



F. F. Wilbourne & Morgan City, La.



*Excerpts From  
Our Pages  
of Life*







These excerpts from *Our Pages of Life* are stories  
written by a group of adults in a life writing class.

As they share their lives, listen to yours, for  
the nature of story involves the tandem act of telling and hearing.  
What these students tell is yours to experience, yours to learn.  
Enjoy these glimpses into others' lives as you read on.

To my students, my friends for life--thanks!

❖ Joan Stear  
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana  
Spring 1997



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at the University of Southwestern Louisiana and  
the Horizons Program of Lafayette General Medical Center for their support  
Kudos, also, to Jim Jennings for his offering of time and word processing skills.



*Front Cover: (clockwise, beginning at top right corner) Pat DeLatte and friend Fay Navo;  
Lois Diehl and her father, Bob Meals; Lois Diehl, shopping with Grandma Baker; Marge  
DeVillier and husband Joe; Pearl Fields, mother of Rosemary Aycock*

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## **Life Writing Class Spring 1997--Thursday Session**

Seated, l. to r.: Lois Diehl; Charlotte McConnell; Jane Ellen Carstens;  
Ruth Maher; Marge DeVillier  
Standing, l. to r.: Jake Valentine; Doris Bentley; Joan Stear; Mildred Joy; Louise de Beus;  
Pat DeLatte; Joan Ireland; Betty St. Dizier; Orpha Valentine  
Missing from photo: Rosemary Aycock; Betty Gerard; Jean Smith; Chris Westell

# A LIFE AND LETTERS SONNET (SORT OF!)

by  
Rosemary Aycock

Because we've memories to keep,  
Which after years of life lay deep,  
But, stirred, will make us laugh and weep,  
We write.

Because enrichment is our goal,  
With friend's support "Memoirs" are told,  
In classes where the good times roll,  
We write.

Because we've found a teacher who  
Enjoys our efforts to be true  
To all we've done and want to do,  
We write.

Because her "know how" leads the way  
With topics, smiles that make our day...  
Her pencil guides us, less we stray...  
We write.

And so we hope this teacher rare  
Will know her students truly care  
For helping us to risk, to dare,  
To write.



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## CANAL STREET, NEW ORLEANS, CIRCA 1949

by  
Pat DeLatta

During our latter years in high school, my best friend, Fay Navo and I spent many Saturdays going downtown to "Canal Street." We were sixteen years old and considered ourselves very sophisticated. Now, as I look back at those times, I realize that we were really naive and were also very, very lucky. Although downtown New Orleans and the French Quarter were safer then, there was still plenty of trouble we could have gotten into!

Canal Street, the widest boulevard in town, offered miles of shopping and entertainment. Getting there was by way of bus and streetcar. Few teenagers had cars in those days, so we thought nothing of having to ride public transportation. We did it every day to get to school. The carfare was only seven cents for New Orleans passengers, but because my family had moved just across the line into Jefferson Parish, where the fare was ten cents, my daily trips cost me three cents more. I had to catch the Jefferson bus a block from my house and then transfer to the Tulane streetcar once we got to Carrollton Ave. That's where I met up with Fay, and together we planned our day as the streetcar clanged and swayed along the tracks. The wooden seats and wide open windows were not too conducive to comfort, but hey, it was the only ride to town.

Occasionally we went to a movie at the Saenger Theater or the Loew's State where the ticket price was twenty-eight cents and the popcorn only a nickel. We could go for a double feature at the Joy Strand for a quarter. However, the movies there were second runs, and the theater was a little sleazy, so we didn't do that too often. Sometimes the Orpheum Theater would have live entertainment along with the movie. For instance, we got to see and collect autographs from movie stars like Roddy McDowell, Turhan Bey and Guy Madison. Of course, no one remembers who these people were, but to us then, they were famous! Our shopping was usually more looking than buying because the dollar that each of us had didn't stretch too far. We had enough fun just being on Canal Street.

