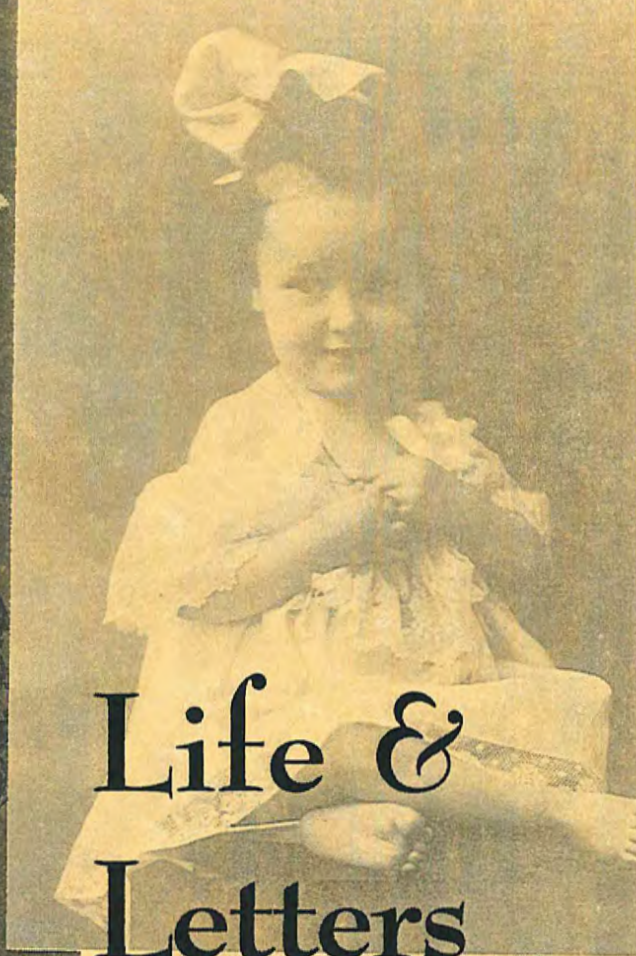

Life & Letters

Volume XVa
Spring 1996

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These collected stories of **LIFE & LETTERS**, a volume of life history writings--episodes from people's pasts--, could easily be entitled "Stories of Significance." Lucy McCormick Calkins, the author of Living Between the Lines, has pointed out that "writing memoir has everything to do with rendering the ordinariness of our lives so that [our lives become] significant." Hence, the commonplace becomes meaningful. The ongoing ordinary passages of days add up in life. It's no wonder that the most often expressed toast is "To life!" In every language, as in every story, life becomes a celebration. Even in the sickness, the dreariness, the wickedness, the lackluster of life, story adds meaning. And we see what can be--an extraordinariness out of the ordinariness.

LIFE & LETTERS is an extraordinary collection of extraordinary stories told by men and women who have lived ordinary lives. The final rendering in memoir form is not a conflict between fantasy and fact. These authors have considered life and its inconsistencies. They tell their stories as best as they remember them. And they listen for the meaning. They look for extraordinary ways to explain the ordinary. And they find them in **LIFE & LETTERS**, where an audience of strangers becomes an audience of friends. Welcome to our circle as friends. And thanks for sharing in the "ordinariness of our lives."

--------Joan Stear
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana
Spring 1996

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Front Cover: (top right corner) Alicia Keaty; Jim Jennings; Joan Dimmick (on right, with twin sister Jean); Yvonne Seneca; Emile and Rose Arceneaux, parents of Olympe Butcher; (center) John Townsend

LIFE & LETTERS
Spring 1996

Seated, left to right: Joan Dimmick; Wilma Bowles; Margaretta Blanchard; Olympe Butcher; Joyce Boutin; Joan Stear
Standing, left to right: Jim Jennings; Yvonne Booth; Fran Gross; John Townsend; Joe Glorioso: Ed Parker
Missing from photo are: Anne Comeaux; Marion Embree; Alicia Keaty; Yvonne Seneca

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Life & Letters thanks, as always, the English Department
at the University of Southwestern Louisiana and
the Horizons Program of Lafayette General Medical Center for their support.

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KEEPSAKES, HEIRLOOMS, DUST CATCHERS, OR JUNK?
by
Wilma R. Bowles

Over the years of moving from state to state, I have managed to keep items that have survived several moves.

In the middle 1930's, I received a tea set and some small porcelain cats and dogs. I spent many hours serving cookies, cake, sandwiches, and KoolAid to my imaginary playmates. The porcelain cats and dogs were also invited to the tea party. Two cats and one dog have survived the moves. As for the tea set, it is only a fond memory of many hours of imaginary play.

From each of my grandmothers' belongings, I have a memento or two. My maternal grandmother, Emma, owned a pair of carnival glass flower vases. Mama was able to keep this pair after her mother died in 1925. I've used these vases for flowers on many occasions. Today, the vases sit on a bookshelf as dust catchers. A lamp table is also part of Grandmother Emma's legacy. The table is at least seventy years old and has been refurbished. Today, it is still a lamp table and also a place for an AM/FM cassette radio, a wonder of technology Grandmother Emma never saw.

La-Lee, my paternal grandmother, listened to the recitation of the rosary, the news in French, "Stella Dallas," and "The Shadow" on a Philco radio which sat on a table with claw glass marbled feet. When she died, the grandchildren were given their choice of items they desired. I chose the table, two footed glasses, and a bowl. Grandma La-Lee used the glasses to make 7-Up floats during the summer months, and the bowls were used to place potato salad after it was mixed. Throughout the years I have used the table to play cards, place and decorate a small live Christmas tree, set up a Scrabble board, and put together jigsaw puzzles. The glasses were broken many years ago, and the glass bowl sits on the shelf.

The largest item that occupies the most space in my home is a three drawer mirrored dresser with intricate designs. The top is brown marble, typical of the first part of this century, and is dated on the underside "1925." Ten years ago I antiqued it with green paint and left the mirror untouched upon the advice of a relative who likes to work with very old, heavily painted furniture. The dresser was Grandma La-Lee's which Dad kept for himself after her death.

More heirlooms on hand are two crocheted bedspreads that Mama made along with embroidered pillow cases and scarves; a crocheted piece of lace that was made for a piano scarf; one right three-buttoned high top baby shoe, one left baby shoe, and a baby comb and cap.

Keepsakes, heirlooms, dust catchers, or junk? Perhaps all of the previously mentioned. After all, "One man's junk is another man's treasure."

RELIC OF THE PAST
by
Anne B. Comeaux

I am leaving the house with my brother, Fernand. Mama needs a few items from the grocery store, so she is sending us to get them. She places her list in my hand. It includes the following:

2 cans of tomato sauce
2 pounds of flour
5 pounds of sugar
1 bar of yellow soap (Octagon)

After our walk together, Fernand and I enter Granier's Grocery Store. I hand the list to Louis, the man behind the counter. While he is looking at the list, I examine the arrangement of the store's contents with my eyes.

The floor is solid wood made of boards that are about four or five inches in width. An oily compound has been rubbed into the wood giving it a dark appearance. When I ask Fernand why the floor looks oily, he tells me, "That's to keep the dust down. The cars traveling on the gravel road in front of the store raise a great deal of dust."

At the center of the room, suspended from the ceiling with an electrical wire, is a single light bulb. I don't visit this store often, but I always look to see if the light is on. Electrical lighting is a new thing to me, and I want to see how it looks. We have only kerosene lamps at home. I never get to see the light on because it is used only in the late evenings and during very stormy weather when the sun isn't shining brightly.

