abusive or unloving relationship.)

Every wife will receive helpful information how to give loving support to her man whatever his lifestyle. Those who know the Lord will feel their hearts singing as they read this astounding story of God's matchless love and grace.

This book can also be given as a gift to lovingly share Christ with a friend.

Get ready for a very frank story. Nancy writes with candor that is refreshing and brings stark realism and an inside look into the home and heart of a stellar athlete and his wife, who apart from the grace of God would have seen their home broken beyond repair.

I've known Nancy personally for twenty-five years; and I can testify that she lives what she teaches and teaches what she lives.

**Joyce Rogers**

*Author, Speaker, Wife of Dr. Adrian  
Rogers, Pastor Emeritus of Bellevue  
Baptist Church and Founder of Love  
Worth Finding Ministries*

*I tug at my mind, trying to free it from the foggy abyss it is locked in. I hear birds chirping outside my bedroom window, and idly wonder at the happy sounds of these tiny, tranquil creatures. Don't they know better than to set themselves up for a fall? If spared by one quirk of fate, don't they know that the next door neighbor's cat, Midnight, is always waiting to pounce?*

*I feel something pinching my waist and realize I am still wearing the tight pants and shirt of the night before. Blinking in the early morning light, I have trouble focusing. In a rush of sudden nausea, I hear again the voice of a secretary who works in John's office. Grabbing my arm as John and I leave a popular lounge, she says loudly, "Your husband tried to get me to go to an apartment with him this week and I think you need to know it."*

*I stand frozen to the floor; my mouth open in disbelief, my face burns as I try to swallow the tears that spring to my eyes. Her look of pity tells me she is speaking the truth. Unable to face the startled expressions on the faces nearest us, I stumble toward the door. The guilty alarm on John's face confirms her accusation.*

*Holding my arm, his face contorted with anger, he says, "Nancy, that's a lie! Can't you see, she's making the whole thing up?" He glares at the woman as if he wants to kill her, but she returns his gaze steadily. By then several people are gathering around to watch, so I rush blindly out the door. Stumbling out to the parking lot, I just want to find our car and leave. John is still holding on to me, still pleading his case.*

*"Nancy, honey, listen to me! That woman is lying! How could you be stupid enough to fall for that? She's half drunk, for godsakes! Can't you see she's just trying to get me in trouble? Don't be dumb enough to fall for her lies!" By now, we are out of the parking lot and driving down the street.*

*"She is not lying, and you know it! I'm not as dumb as you think! I want to know what she is talking about. Where is this apartment? How many other women have you taken there with you? I thought our marriage meant something to you," I sob.*

*"Honey, it does, it means everything to me. I told you, she's just making it up. It never happened, Nancy, I swear!"*

*"I can't live like this," I scream. "If this is the way its going to be, I can't do it! I don't want to live like this." Hysterical, I open the car door to jump, but John's quickness stops me. He grips my arm, and I see the fear in his face as we pass under a street light. He is begging me to calm down and shut the door. For once, he seems to be in a situation he doesn't know how to handle.*

*I don't know if I would have jumped. I know I would have regretted it before I hit the pavement, but after a few minutes of John begging me to believe him, he curses at that lying woman, and I close the door and settle into a miserable silence.*

*John keeps a cautious eye on me but says nothing as I walk stoically into our bedroom and fall across the bed. I turn off the light. For once, he is quiet and subdued.*

*It is not mentioned again. My life... my future... is going down the sewer, and I'm too scared to talk about it.*



## ~ Chapter One ~

An idyllic childhood was probably poor preparation for the harsh realities of a life with John Bramlett. I grew up on Hollywood, near North Parkway and Overton Park in Memphis. The large, attractive homes with their neatly manicured lawns and wide, shaded streets were a far cry from the ramshackle collection of timeworn houses of John's neighborhood. Alabama Street, with its squalid rows of shotgun style houses, some with outhouses perched in the back, was miles away and a world apart from Hollywood Street. An affront to John's pride, his background seemed to inflate the sizable chip he carried on his shoulder every place he went.

When I met John for the first time, I already knew something of his reputation. He was a stellar athlete, but even as only a high school junior, he was known as being mean and tough; the local "bad boy."

One night, driving around with a group of girls from my school, Central High, we ran into several boys from Humes High at our favorite drive-in. One of the girls with us knew the boys from the rival school, so she began introductions all around. One of the boys already had my attention; he was the best looking boy I'd ever seen, and suddenly I heard Rita saying, "Nancy, this is John Bramlett."

In that first moment of eye contact, my heart began racing. I suddenly felt ten years old and speechless, but after his shy, "Hi, nice to meet you," he was very quiet, not at all what I expected. When I sneaked an occasional look at him,

his eyes were on mine and I could see that he was as nervous and flustered as I felt. After we all left the drive-in, I couldn't stop thinking about him. There was something behind that shy smile that triggered strong feelings in me and that last quick look from him told me he felt something, too.