Young and fearless, Fay and I also wandered up and down the cobblestone streets of the Vieux Carre. Some days we would even walk to Jackson Square and watch the pigeons decorate the statue of General Andrew Jackson, the hero of the Battle of New Orleans. The artists with their easels surrounding the Square fascinated us, not only for their beautiful paintings, but because of what we imagined were their Bohemian life styles. Visiting the Cabildo Museum, which faced the Square, allowed us to experience the history of our city, its glory and its disgrace. New Orleans had been a center of culture and progress, but the slave cells and auction blocks, still on display, were silent reminders of the inhumanity practiced during those historical times. Next door to the Cabildo, at the St. Louis Cathedral, we would step inside for a moment of reflection, and an escape from the hot, humid New Orleans weather.

We were in and out of the many shops and alleys and places of intrigue in the French Quarter. The most fascinating shop we found was on Royal Street. It was a dark, forbidding establishment known only as "*The Tea Room*." Down a small alley, and behind a larger shop, there was "*The Tea Room*." The building consisted of two rooms divided by a curtain. The pungent smell of incense drifted through the tiny rooms as we courageously rang the bell and waited to come face to face with "Mother Marie," who "*knows all....tells all.*" I suspected that the incense was an attempt to disguise the bad smell of mildew, candle wax, dusty furniture and bodies damp with perspiration - no air-conditioning in those days. From behind the curtain, there appeared "Mother Marie"! She was dressed in the Gypsy fashion of long full skirt, emblazoned with patterns of bright flowers, her white peasant blouse adorned with rows and rows of beads. The scarf that covered her head was red satin, and the large hoop earrings dangling from underneath were of gold. The large rings on her fingers and the bangle bracelets on her arms clanked noisily as she greeted us.

When we told her that we were there for a reading, she asked if we wanted the cheese sandwich or the lunch meat sandwich. Fay and I looked at each other with confusion, and not being wise in the art of fortune telling, we asked for the cheese sandwich and hoped for the best! Seeing our discomfort and realizing that this visit was our first foray into the world of the occult she explained; in New Orleans at this time, it was illegal to sell fortune telling, therefore, what we were really buying was a sandwich and a cup of tea. The fortune telling was something that the "seer" did for our benefit, at no cost to us. "Mother Marie" explained that she had been born with a special gift that allowed her to see the future in her crystal ball, or the tea leaves, or the Tarot Cards, or by just reading the lines in the palms of our hands, and she would tell us our fate. A deal we could not pass up, so, of course we went for it. Fay requested the Tarot Cards, while I decided on having my palm read. We were led, each into a separate room and waited while the other was given her glimpse of "*life as it will be.....*"

I'm not sure all the facts thus revealed to "Mother Marie" and passed on to us ever came to be. I can't remember what the fortune teller predicted. A couple of years later, our paths in life took different directions. Fay got married and moved to Jackson, Mississippi, while I went away to College in Baton Rouge. We kept in touch for a while and then drifted apart. But on that Saturday, long ago, during our trip to Canal Street, for fifty cents, just one half of a dollar, we had a cheese sandwich and tea, we had contact with a real Gypsy fortune teller, a sneak preview into the future, and an experience treasured by two "sophisticated" sixteen-year-olds!





## THE MAFIA CONNECTION OF THE WESTELL FAMILY

by  
Chris Westell

Mamo had a cousin, Louise, with whom she was very close. Though she was our cousin too, we children called her Aunt Louise since she was the age of our parents. Aunt Louise, educated as a pharmacist, married Stephen Malkiewicz, also a pharmacist. Our families were very close, and we kids loved to visit with the Malkiewicz kids. We especially loved to visit since they owned a drug store with an old fashioned soda fountain. Aunt Louise would give each of us a soup bowl and let us loose behind the soda fountain! What fun! What bellyaches!

The drug store was in Chicago Heights, a suburb of the windy city. In the twenties and thirties, Chicago Heights was well controlled, excuse me "protected," by The Al Capone. On one visit to Chicago Heights, Uncle Steve asked my Dad (Papo) to go with him on an "errand," his weekly "protection payment" visit to Al Capone. Arriving in downtown Chicago they proceeded to a store front building and entered. They went to the back of the store and entered a long darkened hallway. Before entering the door at the end of the hallway, two large "goons" checked them for weapons. Then they walked into a very lavishly decorated room filled with cigar smoke. Behind an impressive desk sat The Al Capone. My Dad was introduced and received a warm hand shake from the Chicago Boss. A long friendly conversation ensued, at the end of which, Big Al offered my Dad a job in his "business." He said he could triple the money he was making at Sieman Body. Very graciously and carefully, Dad declined the invitation, telling Al that he didn't think his wife Harriet would approve of his changing jobs at that time. My Dad was familiar with mob business as he had lost a very dear Uncle to mob dealings many years before this.