To my left as I enter stands a long counter. Its wood is worn in some spots, giving it a shiny appearance. The solid wood below the counter prevents me from seeing anything below the level of the counter. I see Louis reaching under the counter from time to time, so there must be some shelves under it.

Straight ahead of me is a glass case. It looks somewhat like the counter except for the glass sides and top. It is higher than the counter space. Inside this area, I see ham and sausage links, and cheese and butter. Part of the ham has already been sliced and sold. The sausage links are loose. There must be at least eight or ten links connected together. Customers will buy as many links as they need. The cheese is one large hunk. It will be sliced as needed or sold in small chunks. The butter is fresh butter churned by the women in the Granier family. Besides the store, the Granier's also operate a small dairy. Butter is available in this store only twice a week. Margarine has not yet made its appearance on the market. When a patron wants butter, it is placed on a small square waxed container and weighed, in accordance with the amount a customer wishes to purchase.

Towards the right side, on the floor space, is a small table with four chairs. The heavy chairs are made of iron with rounded backs. Today two men sit at the table playing cards.

There is more counter space on the right. Behind the counter are shelves attached to the wall. On the extreme right, I see a few small tins which I know contain a dozen aspirins each. Boxes of baking soda and some other jars and bottles are also on the shelf.

Some shoe strings attract my attention. Although there are different sizes, they are all black. Next to the shoe strings I see a few cans of black shoe polish. There is a pair of men's work shoes and a pair of lady's pointed high top shoes with buttons as fasteners. They look dusty as if they have been there for a long time. We never buy shoes at Granier's store. Mama orders ours from the Sears and Roebuck Catalog. Mama has been doing catalog shopping for so long that she seldom makes a mistake ordering the correct size.

Five or six loaves of bread are on another shelf. They look exactly like Papa's bread, so I know Papa is the one who put them there.

My survey of Granier's Store is halted abruptly as I hear Louis utter: "Let's see--two cans of tomato sauce. Here we are." It is almost as if he is making a melody from the words on my list. I watch him intently as he takes two cans of tomato sauce from the shelf above the counter, sets them on a half sheet of newspaper which he has precut, wraps the two cans as a unit, smashes down the ends of the newspaper, and "voila!" Louis has produced a neat, easily carried package.

"Two pounds of flour," Louis muses aloud. From a stack of small brown bags, Louis selects the right size and moves toward a set of large cans and barrels located behind the counter. He places the paper bag on a balance that has large numbers on it, then proceeds to put flour into the bag. Louis has done this many times, so he slides flour from a scoop carefully and quickly. He knows about how much he will need. I watch the large needle sway back and forth, wondering how Louis will know when I have the amount Mama asked me to get. The needle slows and comes to a stop. Louis looks at me as he says, "Lagniappe." Quickly he closes the bag, neatly folding the top closed. The next step is a fascinating surprise. Above his head, I see a ball of twine, suspended in some way from a board to which it is attached. The end of the string, as we call the twine, rests loosely on the counter. Louis takes hold of the twine, roughly measures a length he will use, and with a quick jerk, breaks it off the ball. He wraps the twine around the bag of flour and knots it securely.

Still marveling at the strength in Louis's smooth, white hands, I hear Louis droning, "Now--five pounds of sugar, five pounds of sugar." He continues repeating the phrase until he reaches a barrel behind the counter. He peers into the barrel, then looks at Fernand and me from over his glasses and says, "Tell Mama I'm low on sugar today. I'll give her three pounds. Day after tomorrow the drummer will bring me another sack. Will that be all right?" It seems correct to us that the answer is "Yes," so we agree. Once again Louis measures out the sugar in the same way as he measured the flour, but with a different scoop. He ties the bag securely. "Don't forget to tell Mama that I sent only three pounds of sugar and charged her accordingly."

I nod in understanding. I will not forget the message I must give Mama.

"A bar of Octagon soap. Yes, indeed! Mama has to have that for wash day, huh? Does Miss Priscilla still help Mama with wash day?" he asks, trying to get me to talk.

"Yes," I respond. "She comes to help Mama on Mondays."

Louis gets the bar of Octagon soap, which is already wrapped, and does a quick check of our purchases. "Now, there," Louis says. "Fernand, you carry the two bigger packages. Your little sister can carry the smaller ones."

Obediently, we share the packages.

"Oh!" exclaims Louis. "I almost forgot!" His slim, bare hand, revealing neatly trimmed nails, reaches into a candy jar. He withdraws it, holding some pieces of brightly colored candy, looks into his hand as if counting, then portions out two pieces for Fernand and two pieces for me. "Lagniappe," he says, smiling.

"Thank you, Mr. Louis," Fernand and I say together.

Quickly, the sugar candies have passed from Louis's hand, to our hands, and into our mouths. No thoughts of cold viruses or pathogenic bacteria then. Those "joy-killing" ideas will come many years later. The present word--the important word now--is *lagniappe*.

Lagniappe--a small gratuitous gift. Is it a thing of the past, or has it taken some other form? Might one look upon today's weekly sale sheet circulars as some form of impersonal lagniappe? Perhaps. But the weekly sales sheets in my newspaper never smile at me. What about the coupons? Are they some form of Lagniappe? They do fit Webster's definition. But I confess I have never felt the thrill in clipping a coupon that I always felt when Mr. Louis's slim hand slipped into the special jar resting on the counter of Granier's Country Grocery Store.

CHILDHOOD EVENT: "SENSE-ING" FUN
by
Yvonne Seneca

A visit to Grandma Madeline Guidry Jeanis' home was the one time we could experience all our senses. It was so exciting when Mama would tell us we were going to spend the day with Grandma Jeanis. Since we did not have a car, Grandma would send her car to Crowley to pick us up. Uncle "Shin," Louis Jeanis, drove the car, a Model-A. When I think of the family riding in the car, I wonder how we all fit, for there were Marguerite, Genevieve, Alfred, Jeanne, Mama and me, plus Uncle Shin. It was a thirty minute ride down south Highway 13, a gravel road in the thirties.

Grandma's house was about two hundred yards from the road with a pasture between the house and the highway. I liked to be the one to open the gate at the road. Sometimes if the cattle were in the pasture, I felt anxious as they stood there looking at us. There was another gate near the house, but this was usually left open so the cattle could go back and forth to the barn. A picket fence surrounded the yard where Grandma waited to greet us. After all the hugs and kisses, Grandma would say to the children in her heavy French accent, "Don't swing on my gate, and don't scratch my yard." The gate had a heavy chain and weight to keep it closed so the animals could not come into the yard. By the way, it was fun to stand on the weight and ride while the gate closed. The yard was smooth hard earth. Grandma did not want us to cut the hard surface with a sharp stick to draw the outline for hopscotch or other games. I always liked to walk around the yard to see the flowers and get reacquainted with everything, always curious to see if there were any changes since our last visit.

The front gate to the yard was closed and locked. We were told that when Grandpa Lovensti died many years ago, his casket was carried through this exit. After the funeral, Grandma closed and locked the gate, never to be opened again. Now it was covered with pink climbing roses. The smokehouse was always an interesting sight with its small door that opened to a dark interior with the strong smell of smoke in the wooden walls and of smoked meat. Grandma did not like grass growing in her yard. In fact, she would sweep the yard. The scrubbed and bleached board walks from her back porch steps led to the gates and out buildings in the yard.