All the way home, I was scheming up ways to run into him again. I tried to calm down by telling myself that he probably had all the girls over at Humes High chasing him.

A few days later, he called me. I recognized his voice the instant I heard it, but he identified himself as "a friend of John Bramlett's."

"I was with John at the drive-in that night we met," he said.

"Oh really? What's your name?"

"That doesn't matter... I'm just calling to see what you thought of John."

My heart was thumping so fast I could hardly speak. I knew the voice on the phone belonged to John, but I played along to see what he would say. I was hoping he would ask me out.

"So, what did you think about him?"

"Oh, I thought he was real nice," I answered, trying to keep from laughing. "Would you go out with him if he asked you?"

"Yeah, I think I would. Sure."

"You would! Man, that's great! I mean, I'll tell John you said, Yes."

My heart went out to him as I realized that he was so afraid of being rejected that he had to hide behind a lie. It was no longer funny. I just wanted to put him at ease, so I made conversation about school and our mutual friends. After a few minutes, he said, "Well, like I said, I'll tell John you said you would date him. He will probably call you soon."

## Too Soon To Quit

A few days after that scintillating conversation, John showed up on my doorstep. He was there to invite me to go to church with him on Sunday night. Not a word about his “friend’s” call! I didn’t mention it either. I guess he thought a date for church was safe enough to get past my parents, and it was. The next three Sunday nights, we went to John’s family’s church.

I was thrilled to be seen with him; he was different from anyone I had ever met, and I was flattered by his attention. I was so infatuated that I would have spent every minute with him. I hated that he lived so far away. He didn’t have a car, so he had to ride the bus or hitchhike to get to my house. He was careful to cultivate a favorable impression on my folks, always very courteous. Not long after we began dating, my parents were doing some painting and wallpapering in the house, and John came over to help.

Dad immediately started a conversation. “So you play football for Humes, do you?”

“Yes sir, I do.”

“What position do you play?”

“Linebacker, sir.”

“Think you can beat Central this year?”

I listened for John’s reply. “I don’t know, sir, but we’re sure gonna try. Maybe this will be our year, you never can tell!” That was the most I had heard John say at any one time. *He might be shy with me, I thought, but he doesn’t have any trouble talking about football.*



My dad, Warren Andrews, was president of Innkeepers, a division of Holiday Inns. He met my mother, Adelaide, (whom everyone called Ad) in Draughon’s Business College, where both were preparing for a career in the

business world. They married in April, prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and I was born on Good Friday in April of 1942. Eight years later, my little sister, Janet, arrived on the scene. My mom never used her business training outside the home, but the discipline of its application seeped into her management of our lifestyle.

Family was a top priority to the Andrews clan. My paternal grandmother, Mama Lotta, lived nearby, and I kept the path hot to her house during my early years. When anything upset me, she'd hug me to her and say "everything was going to be all right." She was the most positive person I ever knew.

I'm sure all of those Saturday night dinners at Mama Lotta and Big Daddy's house with aunts, uncles and cousins, influenced my reluctance to give up on any difficult family situation. The moral climate of that time was to stick together and work things out. I still remember the aroma of steaks and chicken cooking on the grill as we all shared family news and events of the week. I often think back to the innocence and carefree atmosphere of those years.

John's lifestyle was lived out at the other end of the spectrum. We knew his background. None of that mattered; my family accepted people on principle rather than on their prestige. We knew how disciplined John was as an athlete, and he worked hard at finding jobs to earn spending money in his spare time. I knew he didn't have money for all the extras many young people enjoy—I didn't care; I just wanted to be with him.

I knew the magnetism I felt was mutual. He spent every minute he could at my house. We dreamed and schemed up ways to be together, and talked constantly of when we could be together forever.

## ~ Chapter Two ~

I've often wondered if my parents were fully aware of the intensity of my feelings for John. Perhaps they guessed, and cautiously avoided making too much of the relationship for fear they would only complicate matters. I'm certain they would have preferred that John accept a football scholarship far from Memphis, and allow us to drift apart after he graduated, I still had a year of high school to go.

His Junior-Senior Prom at Humes was coming up and I was ecstatic in my first floor-length formal gown. On the afternoon of the prom, I was waltzing around the room to the strains of our favorite song when the doorbell rang, and a florist's box was delivered for me. When I opened it, my heart sank. All week long my friends and I had talked of nothing else, and we were certain I would have an orchid to wear. The carnation corsage looked so ordinary, I burst into tears. When he called to see if it had been delivered, I didn't hide my disappointment.

"This is such a special night," I pouted; "I thought you would give me orchids. Every girl but me will have orchids."

"I didn't know," he said; "Honey, you know how special you are to me! If I'd known what you wanted, you'd have the biggest orchid there. I'd do anything to make you happy don't you know that?"

"Well, I'll wear it. If anyone says anything about it, I'll just say you didn't know what to get."