Moving ahead to 1962, I was working at St. Anthony's Hospital in St. Louis, MO. As Sister M. Crescentia, R.N., I was the Supervisor of 2 West, which was a men's surgical floor. The area also had an 11 bed Intensive Care Unit, which I set up. Because 2 West was a men's floor, I had many policemen as patients. But also, as patients were some of the guys on the other end of the law. Whenever one of the "Mafia's Gentlemen" were patients, their family head, Jimmy Michaels Senior, would pay a visit. Senior was now retired but used to run St. Louis when Al Capone was running Chicago in the twenties and thirties.

Senior loved nuns and was a perfect gentleman. I was soon high on his list of protected persons. He even gave me his private telephone number and told me not to hesitate to use it. The policemen who were patients teased me about it and said I was really privileged as very few people had that number. Only J.M., Sr. answered that phone.

One "Mafia Gentleman," a patient in our wing, turned out not to be a gentleman. He literally attacked every woman that entered the room. Because I did not have enough males to cover his care, I soon made use of the private phone number. After explaining the problem to Jimmy Sr., he assured me that it would be taken care of immediately. Sure enough, within the hour Jimmy Sr., with two of

his guards, appeared on the unit. This dapper gentleman in his 80's strutted down the hall with these two six foot, 250 lb. guards on either side, a scene out of the "Untouchables." The men entered the room of the troublesome patient and exited only two minutes later. From that time on the patient became a saint, burdened with the vow of celibacy. The conversation among the employees was, what was the threat? I only wished that all my supervisory problems could have been solved with the same ease!

Our unit cared for many elderly men with prostate surgery. At that time, treatment required quite a long stay in the hospital. One problem was the patient's nutritional needs. With a doctor's order, I would prepare egg-nog drinks and spike them with whiskey, a palatable way of getting something nutritious down our elderly patients.

One evening as I exited my office with a tray of eggnogs spiked from the cache in the locked cupboard, I found myself face to face with Jimmy Sr. (Remember he was a very short man.) His nose quickly picked up the familiar smell and he immediately began to tease this nun about it. After I explained, he wanted to know how I got my supply. Oh, what Mother Superior didn't know. Patients were permitted to bring in alcohol for their own use, and when they went home some was left behind, a very limited and unpredictable supply for our wing. The next day, a case of Seagram's mysteriously appeared on my desk in the office which was also the linen room. The employees went into a hysterical response. Week after week we received a case, never seeing the deliverer. Soon I had to use the private number to stop the flow. I told Jimmy Sr. that I would get into trouble with Mother Superior if she found out about my excessive cache. He said he would take care of her, too, if necessary!

I was transferred before the supply was depleted and I wondered what my successor, Sister M. Martin, thought when she opened that cabinet. I am sure the Head Nurse, Mary Jane Thoele, had an interesting and convoluted explanation. "Mom Thoele," as we affectionately called her, was my partner in crime. We could have written a book about running 2 West in the early sixties.

Continuing with the Mafia picture!

One afternoon we admitted a heavy-set Italian man to the Intensive Care Unit with an acute coronary. In the evening when I returned to the floor to make my rounds, the nurses and aides in I.C.U. were in a frightened panic. A group of visitors for the newly admitted patient had come to party. One glance at the skidsy monitor, and I headed for the large private room. I knocked and tried to open the blocked door. Not until I announced who was knocking did the door slowly open. What a sight! The patient was sitting cross legged at the top of the bed, his leads for the monitor still attached. Four other gentlemen sat around the bed and a poker game was in progress. Whiskey bottles were scattered around and smoke filled the room. The four men and the guard at the door had taken their jackets off and their holstered guns were visible.