When we were young, our favorite game at Grandma's was to "make roads" for our small toy cars and trucks. The house was about three feet above the ground and underneath the house was where we were allowed to dig and scrape the cool sweet-smelling earth. The area under the house was clean as was the yard and her house. In fact, Grandma always hired one of my cousins, who lived nearby, to get rid of the dirt dauber and old wasp nests from under the house. I believe she paid them a nickel a piece. Many times our cousins, Mitchell, Harry, Leeward, and Frank, would come to meet us to play.

Later years, when we were older, we were attracted to the haystack in the pasture on the south side of the house. We would climb to the top of the haystack, then jump off into the soft loose hay on the side of the stack. The hay had such a nice smell. We would be itchy after playing around

the hay. If we were a crowd, Grandma would stand on her back porch to call us saying, "Get off the haystack!" I suppose she was afraid we might get hurt. Also I was told we would make holes in the haystack. I learned later the holes would allow rain to seep through causing the straw to rot.

At noon Grandma would call us in for dinner, our midday meal. If we were out in the pasture around the haystack, she would stand on her back porch to ring her large dinner bell. Everyone returned to the house immediately to wash up at the well. I enjoyed being able to look out over the yard and pasture and be with all the other kids around the sink at the well as we all cleaned up together. We could check our faces for smudges before going indoors because Grandpa had nailed a small mirror to the wall on the back porch.

Grandma's kitchen was a very large room. On one end was a woodburning stove with a large flat surface that was used during the winter for cooking and heating. Grandma used a coal oil stove with four burners for warm weather cooking. This stove had a square tin box that served as a portable oven for baking. On the same side of the room in front of a window was a long table with two dish pans for washing and rinsing, a bucket of water with a dipper, and a work area. On the other wall was a cupboard. In the window next to the cupboard was a box on the outside with screen on two sides and shelves for storing food during cool weather.

The eating area was on the opposite side of the room. Grandma had a very long table for at least twelve people. Between the table and the wall was a long bench where many of the younger children would sit. The adults always ate first, then after the table was cleared, we children were served. Our mothers would serve our plates. There was never a question as to what we wanted or didn't want. The food always smelled and tasted so good, we would eat everything. At the table we children would talk in quiet tones among ourselves.

After dinner we were sent outside to sit on the front porch while the grownups would take their afternoon nap. Their nap time was our fun time. We cousins would talk about school, friends, favorite songs, and sometimes tell scary stories like the one about the "flying cow."

The "Flying Cow" is about a little girl saying her prayers. As she knelt facing the window in the back bedroom, she saw a cow with wings flying over the pasture coming towards her house. She screamed. We don't know who the little girl was. Sometimes as we told these stories we would get carried away, each trying to tell the best story. These times spent on the front porch were pleasant even during midsummer because there was always a breeze blowing across the porch.

Grandma always had a midafternoon treat of either cake or pie with lemonade for us. The adults usually had their afternoon coffee before we parted for home. Such great times I always remember.

LOOK OUT!
by
John Townsend

The year was 1934. As usual, Mom began to prepare for our annual Fourth of July family outing three or four days in advance. For several years we had made the trip to Granny and Granddaddy Allen's house in Sibley. There we were joined by Uncles Roland and Arthur Robb with their families. The two men, though not legally blood kin, had been reared by Granny and Granddaddy from ages 9 and 10, but had boarded with them off and on before the two were school age. As far as Mama was concerned, they were her brothers in all but name.

The Fourth fell on Wednesday that year. Daddy took Tuesday off in order to get in some fishing to augment the food the next day. It also allowed Mama to help Granny complete her cooking and baking for the usual large gathering. In our family there was Mama, Daddy, me, Bubba, and Dick. With Uncle Roland were Aunt Bessie, Louise and Roland, Jr. Uncle Arthur, Aunt Gladys, Granny Granddaddy, and Uncle Red completed the family.

We traveled about two miles to 'Uncle' Tom Jones' camp located one half mile north of the Doyline Road on Dorchat Bayou. There we were met by four or five couples and all their kids. The gathering usually numbered around thirty, adults and children. With this crowd, a lot of cooking was called for.

Our leaving early that Tuesday morning was delayed because of a flat tire on our 1931 Model B Ford. It was mid-morning before we finally headed out from our house on Buckner Street in Shreveport for the thirty mile trip to Sibley. At the last minute Mama decided to add a three layer-cake to the list of things we were taking for the picnic. Each of us three boys took turns holding it on our lap. I took the first leg lasting until we got out of stop and go traffic. Dick had his turn for the twelve or fourteen miles to Fillmore Station on Highway 80 about halfway between Shreveport and Minden, Louisiana. The station was a regular stop whether going to or coming from Sibley. It meant a chance for us boys to get something cold to drink, usually a Nehi grape or cream soda.

It was a few minutes before noon when we drove away from the station located on the second highest hill on the highway between Shreveport and Minden. As we started up the second slope we saw a slow moving truck top the hill. Suddenly as we neared it, a fast moving car came head on towards us. Daddy swerved the Ford off the road. There was a drop off of about four inches from the top of the pavement to the dirt shoulder. The turn to correct our change of direction was blocked as the front wheel caught the shoulder.

Almost in slow motion we headed down the embankment into the ditch. Then we were stopped, but only for an instant as the car began to tilt over. The driver side wheels were still spinning as I scrambled out a rear window, joined by Dick, then Daddy. We could hear Bubba inside crying. He had been holding the cake. I heard Mama say, "There's nothing to cry about." Then she was handing Daddy the three-layer cake, intact, save for the icing being smeared about.

No one was hurt save for Bubba's feelings and his shirt front messed up with coconut icing. Some men at the station came and helped right the car. After adding some lost oil and water, we continued our trip. The car that caused the accident did not stop.

And, oh, yes, the fishing trip was a success as was our Fourth of July celebration get together.

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A WALK OF LIFE
by
Joyce Boutin

In 1973 on October 7, Mathias and Edith Guidry celebrated their 50th anniversary. Mom and Dad had provided each other their children with a lot of love during those years. Bradley and I celebrated our 25th anniversary with them on October 10 of that year. Together Mom and Dad raised seven children, Ivy, Ovey, Edna, Leroy, Dalton, me, and Louis. We were rich in love and affection. In every picture I look at, Mom has a hand on Dad.

In celebration of fifty years of marriage, a mass was held at the Carmelite Convent on Carmel Avenue. The weather was nice, so we held the reception outside at Mom and Dad's house. For me, this event is history in the making. Mathias and Edith, Shortie and Nan, as they were called, were always there to help in whatever capacity. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for always being there for those who needed you. You will always be remembered. I love you.

MEMOIRS CONTINUED: CHAPTER XVIII

by

Alicia Keaty

My memoirs from now on will not only be about my single life, but about the years since my marriage to Thomas St. Paul Keaty, Sr., on January 31, 1942. My memoirs will also include the happenings of both of us. Your Dad (or Grandad, to all of you grandchildren and young ones to come), as you probably witnessed while he lived, was very talented. He could sketch, draw, paint beautiful pictures, copying a few of the old masters. He also carved on a piece of oak wood, a beautiful picture of Donatello's *Madonna and Child*. At the request of the Sacred Heart Church in Baton Rouge, he designed and carved the Stations of the Cross. For starters of sharing with you Tom's many talents, I would like to quote a poem he wrote about me, as a gift for one of my birthdays:

Lost Child Regained

That's my Lost Child on the wall there,
The infant girl with upswept hair,
Seated on a piano stool
According to the antique rule
Of photographers everywhere;
The tiny hand to heart with grace,
The naked foot half-hid by lace.
And the smile upon the face:
What can we say that makes sense
But, "Innocence, O, Innocence!!"