"I didn't, honest! I'm sorry. I'll be there at seven to pick you up."

"Okay," I conceded grudgingly. I found it impossible to stay angry with him. When he came to get me, he had a big white orchid corsage in his hand. I learned years later how he paid for those two corsages. In his neighborhood, when people were desperate for money, they went to the hospital nearby and sold a pint of their blood. He had already sold a pint to buy the carnations, and when he realized my disappointment, he had gone to another hospital, and sold another pint. In all the time we dated, I think every gift he bought me was purchased with his blood.

It was a perfect evening. We danced almost every dance together, refusing to share our happiness in each other with anyone. John was on top of the world. He had been named to All-Memphis, All-State, and All West Tennessee football teams. He was chosen to play in the High School All-American game at Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

I was proud of John's accomplishments, but as his graduation came nearer, I was having to face the fact that the honors he had received could take him somewhere far away. I knew Memphis State (since renamed the University of Memphis) had offered him a football scholarship but so had schools in Tennessee and Kentucky. In spite of all his assurances that there would never be anyone for him but me, I was certain that he would forget me if he went away without me.

I could see the tension in John mounting as the time approached for him to make a decision, and I was desperate for him to choose the local university. One night as we held each other closely, I think we both realized that the intensity of our emotion was almost at the breaking point. It was becoming harder and harder to keep our feelings in check, like trying to stop a smoldering fire from erupting.

John abruptly pulled away from me. "Nancy, I can't stand much more of this! Maybe we ought to get married right now!"

We had talked about marriage before, but always as an event out there in the future. Suddenly, it made perfect sense; the answer to all of our problems.

"We could run away, Nancy... get married in Texarkana! You don't need the consent of your parents down there. You don't even have a waiting period. We can slip off and be married before anyone even knows we're gone. Then wherever I go to college, you can go with me."

"Oh, John," I cried out, throwing myself back into his arms. "That would be wonderful! Let's do it. Let's elope!"

From that moment on, when we were together that's all we talked about. Not once did it occur to us to discuss the serious consequences of what we were planning. It was going to be such fun!

A few weeks later, John accepted Memphis State's offer to play football for them, and we celebrated by secretly setting our wedding date. We were so happy and excited I can't believe someone wouldn't have noticed the change in us. They probably saw our exuberance as relief to have John's big decision behind him. Friends and family alike were glad he had decided to play where he grew up.

I saw myself as a big part of John's dream to make a name for himself through sports. I can see now that my youthful approach to everything was self-serving and headstrong. I made decisions based on very selfish reasoning. I didn't worry about how hurt my parents would be if I didn't finish that last year of high school. I wasn't concerned about how we would support ourselves. I thought only of what I wanted, and what I wanted was John Bramlett. True, he was a little rough around the edges, but I would change all that after we were married.

The day we chose to get married disavows any superstitious thought we might have had; we were married on the thirteenth day of July. Our carefully laid plan for getting away without arousing suspicion was as far as our thinking went; our way of solving problems was to worry about them when they slapped us in the face, not before.

We left town on a Sunday evening after church with John's brother, Burt. He drove us across state and county lines to Texarkana, Texas, over three hundred miles away. The next morning, we went looking for the sources we needed: a place to get a blood test, someone to issue a marriage license, and a justice of the peace to perform the ceremony. Everything went smoothly. Oddly even found a church pastor for us, which somehow made it seem less ill-advised.

Standing there before the minister repeating the marriage vows, the fleeting vision of myself in a beautiful, white wedding gown flashed before me but quickly vanished at the sound of John's voice, clearly stating, "I do." After hours of riding in the car, the orange suit and floral print shoes I had worn to church in Memphis the previous night, suddenly made me feel more like a frightened child than a sophisticated bride on a grand adventure.

When the ceremony was over and we were on our way home, the impact of what we had done settled in on me. I had cleared the way to be out late on Sunday evening, but by now it would be apparent to my parents that we were gone. Together. There was only one thing to do: just come clean and explain our feelings. Cry to make them see that we could make it work, that we *would* make it work. And beg for their forgiveness.

I think they had it all figured out before we got there. All the acrimony we deserved and expected never happened. They swallowed their disappointment, and accepted John



graciously. His relief was obvious. Maybe that was why, even at his worst, he has always had the greatest respect for their feelings. I was grateful for the civility he showed them, but learned right away that it didn't necessarily extend to me.

Right from the beginning, I should have known that sports would be the center of our lives. We spent our honeymoon in Baton Rouge where John played in the High School All-American football game. The game was important to John because he had set his heart on one day playing professional ball, and he knew there would be coaches and scouts from all over the country there to watch. And it was clear to me that for the next four years, we would walk, talk, eat and sleep *sports*

It was a big day for John. His hitting got all the scouts attention, and coaches from Kentucky, Louisiana and Florida were talking with him about his commitment to Memphis State. But we were satisfied with his decision, and have never regretted it.