I stood before them, hands on my hips. With my best nun's glare, I told them, "I want you out immediately and I also want you to know that guns are not permitted on this unit." I also warned

them that I had the private number of Jimmy Sr. and would use it if they were not cooperative. Sheepishly the visitors gathered up the cards and bottles. They put on their coats and left without a remark, only a slight nod of the head as they passed me. The Patient received a classic lecture from a nun, warning him that his condition might result in a face to face meeting with the Judge of all judges and he had better get his rosary beads out and start using them. We threw open the windows (mid winter) and the now model patient lay shivering in his bed until the smoke and odors cleared. Another saint to care for in 235!

The Mafia Connection continued to strew interesting incidents over my two year stay at St. Anthony Hospital. My Dad relished all my reports and updates.



**REMEMBER, CHILDREN: CHANGING OF TIMES  
THE HOLIDAYS OF '96: THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS**

by  
**Charlotte McConnell**

During the last few years as the grown grandchildren were enjoying their own parties and the younger ones were receiving large toys, it suddenly made sense to relieve those families from having to come to G'Ma's for Christmas Day. As the solution to it all, I have been inviting all my children for a get together at Thanksgiving. Ours is an informal affair (for me anyway)--no hassle over gifts and fun to all be together at a very relaxing and happy time. 1996 was different, though. Daughter Mary Charlotte, could not come. Our youngest, Johnny, and his family, squeezed in their vacation for the year with a trip to the coast at Gulf Shores. Don's Barbara and Sara were in Kansas with Sara's other Granny, Dorothy. With the families scattered, Don and I accepted an invitation to spend the day in New Iberia with friends. We did have a beautiful day with the Labiche family: Mom Brenda, Dad Wayne, their daughters Caroline and Jennifer and with Matthew, Don's son. That night Matt gave Caroline a ring, and their plans are to marry in October.

Of my two sisters who live at Cornerstone Village North, Elaine, 89, planned to spend Thanksgiving week with her children, Pam and Bill, in Texas on Lake Conroe at April Sound. Before she left, we celebrated at my apartment. My sister Olga, 92, is confined to a wheelchair and cannot move around on her own. I am not able to handle that situation so she and I had our dinner together at the Infirmary the day before Thanksgiving. She later told me what a nice meal they were served on that Thursday.

It seemed really foolish that I had not thought of this idea before, but by Christmas I was able to engage an aide from the infirmary on her day off, to come to my place with Olga for a few hours visit and a home cooked meal. Her visit worked out well. How she enjoyed her few hours away from there! Whenever the "girls" come over, the meal is special. I try to always have something we enjoyed from the days gone by--foods they don't have where they live. I've had at times: boiled artichokes served with our Mother's salad dressing or Cornish hens or avocados or asparagus or an oyster stew made with milk or a broiled beef filet or a corn pudding, etc, etc. It's sad, in a way, but fun for us to be together--the last three of the eight originals. We frequently have lunch together in the big dining room on the retirement side at Cornerstone Village.

Then at Christmas, the children choose a time before Christmas Day, as to when they can come to be with me for "G'Ma meal" and a Christmas Tree exchange of 'gifts'. I have not been a true gift giver for some years. That is, I don't spend time shopping in stores. It's been a little money for the little ones, in an envelope all tied with a ribbon and also a surprise package--usually a favorite food wrapped up with ribbon as a real gift would be.

Do you remember what there was for you in that surprise package in 1996? Johnny and Jody, you received a rib-eye rack. Then Johnny, you were so excited when you called; there were fourteen nice steaks and a rack of ribs when you cut them all up.

Don and Barbara, you received two mushroom farms again. You had enjoyed these two years ago, so I repeated that surprise. If any of you have not experienced these farms, you should try them. They are interesting to grow and delicious. The married 'grands' received mushroom farms also.

My granddaughter, Katherine Hunter--I have two Katherines--you seemed excited over your two tickets for "La Boheme".

Mary Charlotte had a large tin of my fruit cookies that I only make for Christmas, and also one of my photos.