You see it is a faded old photo;
Why I keep it, I do not know:
For it always stops the flow
Of happy thoughts, then brings in
Vague regrets, as for a sin,
Or duty all undone--you understand,
I wasn't there to guard, protect-defend!

"Foolish old Man! To think so
Of your Wife's photo at two!
You know quite well, it is not true,
This child is not lost to you,
But merged by Time and Life
With the noble Nature of your Wife,
Where Child and Woman are as One!"

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THE WATERS
by
Margaretta Blanchard

Open your eyes and see the wonders of nature. I will tell you about the waters of North America; the beautiful waters I have seen! The waters of our country have colors like the rainbow. Bill and I had the opportunity to see many of those streams and bodies of water. We were so fortunate!

Have you ever seen yellow water? I had not until we were riding down the highway in Nevada. There between two small hills was a small lake. We could not believe our eyes. So we looked again. We stopped on the side of the road and watched in silence. The lake had the slightest specks of green in it, but it was really yellow water. It was not clear water. It looked like a lake of small flakes of yellow cream cheese. Yes, I know it sounds unbelievable. Someone said the lake was near a copper mine, so that was probably why it looked yellow.

Did you ever see black water? On our sail from Prince Rupert, British Columbia, to Skagway, Alaska, we saw jet black water in the inland passage. It seemed as though we were looking into a clear midnight sky. It was very intriguing, but kind of spooky. No one could tell us why it was that color. We sailed quite a few miles through that area.

One day, on another trip, we drove for miles into the hills of South Dakota. There we saw silky purple water in the little lakes that were made by the ranchers as they dammed the passage between two hills to make a place for their cattle to drink. We wondered if the cows gave purple milk. Maybe they just became royal cows.

In the plains of Manitoba, Canada, we saw fields stretched out for what seemed a hundred miles. The Indians were irrigating the fields with holy water pipes attached to wheels. For awhile clear drinking water seemed to be flowing out of the pipes. Then shortly after we would see ice blue water flowing out over the land. There was no one around to ask 'why.' So we just kept riding and enjoying the unusual, but beautiful water.

On other trips we would see sky blue water just sitting there waiting to be enjoyed. Then we would see emerald green water sparkling like it knew something we didn't. Most of the water we saw was blue or green but of different shades.

When we reached New Brunswick and Fundy Bay and Nova Scotia, the water was a deep red. The earth on th bottom of the bay was a deeper red. How did we see the bottom? That bay has the highest tides of any place in the world. When tides go out the boats sit on the bottom of the bay in very red clay. People have to tie long ropes on their boats to moor them so that they don't hang in the bay when the tide is out. It is quite an interesting spot. When the tide comes in, it comes in waves just like the Gulf Coast of Louisiana.

In New Brunswick, I walked out to a place called the flower pot. It was a tall rock out in the water on which wild flowers grow. If I had stayed until the tide came in, I would have been completely covered with red water.

When we flew over Canada on the way to Europe, the Hudson Bay waters looked exactly like the "blue" of the sky when we are having a "high" in weather. It was so beautiful, some of my traveling mates insisted that it was not water, but the sky. But that's another story.

The most beautiful of all the five Great Lakes in the northern United States is Lake Michigan. It is spectacular!! It looks like lime sherbet! A man who has a home on the North Shore of Lake Michigan told me when winter time comes up there and the weather turns cold, below freezing temperature, the waves start to freeze. Then it is at its coldest time, the waves are frozen into a twelve inch sculpture of lime sherbet. I didn't see the lime sherbet waves because we were there in the summer time. But I did see a rock that the man found in the lake. It was about a foot long and looked just like lime sherbet.

One day, like an eagle, we soared over the mountains in a five-passenger airplane. We landed at Glacier Bay, Alaska, some miles west of Juneau. There we transferred onto a small ship and sailed on into Glacier Bay. Oh, the fantastic sight that came into view. The ice blue icebergs were magic, sitting in the water of the same color. They were at the foot of a huge glacier. Small pieces of the blue ice were bobbing up and down like children at play.

There is no way my human mind can describe the beauty of God's creation in that spot. It just left me speechless. The temperature felt as though we were sitting in a freezer, but we didn't feel cold. Only our spirits were alive. Every human being should be able to experience Glacier Bay, Alaska. But the most memorable water that I have gazed upon was in the Gulf of Mexico.

Bill and I had seen almost every thing from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, but we had never been to Grand Isle. So we decided to drive our motor home to the Gulf of Mexico. We spent several days in a campground on the edge of the Gulf.

One morning when we awakened, we looked out over the water. There were scattered clouds in the sky. The sun was peeping out between the clouds. On the water was a sight to see. It seemed as though someone had dropped thousands of diamonds into the water. In the center of this water, stretched out in a long line appeared something that looked like a very long bracelet covered with diamonds. That was one of the most spectacular sights that we had ever seen. I shall never forget it.

And if we open our eyes to our fellow man, I bet we could see eagles and diamonds and lime sherbet and blue eyes and red hair and loving hearts. We just need to stop and look and listen and feel.

HALLOWEEN 1938
by
Fran Gross

Mother, Dad and I were living in Gothenburg, Nebraska, in the central part of the state, from June to November 1938. That fall I entered the fourth grade.

The elementary school had a tradition of having a Halloween party for all the students and their parents. We played games and bobbed for apples, but the big event was the costume judging. I'm sure each class had their own winners--a boy and a girl.

That year Dad found a hideous witch mask for me. Mother bought black chintz material for a skirt, white material for a high necked blouse, and orange material for a cape. Mother made the outfit big enough so I could wear it for several years. The skirt was long with an elastic waist, the blouse had long full sleeves, and the cape was a rectangle with a draw string. To top it off I had a pointed black cardboard hat that we bought at the store. I wore shiny black shoes, and of course, I carried a broom.

We had no sewing machine, so Mother made my costume at the home of her friend, Avis Harper. Morgan, Avis' husband, worked with Dad for the Tri-County Irrigation Project. That year was the beginning of a long friendship between our families. Their son, Jim, is four years older than I, and Dorothy, their daughter, is 21 months younger. Two years later they had another son, Tom.

The night of the Halloween party arrived. I was shy then, but determined to have a good time. We were all trying to guess who was who. One of my fellow girl classmates knew who I was (I do not remember any of my classmates' names) and we were both having a good laugh because our teacher did not recognize me.

The parents entertained themselves while we children played games and ate the food. Finally the big moment arrived when the winners of the costume contest were announced. Boy was I surprised when my name was called as the girls winner of my fourth grade class. My prize was a Big Little Book, probably about Little Orphan Annie, but I am not sure as I received more books as I got older.

The Big Little Books were about 4 X 5 inches and 2 inches thick. Most had a picture on the left hand page with text on the right. The most memorable feature was a small picture in the upper right hand corner of the text pages. When I rapidly flipped the pages, it created the illusion of action in the small pictures. Big Little Books were a favorite of both children and adults.

Mother kept my costume and mask for several years and I wore it to many parties. Finally the mask disintegrated and we packed the costume away in an old trunk. After I had children, we ran across it in the attic. Lorelei even wore it a time or two.

Halloween 1970, we were living in Adelphi, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC. Both of my boys, Wayne, aged 9, and Clayton, aged 6, wanted a different kind of costume. I persuaded Wayne to wear one of my wigs, a long ladies sweater, and makeup. He made a good looking girl. Clayton decided to wear the witch costume. Unfortunately, we did not have an ugly witch mask.

