

## Praise for *Will and Dena*

In *Will and Dena*, we witness the evolution of a remarkable man. Will is a gentle, polite, somewhat awkward, and unlettered country boy who is armed with a phenomenal talent. Under the tutelage of a wise and caring father, and with the steadfast love of a beautiful girl, he emerges to become a brilliant soldier and a solid figure of a man. Will's journey toward manhood and the fruition of his great talent, along with his chance for happiness in love, are plagued at every turn by the ever-present evil of racism.

Bob Rogers' story is peppered with memories of days in the old south during the forties; hog butchering, chicken feeding, cooking on wood burning stoves and making do. The theme of baseball runs throughout and the successes of the Black players and their camaraderie with some of their white teammates are heartwarming and often humorous. Great dialogue makes the characters believable. Descriptive passages flow beautifully and captivate. The story is convincingly told through a series of conflicts that widen as new ones open. The love story is tender and appeals to the romantic in all of us. Hope for Will's survival at home and in the military, and for his reunion with Dena propels us through the book. A great read.

Barbara P. Grainger, Retired English Teacher

Reading *Will and Dena* was like sitting on the sidelines and watching the action. I felt like I was there. I enjoyed every word. You will too!

Audrey Quick Battiste, Librarian

Readers will find *Will and Dena* both a beautiful love story as well as a walk through the times of World War II. It is also a reminder of the prejudice that Afro-Americans have faced in our country, even when serving in our military. Will, the main character is a lumberjack and an amateur baseball player. Dena, the girl that he falls in love with, has struggles with her own mother, in that she doesn't feel like Will is an appropriate choice in a boyfriend. After all, Will has no plans to go to college and that is the direction Dena is heading. So even within his race, Will faces those that feel he just doesn't match what they think he should be.

A group of businessmen in his area decide that they would like to bring in this "colored" baseball player to help make a name for their town and to bring financial gain to their businesses. Readers will discover how the Ku Klux Klan affects Will and his family. Will ends up having to run for his life and finds refuge in the U.S. Army in the 366<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and the famed Buffalo Soldiers of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division which ends up fighting Hitler in Italy. (*Will and Dena* is dedicated to LT John Fox from the 366<sup>th</sup> and to Italian Partisans.) During his army days, Will becomes friends with three members of his infantry platoon and they become known as the Four Musketeers.

Personally, I loved the way that Bob Rogers wove the works of Langston Hughes into this book. Dena sends articles to Will from the *Chicago Defender* and the reading that Will does brings him out of his “small world” in North Carolina and eventually helps him to find his mission in life. He realizes the “war” that is going on in his home country while also fighting a war abroad for his country. One line that shows this realization for Will is: “The deal for us in this war has to be a Double Victory – abroad and at home.” He makes a vow to do his best to make his stay in the army count for something. “Maybe my little bit added to that of all the colored soldiers will help strike a blow for Mr. Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms. I hope I remember what they are. He rolled his eyes upward, ‘Freedom of speech and worship, and freedom from want and fear.’” Will wants his fighting in WW II to help colored soldiers to be able to take away the fears from their families of being beaten or killed. This would make everything he had experienced worth it to him.

Author Bob Rogers has done a beautiful job of weaving a love story within a war story. Readers will be captivated by Will and feel his struggles as he proceeds through life and the many decisions he has to make as he determines his personal mission in life, while serving the mission his country has called him to do in World War II.

Joyce M. Gilmour, for Military Writer’s Society of America

*Will and Dena: Love and Life in World War II* represents historical fiction at its finest. Author Bob Rogers skillfully conveys the irony of a country that both combats racism abroad while simultaneously promoting the most insidious form of racism within its own borders. *Will and Dena* calls to mind such satires as Joseph Heller’s *Catch 22* as protagonist Will Wallace confronts one form of institutionalized insanity after another. In the end, love and baseball conquer all, a one-two punch you won’t want to miss.

— Shelley Kirilenko, Author, *The Blue Kimono*

*Will and Dena* is impressive.  
I thoroughly enjoyed this novel.

— Lew Berry

Bob Rogers, a former army captain, Vietnam War veteran, and avid baseball fan is well qualified to author this timely and

thought-provoking novel. Rogers' careful attention to dialog consistent with the time, culture, and geographical setting, his strong word choices, excellent characterizations and story transitions give life to his complex plot.

*Will & Dena: Love and Life in World War II* is historical fiction at its best. Bob Rogers skillfully communicates the incongruence of a country combating racism abroad while simultaneously promoting a most menacing form of racism at home. Rogers uses the platform of fiction to convey a valuable message relevant to today's reader.

— Richard R. Blake for *Reader Views*

"Bob Rogers' story-telling in *Will & Dena: Love and Life in World War II*, engages the imagination for those who missed an era forever renowned for its honor - [America's greatest generation]."

Pat J. Schulz, Publisher, ENHEART Publishing, Inc. and author, *Making Sweet Lemonade*

A nice story of growing up in the south and a piece of history during WWII. Worth reading for the perspective it brings.

E.S. Tennent