The smaller children--you enjoyed your favorite gourmet canned favorites! Tiny sardines for Ben, smoked oysters for Katie, and special canned Freestone peaches for Sara. Sixteen month old Michael, you enjoyed yours the most! When you easily opened your wrapped banana, you ate it immediately!

Don, Barbara and Sara and I enjoyed Christmas Day with my Mary Charlotte at her home in Patterson, La. Her decorated home was lovely; everyone was comfortably casual. We had wonderful food. On request, I made oyster pies. We had too much food, so we all returned home with many goodies. So weary and so good to get home and crawl into bed. I rested for a week.

BUT! I was with each of my family at some stage of both holidays, and I truly loved it all.



## **DEAR AUNT ESTELLE!**

by

**Anna Ruth Boudreau (Ganucheau-Maher)**

Great Aunt Estelle Mouton was born on the 20th of November, 1882, in Lafayette, Louisiana. The youngest child in the family of Ambroise Mouton and Lodoiska Rhul, she was the sister of my grandmother, Marie Alice Mouton Labbe. Aunt Estelle, a milliner by trade, eventually opened her own shop in New York City after having designed and purchased hats for large firms. She lived in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, making trips to Europe annually to purchase hats. During her earlier career life in the early twentieth century, she had married twice, produced no children, and lived in Paris for about five years. I am sure she was considered a liberated woman long before the Women's Lib movement began.

As a child growing up I had only heard of Great Aunt Estelle through my mother and grandmother. Our first meeting that I remember was in 1950, shortly after I married. This occasion was when she visited Mom and Dad in New Orleans, at which time she appointed my mother executor of her will. Aunt Estelle was then 68 years old.

In later years after my parents and grandparents were deceased, I visited her in New York several times when traveling to Canada and Europe. In 1973 on such a visit I could see she was losing ground pretty fast at the age of ninety-one. I asked if she had ever considered moving back to Lafayette where she would be among family. She told me she had, but wasn't sure she could continue living alone. She added, that living alone in New York was becoming very difficult. To my astonishment, I heard myself saying, "Why don't you come and live with me and the children in Lafayette?" Without a moment of hesitation she replied, "I would love to." I told her I would have to return home and speak with them but assured her I could see no difficulty.

After receiving my telephone call a couple of days after I returned to Lafayette, Aunt Estelle immediately set about making all of the arrangements for her move. She shipped personal items she wanted to take with her to Lafayette, sent some of the beautiful items she had collected to favorite nieces, purchased an airline ticket from New York to New Orleans, arranged for transportation to LaGuardia Airport and said her goodbyes to a few remaining friends and church members. She arrived in New Orleans where I met her in a private plane furnished by my cousin Paul Fournet. My youngest daughter, Rosemarie, willingly gave up her bedroom and moved into our small study so Aunt Estelle would have a large bedroom next to a bath.

Aunt Estelle was what I would describe as a lady in no uncertain terms. She kept up with fashion, current events and local and national news. She dressed every evening for dinner, pearls and all, wore her hair a shade of auburn, and had her nails manicured regularly. She loved to visit with members of the Mouton family and children of old friends of bygone years. She dearly loved to visit with my aunt and her niece, Aurore Labbe Fournet, who lived next door to me. Everything had to

be done properly for Aunt Estelle. At 91 she even continued corresponding with friends and relatives in New York, Chicago and California, writing her own cards and letters.

Aunt Estelle lost no time joining the Christian Scientist Church, having been a member for a number of years in New York. She was very faithful in her belief in the Christian Scientists' teachings. As her eyesight continued to fail, she had phonograph records shipped to her regularly to listen to her daily lessons. She made many friends at her church who brought her to the church services, appointments and ran errands for her.

After just a few months in Lafayette, Aunt Estelle suffered a stroke. Because of her religious beliefs, she did not seek help from the medical community. I was insistent and she finally agreed to see a general practitioner. The doctor diagnosed the difficulty and prescribed medication which she agreed to take. Remarkably, she recovered through medication and the care provided by members of her church and services available from the Council on Aging. A few months later, she was enjoying her life again. The only damage from the stroke was that she was no longer able to walk. But even that did not deter her. She immediately ordered a wheelchair. She continued to write her social correspondence, attend church services, prepare her own breakfast and lunch, and was able to wheel herself out on the driveway in the afternoon to visit with all who would drive or walk by.