Off they went to make the rounds of the neighborhood. Wayne knocked on our next door neighbors' door. The Sivatkoes knew him very well, but did not recognize him until Clayton stepped out of the shadows and laughed. The Sivatkoes thought the boys had chosen well. That was the last time the witch costume was worn. Where it is now, I have no idea. Little did my Mother realize in 1938 that the witch costume would be worn several times, by several different people, over the next 32 years.

Wayne and Clayton Gross

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White Gravy
by
J. M. Jennings, Jr.

I first met my cooking instructor in September, 1941 when I was twenty years old, and, although then I could not imagine marriage ever happening to me, this lady later became my wife.

Margaret had graduated from the Sacred Heart Academy in New Orleans in June 1941 and had enrolled in Newcomb College. Our meeting was accidental. She and my brother Eddie were the same age and had a date to attend a Tulane Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity rush party. Eddie had borrowed a car for the evening and had invited my date and me to double-date.

I readily accepted the invitation for two reasons: first, I had no car and needed transportation for my date and me, and second, I was shy around girls. I could never think of any small talk or chit-chat, and I dreaded long, silent periods. Double-dating solved both my problems.

That double-date led Margaret and me to become interested in one another to the extent we began to "go steady." I gave my Fortier High School graduation ring to Margaret, and she wore it as a signal to her other suitors she was spoken for.

My friend "Red" Barnard also had a steady girl friend in the fall of 1941, and he and I wished to impress our "steadies." What better way to impress a potential mate-for-life than to demonstrate the ability to cook: to prepare a gourmet supper?

My Aunt Mary (Auntie), at whose home I lived, applauded the idea and offered the use of her kitchen. She also volunteered to stay in her quarters for the entire evening and gave us free use of the living and dining rooms for our party.

Both Margaret and "Red's" date agreed to come to our supper as much out of curiosity as hunger, I suppose. While "Red" went in his father's car to pick up the two girls, I stayed at Auntie's house to prepare for the great event.

I dressed the dining room table with a white damask table cloth and set out the good china and the heavy, old fashioned sterling silver cutlery. Auntie approved of these preparations and added a cut-crystal bowl of camellia blossoms from her yard as a centerpiece. I thought the table setting looked appropriate for our supper and returned to the kitchen to begin cooking.

"Red" and I had planned a meal of fried pork chops, mashed potatoes, green beans, and a lettuce and pineapple salad. On our Boy Scout hikes, we had prepared each of these foods but never all at the same time.

I had boiled the potatoes earlier in the afternoon because, while I anticipated no problem mashing the tubers, I did not wish to be distracted while concentrating on cooking the pork chops and making the white gravy for the mashed potatoes.

The chops came out of the G E monitor-top refrigerator and went into a deep, cast-iron black pot on the gas stove. After I added a cover to the pot so the meat would cook thoroughly, I began peeling the potatoes. "Red's" return with the two girls interrupted my concentration on my cooking responsibilities while the meat browned and sputtered. Maybe the flames were a bit too high while I went to greet our guests. I asked them to make themselves comfortable as "the meal should be ready shortly." Then I returned to the kitchen to see what was causing all the smoke. The pork chops, of course! Well done and then some but with lots of hot pork grease in the pot as a beginning for the white gravy. The crisp chops went in a pan into the oven to keep warm, while I began to add flour to the grease, as I understood this was how gravy was made. Too much flour! The gravy was now the consistency of custard. Add milk to thin. Now too watery. Solution: add more flour and stir.

"Red" came to the kitchen to add his expertise and hurry me along and also to open some more windows to disperse more of the smoke. Margaret and "Red's" date also came back to offer their assistance and advice. While "Red" and his date solved the gravy problem, Margaret opened the canned green beans. While the beans heated, she put the canned, sliced pineapple onto lettuce and added grated rat cheese for the topping to this salad. I mashed the potatoes.

We laughed and joked all through our supper about the problems of meal preparation and coordinating the various phases for the individual dishes to be completed at the same time. I have always felt somehow "Red" and I were evaluated by our dates as to whether we were worth considering as potential husband material. I must have passed the test as acceptable for Margaret and I married fifteen months later. "Red" didn't make the cut and remained a bachelor until the late 1940's before marrying Sue Cologne. And I never again attempted to make white gravy.

CHEZ NOUS A LA COMPAGNE
by
Olympe A. Butcher

Part I

I don't think any little girl in the whole world could have had a happier childhood than I had. In our home, love was everywhere. Each morning Mama woke us up with a cup of coffee in bed. Because I was young, she brought me some café au lait.

Born into a large Acadian family in the country on what is now Rose Lane on Louis Arceneaux Road in Lafayette, I was the ninth child. As I played hop scotch or jump rope in the yard, I could look over the picket fences and see the homes of the Edmond Moutons, the Louis Martins, and across the pasture the home of my grandfather, Louis Joseph Arceneaux. A little farther yet, I could see the Colomb home. There were also many tenant houses, all surrounded by green fields of cotton and corn.

One of the thrills of the summer was to anticipate the visit of my cousins, the Breaux family, who came from Gueydan to visit Nainaine and Maraine at the old house.

I enjoyed dancing across the well mown, green pasture while admiring the printonieres of yellow and white on my way to visit with my father's sisters and one brother. I always got permission first and Mama found joy in allowing me to join my cousins to play. We often had breakfast in the fig trees. There were fifteen huge Celeste fig trees planted by my grandparents along the West side of the house. This beautiful home had been built at Beau Bassin by my grandfather Louis Joseph and his grandfather Pierre Louis Arceneaux. The completed house was then moved on huge logs to its new location on this highest spot in Lafayette Parish. But, I was too young to know all these facts then! I just knew I loved the house.

I felt welcome there--even to sleep at night (every night) until Mama gave birth to my little brother Charlie Boy (Charles André Arceneaux). I realized that I was missing something at home. Up until then (about 4), I was just a lucky little girl with two homes.

My parents, Emile Galbert Arceneaux and Rose Celestine Mouton, married in 1902 and had ten children. We were fortunate to live on a farm where we had year round fresh fruit and vegetables, all the food necessary for our large family.

As farming goes we were not rich. So we certainly had no piano. But we could sing! One of my favorite recollections of our family at day's end was when all the chores were done, the supper dishes put away, the cats and dogs fed, the pig penned, and the cows milked,--we all sat on the long front *gallerie* with Papa and Mama in the swing to watch the big round moon rise as the day turned

into night. Papa serenaded us, beginning with *La Marsiellaise* and then some of Mama's favorite songs: *Over the Waves* (Mama's favorite); *I Love You Truly*; and *It's Three O'Clock in the Morning.* My sister Vange (Evangeline) had a beautiful voice and could be heard singing, too. But then Papa's songs changed to *My Wild Irish Rose, I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen,* and *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling.* One could have easily thought we were Irish, but truly, we were just a tender loving French Acadian Family!

And religious, too. Before putting us younger ones to bed, Mama gathered us in her bedroom where we all knelt around the four poster colonial bed to say the prayers before the statue of the Blessed Mother and the Sacred Heart. *Bon Soir!*

Part II

As we entered our home from the long front gallery, the big hall led directly to the dining room. On either side of the hall were four large, rooms with high ceilings. One room was the parlor, our sitting room , and the other three which all opened into the hall were bedrooms. We had one large bathroom, and each of the bedrooms had large walk-in closets with a *lavabo* and a *pot de chambre.* The tall rooms with many windows gave a *courant d'air* (cross ventilation) and kept us cool. Air conditioning was unheard of. At one time there were three fireplaces in our home which kept us warm throughout the winter, using wood from our woodland property located on the Vermilion River (now Wilderness Road). This wood, gathered early for winter was corded next to the south fence in the back yard.

