



**A Big Hearted Texas Book: A Review of *Brave New Wanda*,
by Lynda Rutledge (Wordfarm, 2004, 189 pp.)**

In Aldous Huxley's [Brave New World](#), he writes of a future time when babies are born in laboratories -- a chilling, impersonal, and yet not so far-fetched prospect. That possibility, and the title itself, is a point of departure for Lynda Rutledge's recent novel, [Brave New Wanda](#), published by the start-up publisher, [Wordfarm](#). I was attracted to this independent publisher both because it includes some graduates of Wheaton College, former staff with InterVarsity Press, and at least one person with theological training. In addition, they publish John Leax, a wonderful Christian writer. And yet I suspected that they were into more than publishing books for the religious market. I was right.

Indeed, you wouldn't find [Brave New Wanda](#) on the shelves of Lifeway or Family bookstores. Not when the "f" word is used in the second paragraph of the first page! I'm not in favor of gratuitous profanity, and yet I am strongly in favor of allowing a character to be authentic, to be who they are. There's no need to clean up Wanda. Wanda is a hardened and profane 13-year old girl who has been let down by life and by the people close to her. When her mother dies, she shoots her stepfather in the foot with a rifle, puts her half-crazy grandmother and Wild Thing (her dog) in her mother's old Cadillac, and hits the road. Her goal? Find her real Daddy.

And that's where the fun begins. It seems Wanda's mother had visited a shadowy artificial insemination clinic in Dallas. That's where Wanda goes. Page one. What she finds is a web of deceit. It seems that one of the doctors decided to donate sperm on multiple occasions and, thus, is the biological father of dozens of children. It's there she meets Patty Hightower, former Texas Beauty Queen, recently jilted by her husband who made off with his secretary, Patty who for whatever reason had not been able to have a child to complete her "perfect" existence, Patty who is having a very, very bad day. She's thrown together with Wanda, and both discover who they are through the journey to find Wanda's "real" father.

In a real sense, [Brave New Wanda](#) asks the question that we all ask: Who am I? Wanda is searching for that perfect Daddy, the one who will welcome her into his life and make it all right. Patty is looking for the idealistic lifestyle any beauty queen would want -- perfect husband, home in the suburbs, designer baby, important job, and, of course, perpetual good looks. They both find out that what they thought they wanted is not what they need, that life is messy and grand, that the roots they sought -- the things that they thought would give their lives meaning -- were no roots at all. Rutledge doesn't give us the answers, only hints, but that's part of the beauty of the book: it's not all tied up neatly in the end, and yet the suggestion of resolution is there. In the end, Wanda Ledbetter is brave, and new, brave enough to say to that donor Daddy "So here it is: I'm too mean to live but I'm too mean to wither, too, you hear. Just so you know. . . . Hey, you

don't know what you're missing." And new enough to get some roots -- her own roots, ones that were there all along.

Brave New Wanda is a funny book built on tragic occurrences, written in a breezy style, dialog-rich and Texas through and through. It reminded me a bit of a more poignant Clyde Edgerton. I recommend it, not as the best book around, but as a piece of serious, enjoyable work. Support an upstart publisher committed to publishing good books. Buy this book.