The south side porch was very cool and the length of the dining room and kitchen. On this screened porch Mama kept her *garde manger*, a food keeper. The big wood stove in the kitchen kept that area warm and was stoked early so that Mama could make the coffee to wake us up and fix breakfast.

Mama was not a great cook. She had been orphaned early when Benjamin Mouton, her father, married to Louise Gentil, had died of pneumonia. She was a student of Mount Carmel in Lafayette and also of the Sacred Heart Academy in Grand Coteau (1896-99) but cooking was not necessarily her favorite chore although she baked the best great little round French breads. Still our kitchen was the place to be. Every morning Mama baked a great delicious cornbread, sometimes biscuits, and a large pot of hot oatmeal. It was like choosing your breakfast for the day. Baking the delicious little, round French breads was for our afternoon after school treat.

One day soon after the departure of the older children for school, I found myself on the kitchen floor serving "tea" to my little brother Charlie from my special tea set. My tea serving was soon interrupted by Mama saying, "Oh, *Nous avons de la compagnie!*" "Pick up," she said to me, "because I'll serve some coffee." Quite often company came because Papa was on the School Board and a member of the Farm Bureau. Such friends as Mr. Frank Bacque and Mr. Bowles, teachers; Mr.

L. Leo Judice, county agent; and Mr. A. W. Bittle with the Farming Bureau--dropped in to talk about schools, business or farming.

On this particular fall morning, our visitor had walked by way of the railroad tracks which led straight to our house from Carencro High School. He was the principal of the school and had come for his recess break to drink a cup of coffee and for a short conversation with my father. As he nibbled on a piece of cornbread, he looked at my mother and asked, "What is this child doing here?", to which my mother answered, "She is only five." "Send her to school--tomorrow! I need her in first grade." My heart leaped! I was going to school!

Holding my sister Vange's hand tightly the next morning (she was a senior), I rode in the horse drawn school bus, the hack, driven by Mr. Luke Dupuis to school. Later, I'll tell you why I cried all morning and how the principal, Mr. Maxim Doucet, saved my life.

WHAT TO DO WITH A FIVE ACRE YARD
by
E. D. Parker

What do you do when you move into a house with a five acre yard? If that yard is well seeded with wild grasses such as Johnson and crab grasses and various other weeds, a good idea is to buy a suitable lawn mower early on. We did just that. We invested in a second hand International tractor, equipped with a belly mower. This was the smallest member of the International line of farm tractors. To go along with the tractor it is helpful to have three boys who are old enough to operate it. By careful planning we happened to have three such boys available. During their teen years Tom, Dave, and Bob did a good job of keeping the grass and weeds under control.

We eventually planted most of the back lot in Coastal Bermuda grass, which had become a very popular pasture grass among Southern stockmen. Coastal, a hybrid, cannot be propagated by seed; instead it must be spread by planting sprigs and runners. We bought the grass runners by the bushel from a grower in western Louisiana, and Tom, Dave, and Bob planted the grass by hand. I considered fencing in our lot at a later date and raise a few head of calves, but we never got around to that dream.

We undertook a project in the late sixties and early seventies to dress the house up a bit. We decided to brick veneer the house. We had concrete footings poured around the outside walls to support the brick work, and removed the asbestos shingles with which the house had originally been equipped. I then taught Dave and Bob how to lay brick. Tom missed out on the brick work because he was in school at West Point at the time. Now I had never laid brick before, but I had seen it done numerous times, and it appeared to be a straightforward process. I learned with the boys and we improvised as we went along. They did a good job. We used second hand brick bought from house wreckers as they demolished some of the old houses in Lafayette. In addition to veneer work the boys also enclosed our wrought iron porch columns to form brick columns and built a fireplace and chimney in an addition at the back of the house which was to provide a third bedroom, a second bathroom, and a substantial family room.

Another project that we started early was tree planting. We planted live oaks and pines. We gathered live oak acorns and sprouted them, in tin cans containing a little water, and planted the sprouted acorns in small peat pots with potting soil. After the seedlings got a good start, we transplanted them in the soil. I say "we," but, again, the boys did most of the work. We also planted a few pine seedlings that we bought in bundles.

Tomato greenhouses were getting a lot of publicity in those days, so I decided to build a greenhouse and get into the act. I designed a prefabricated arch, and the boys and I made enough of them to give us a framework for a thirty feet by ninety feet greenhouse. The legs of the arches

were nailed to a 2 x 8 foundation mounted on short posts. The arches were then stabilized by tying them together with 1 x 4 and 2 x 4 at the top and sides. The framework was then covered with corrugated fiberglass panels. A wide door was provided at the west end. We were fortunate in locating a used greenhouse gas heater equipped with a fan for circulating the air. We suspended the heater from the top of the structure near the east end. Most greenhouse tomatoes were grown under hydroponic conditions at that time (and apparently still are). However, we decided to grow our plants in the soil. We therefore needed some way to till the soil. For that purpose we bought a 16-horsepower garden tractor from Montgomery Ward. We also bought a belly mower and breaking plow to fit. We sold the International since we could now mow with the new tractor.

We planted the tomato plants in rows about three feet apart, leaving a shallow furrow in each row in order to fertilize the plants by flooding the furrows with a water solution of fertilizers. We stretched a wire about five feet above each row to anchor strands of binder twine for the plants to climb on. When a plant reached the wire, the string was untied and moved down the row and tied again, thus laying the older part of the plant on the ground. At the end of the season when a plant was 15 to 17 feet long, 10 to 12 feet of it would be laying on the ground.

The first year we were in the business, we planted the plants in the fall, and after growing tomatoes through the winter, the crop finished off in the spring. With the first crop we did all the work, including producing, harvesting and marketing. All phases of the project were time consuming.

For the second crop we decided to take on a partner to share the work. Esther was working at an allergy clinic on Johnston Street. We had met Esther's coworker, Anna Hollier, and were well acquainted with her family, her husband John and their six children, three sons and three daughters. I asked John if he would like to become a partner in the greenhouse operation. His answer was "yes," and we turned the production and harvesting phases over to him. I continued to do the marketing, and we split the profits equally (if there were any). Our last crop was planted in the fall of 1973. As we approached the end of the season, we had three main customers, the two Veron's grocery stores and LaFonda Restaurant. One of the Veron's is still located on Rena Drive just off Johnston. The other one was located on Congress in the Saints Streets area, but is no longer there. I think there is a book store there now. Both the restaurant and grocery stores were good customers for a while, and there were even times when we couldn't supply all the tomatoes they wanted.

When a large greenhouse operation went into business near Crowley, they approached both Veron stores and offered to guarantee a supply of hydroponic tomatoes for a reciprocal agreement to buy only their tomatoes. So, in one fell swoop, we lost two important customers and had only one reliable customer left, LaFonda.

Esther had known Lee Bob Cox, the owner of LaFonda, as a patient at the Allergy Clinic. Lee Bob had become addicted to our soil grown tomatoes, and why not? I think we were growing the best tomatoes available in Lafayette at the time. Cox liked a small size tomato for his salads, so

we tried to save that size, No. 2, for him. As the season progressed, the yield in weight decreased, as did the average size of the tomatoes, giving us a higher percentage of No. 2 fruit. From December 5, 1973 to January 22, 1974, we delivered 620 pounds of No. 2 tomatoes to La Fonda at thirty-five cents a pound and forty pounds of No. 3 tomatoes at twenty-five cents a pound as a last delivery. The only other sale in that period was forty pounds of No. 2 variety at thirty-five cents a pound to Handi Shop. During the same period we donated one hundred and forty pounds of tomatoes, valued at thirty-two cents a pound ($44.80) to Landry Road Nursing Home, and forty pounds to The Salvation Army. The yield continued to decrease, and we turned everything over to the Holliers, including marketing, for the remainder of the season.

Other projects were in progress around us as we planted grass and trees, built a greenhouse and raised tomatoes, and began construction of an addition to the back of the house to contain a master bedroom, a family room, and an extra bathroom, and a fireplace and chimney for the family room. Two next door neighbors and business partners bought the two five acre tracts joining our lot on the west. The five acres on the other side changed hands twice. I thought about buying the property both times when the FOR SALE signs appeared, but did not, much to later regret. Those years we spent working on our five acre yard are still memorable ones, without regret, and full of the satisfaction of jobs well done.

HAPPY THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES
by
Joan Dimmick

Most of the older homes in the early forties had many windows and doors with long hallways stretching the length of the house from front door to back door. Breezes blowing through our house would bring in cool air along with smells of wisteria and wild roses growing outside.

Every Thursday our laundry was delivered in great huge packages wrapped in brown paper. We would eagerly tear open to reveal the stacks of sweet smelling, freshly ironed linens, towels and clothes. We would each take our own linens and remake our beds and put everything away in its proper place. Our grandmother's best friends owned the largest laundry in town!

The back porch of our house was screened in and full of places to play and sit. It contained a very large commercial three door refrigerator that had replaced the old ice box. We loved how many goodies it held, the ice it made all by itself--a real treat. We're all spoiled today with ice makers and such, but then it was even fun to fill the ice trays.

The groceries delivered to us every day or so were ordered by phone. Everyone had charge accounts, and these were paid at the end of each month. The delivery boy, as the old man was called, rode his bike with a huge basket filled with all the groceries. He would come around to the back door, knock on the screen and someone would run down to let him in, and he would leave the food for us. Rarely did we go to the market and choose our food.

My favorite snack each afternoon after school was five or six slices of toast with real butter. I loved the smell of real butter. Later, butter became scarce and was rationed. We were then sold packages of a rectangular-shaped white lard-looking product with a small orange powder packet which was squeezed onto the lard, mixing it together until it turned light yellow. That first butter substitute was the beginning of oleo margarine. After that, the smell of real butter was no longer. I still wistfully remember the smell of real butter and the times before we were supposed to avoid it for all its cholesterol and fat.

Our family had an old-timey hot water heater and tank that stood off in a corner in our kitchen. This heater had to be lit to get hot water for doing the dishes or for bathing. We faithfully tended to this duty for ourselves and for each other. The bad deal was we could never leave it on too long for fear it would get too hot and blow up. This had happened once in another house of my grandmother's, and the kitchen had literally blown up. She reminded us of this event many times. We were often jumping straight out of bed and tearing down the stairs, falling half way down and banging our hips, to get to the kitchen before it blew. That fear stayed with me until I left home.

Our evenings were sometimes filled with catching fireflies and reclining in the ditch between our house and our neighbors' dreaming and planning. Everyone liked hanging out at our house because we had the most freedom!

THE TEEN YEARS OR TEARS AND ACNE
by
Marion Embree

I was eleven years old when my cousins, Flora and Simon Weil, and I began to have acne, they six and seven years older. I tend to spell it with capitals: A-C-N-E!

Every Thursday after school Simon, 18, drove the three of us to Baton Rouge to the Medical Arts Building on Third Street. I cannot remember the dermatologist's name, but I do remember the Drs. Lorio, Leo, ENT, Dr. Cecil, the pediatrician, and another brother, a dentist, were in the same building. The dermatologist declared that I was too young to have acne as he examined the pimples. He said that I "caught" it from my older cousin "because we used the same hand towel."

Our treatment was ultra violet lamps and x-rays. I do not have any purple scars, but I do have some pits. Those years really were "the pits." Acne is an embarrassment no matter what the age. We shampooed our hair every night with something that smelled like creosote and bathed with the original fragrance of Lifebuoy Soap. Mother sent Grandma Blandina Dreyfus feed sack pillowcases to protect Grandma's bed pillows. I shed tears about my face and hated smelling like railroad ties everyday.

In spite of the acne, other activities helped me enjoy my teen years. I played basketball and was a track team pacer. I like most schoolwork. During my Junior year, I loved English. We had a Newcomb graduate named Corinne Claiborne (nicknamed Lindy) who taught for our regular teacher, Mrs. Didier, who was on maternity leave. She told us she was engaged to be married to a Tulane man, Hale Boggs, and they were to be married when school was out. She was living in New Roads with her Uncle Ferdinand Claiborne who was my Grandpa Theodore Dreyfus' attorney. Our family was invited to the wedding at the cathedral in New Roads. It was a beautiful affair. We were invited to "Mr. Ferd's" home where the reception was held. Their house is on False River, so the setting was as lovely as the occasion.

[Hale Boggs was in the House of Representatives in Washington until his death in an airplane crash in the sea off Alaska. Lindy took his seat and was re-elected several times until she chose to retire several years ago. She has written a book, Washington Through a Purple Veil.]

Despite the purple pimples of my teenage years, I was voted senior class president. I have helped my three children through adolescence without acne. Tears have to be shed and there was no way to get around the "EMBARRASSMENT" that often comes with those years. It is nice to look back and absolutely wonderful to know that I will never have acne again!

ONLY CHILD: THE TIMES AND COLORS OF MY LIFE
by
Yvonne Booth

In the first year of my life, my parents and I moved from my birth city of St. Louis, Missouri, to Birmingham, Alabama. My first living memory is of being in bed, having to take an afternoon nap and hearing the voices of children playing outside. I forced myself to stay awake in rebellion. My mother was firm, and I continued to have to take an afternoon nap--at least to stay in bed the allotted time. I have two other memories of those early years in Birmingham:

One afternoon I darted into the street just as a large Buick "touring car" (as they were called then) drove by. Thankfully it was not going fast at all--as cars in those early days could not--but it ran over part of my leg, dragging me several feet. The woman driver was distraught and then relieved to know that I would not have to go to the hospital. I had a badly bruised leg, and when our doctor came to the house, he said I must stay in bed for a week or longer. I remember that I had to learn to walk again. The woman driver of the Buick was on her way to her home in Atlanta and said to me, "I will send you a beautiful doll when I get home." I waited and waited for the doll to arrive. It never did. The lady from Atlanta was my first lesson in broken promises.

I believe I was about three when this next event occurred--surely Mother told me this fact--but I have only my early memory to rely on now. Everyone who would know is gone. This memory is vivid:

Every weekend--usually Sunday afternoon--Mother and Daddy and I would go driving in our "Vealey" automobile into the "mountains," the high hills around Birmingham. The woods were filled with blooming dogwood trees and on the ground a wondrous assortment of wild flowers--especially my favorite, "Sweet William." It is hard to convey the feeling a small girl had for this beauty in these woods. I could hardly stop picking big bouquets of flowers and I was quite greedy about it. Sadly all the flowers were wilted when we got home. As we drove back into town, we would see several fires in the hills. The Ku Klux Klan were burning wooden crosses.

When I was nearly five we moved to Mother's hometown--New Orleans! That is another story of many other stories!

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THE BATH WAS FREE
by
Joe Glorioso

This is a war story. It is not really a *war-war* story. It's an in-between war story. In either operations during World War II, the European or Pacific, about ten percent of the GI's time was spent on the killing fields, fifteen percent was spent going to and from the killing fields and seventy-five percent of their time were served doing time the GI's called the Five R's: rest, rehabilitation, recreation, refitting and replacement of parts and men. I suppose this story is about *rest*.

At three o'clock on an afternoon during the second week of December 1944, F Company, 87th Calvary Reconnaissance Squadron, left the killing fields for the large village of Nevenhagen (the spelling is phonetic). The company's first sergeant and I were the billeting officers for the company. For my own billet, I chose a two-story brick house owned by a thirty-five-year-old widow, whose husband was killed as a member of the Belgium underground, and her fifteen-year-old son. The company's GI's were billeted in an unused high school building. Captain Wells and the other officers were bedded in three-story brick buildings adjoining mine. The company was bedded down by five o'clock and the rolling equipment secured by six.

After evening mess and just before dusk, I walked to my billet, a two-and-a-half brick building, to meet the owner, Francine (I don't remember her real name). She was a big woman, five feet six or seven, wearing an apron over a blue denim dress button down the front with oversize white buttons, met me at the bottom of the stairs. She was pleasant with a nice face that smiled easily. She led me to a room in the attic. She could speak French and German but spoke conversational Flemish, which she used in a constant jabber. I followed her to my quarters in the attic.

The room was sparsely furnished with a single bed freshly made, a wash stand and a three-legged stool. A pile of apples were stored in one corner of the ten-by-twelve room. I placed my two knapsacks on the bed. Francine immediately took them off and placed them in the washstand's bottom cabinet. She scolded me in Flemish, thinking that I understood. She smiled pleasantly as she continued to chat in Flemish about the bed, the washstand and, I supposed, apologized about the apples. Finally, she left my room. I stripped down to my GI long johns and laid down on the bed and covered myself with a down-filled comforter. In minutes I was fast asleep.

Early next morning, I heard vigorous pounding on the wooden door. Trying my best to open my eyes but frustrated by the pounding, I yelled, "Who is that? What the hell do you want?" The rapping continued and the door knob was being twisted, but no answer from the other side of the door. Slipping from under the warmth of a comforter, I barefooted to the door in my long johns and slightly opened the door. To my surprise I faced Francine, standing on the door's threshold, carrying

an extra large pitcher of steaming hot water. Behind her, the fifteen-year-old boy held a large empty basin. Francine put her weight against the door and forced her way past me and into the bed room, the water splashing about in the pitcher. The teenager placed the basin on the floor and left the room, shutting the door behind him.

Francine poured about a gallon of hot water in the basin, pulled a small bar of yellow soap from her apron's pocket and took two towels from a drawer in the wash stand. I watched her every move, wondering what was in store for this GI. When she had completed her preparatory chores, she looked at me and made signs for me to take off my long johns. I grasped the top button of my underwear firmly with both hand. She said, "Ja. Ja. Ja." I understood, but I was not about to give in to her demands. She stepped forward and unbuttoned the button from the second button to the bottom button, repeating "Ja, Ja, Ja." I reluctantly gave up, but not entirely. I rebuttoned the bottom three buttons. She slipped my johns off my shoulders down to my waist. I had won that little battle of wills.

Francine soaped a wash cloth with the yellow soap. I knew GI soap when I saw it. She scrubbed my face, my upper body, my arms and arm pits as though I was a dirty teenager fighting furiously against a routine Saturday night bath. She rinsed me and vigorously rubbed me down with a rough towel until my skin glowed a light pink.

Francine stepped back, surveyed her work, and reached out for the bottom three buttons of my long johns. I jumped back to the bed's edge and sat to ward off her long arms, but to no avail. She grabbed my johns and ripped open the buttons. Pulling me off the bed, she yanked down and off, my last vestige of human decency. I stood there, ashamed, clad only in my birthday suit, hands clapsed together in one last effort of modesty. My tormentor scrubbed my body, rinsed me with hot water from the pitcher, and toweled me to a rosy pink.

When Francine finished my bath, she looked around for clean clothes, chattering incessantly in Flemish in a mock scolding mode. I pointed to the bottom of the washstand. She leaned over, pulled open the door, fetched out a knap-sack and opened it. It contained my socks, underwear, trousers and shirt. She motioned me to put my clothes on. As I reached for my clean johns, the fifteen-year-old boy entered the bedroom, carrying my combat boots, now cleaned and polished. He was not fazed in the least at seeing his fully clothed mother and a naked American in the room. Francine hustled the boy through the door and followed him down the stairs, closing the door behind them.

Dressing and reviewing the episode in my mind, it occurred to me that this must have been a bath ritual Francine engaged in with her lost freedom fighter. Could I may have been the surrogate husband? For the record, not quite!

I left my billet and walked to the mess truck. The officers were seated on canvas folding stools around a folding table that we had liberated from a vacant house in war-torn France, maybe Belgium. Captain Wells, misinterpreting my smiling and devil-may-care demeanor, said, "Glory, you lucky bastard!" He continued, "By the way, these two officers are here to survey our billets." I shook hands with the officers. The mess sergeant took my mess kit and canteen cup. Powdered scrambled eggs, grape jelly, pan-fried potatoes and Spam in a milk sauce (S.O.S to GI's) was the deluxe breakfast. The hot coffee and powdered milk seemed especially good that morning. Captain Wells explained that the officers were visiting to count the number of GI's and number of officers billeted in the village. Each GI was allowed a space that measured three by six feet and the officers, four by six feet. The owners of the building would get one dollar per GI and two dollars per officer. I had never heard of such an arrangement. Verging on anger, I faced the two officers, "Let me get this straight. Sirs, you're telling us that the U.S. government will pay those bastards so GI's can lay down and sleep on a cold, hard floor in a not-too-comfortable bed roll in their buildings?" They nodded affirmatively. Now, I became madder than hell. "Next thing I'll hear is that the U.S. will pay for the decrepit bridges my tanks break up. How about the miles of single-wire fences we roll over every day and how about the barren fields out tank tracks churn up . . . ?"

Captain Wells cut short my tirade, "Loosen up, Glory. They explained to me that this was reverse lend-lease. It's the government's policy."

"Look at me, Captain, we come over here against our will. We go out and fight a goddamn war to liberate these frigging people. Some of us are gonna get killed, others wounded, maybe maimed for life, and we have to pay them for that lousy privilege? To me that smells of bull manure. Our government is full of crap. I bet that when we win this frigging war, we are gonna pay to rebuild the castles, churches and houses, even those in Germany. Today, they tell us to unconditionally shoot up and bomb everything that threatens us until nothing is left to deter us."

Captain Wells patted me on my shoulder, "Take it easy, Glory. We all have a job to do. Let's just do our jobs. And let the government do what it wants."

I listened carefully. The captain was right. I wanted to do what I could. Most of all, I wanted to get done with the killing and dying and go home. I took a sip of coffee and gobbled down my breakfast. I thought about the payment for my billet (which was not the Waldorf Astoria), smiled at the two officers, and laughed to myself and about the ironic inconsistencies we encounter in a war. By golly, unknowing to the whole war-weary world, I had found one inconsistency. You see. The bath was free.