At dinner in the evening, Aunt Estelle sat at the head of the table. Seated there "she reigned." She came to table prepared to converse on current events, fashion, old Lafayette families or any other subject that might come up. One evening Rosemarie's friend, Lee Ann Menard, joined us for dinner. Rosemarie and Lee Ann were sophomore and freshman college students. Lee Ann was seated to Aunt Estelle's right. Just as we were finishing dessert, I asked Lee Ann if she would like another serving of dessert. She replied, "Gee thanks, but I'm stuffed." Aunt Estelle turned to her and, choosing her words carefully, said, "My dear, one never says 'I'm stuffed.' One simply says, 'I've had a sufficiency.'" I wish I could describe Lee Ann's, as well as my children's, facial expressions after that lesson in etiquette. To this day whenever we hear the expressions, "I'm stuffed," or "I'm full," someone in my family invariably says, "Dear Aunt Estelle" with a little chuckle.

Aunt Estelle lived with us for four years until she was 95. One day she awakened after not having felt well for several days, and told me it was "time" for her "to go." She wanted to be brought to a place called "The Leaves" in Richardson, Texas, near the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The Leaves was an establishment run by her church, the Christian Scientists, where she would be lovingly cared for in Christian Scientists belief. I arranged again with my cousin, Paul Fournet, to fly her there. When I left her at "The Leaves," I knew I would never see her again. I continued to call her several times each week until she died two weeks later on November 22, 1977. I returned to "The Leaves" to bring her ashes to be buried in her parents' tomb at St. John Cathedral Cemetery.

Aunt Estelle's few years with us were quite an experience for all of us. A very good one for me. Especially, I know that my children and I all learned much from this lady born in an era before our time. I am very thankful to have known this truly remarkable woman. Dear Aunt Estelle!



## THE LONG AWAITED BUBBLE BATH

by  
Jean Smith

...1963...Columbus, Ohio

For months, I'd wheedled and connived, plotted and planned for my day in the sun! Just one luscious taste of freedom! In wild anticipation of, and in preparation for said rebellion, I sneaked away from home one Saturday afternoon in early September while Jack snored peacefully on the avocado tweed couch with Chester the Yellow Cat curled up on his chest. Quietly I tiptoed out the back door. I backed the old beige Ford station-wagon down the long sloping drive by the six apple trees and sped away from 696 Island Court and watched in the rear view mirror as the little grey stucco in midwestern suburbia grew ever smaller and dimmer. Then with a small, but annoying twinge of guilt, I twisted and turned the wagon surreptitiously through Saturday's traffic-jams, wiggled my way downtown to Columbus' most exclusive department store, F & R Lazarus, and remained dead-set on implementing my plan.

Oh, the plan? In a fit of rebellion I'd decided that, for once in my life, I'd splurge--and the cost be damned! Now was the time! I intended to purchase the most outrageous, most expensive jar of bubble bath in existence! After eleven years of marriage and four kids, the oldest of whom was ten and the youngest five, I'd waked one morning in May to find myself at the ripe old age of thirty, teetering on the verge of extinction like the ancient dinosaur. I'd become an endangered person. A nonentity. Only one of the millions of middle America's "Mrs. Smith." And faceless like them, I existed only through others--only as "Wife of Jack or Mother of Kathy, or Doug, or Libby, or Phil." Nothing more. Looking deep into the bathroom mirror, I saw a stranger. Another person's wife or someone else's mother, but no Jean--no self. But finally, now I soon would see me in the mirror again. Driving along, I relished the thought that on one special day the very next week, my status would change--drastically. Yes! At long last, my day was coming! And I figured I was way past due for a little luxury. The time was overripe for a spree--a fling! Just this once.

As vehicles whizzed by the corner of Broad and High, I spotted a parking space right on Broad Street. I pulled in, dropped my quarter in the parking meter slot, and high-tailed it on up the block to the city's fanciest old department store. For a moment, I stood gaping at the prestigious building that loomed high above the busy sidewalk. Still wearing the tattered jeans in which I'd hurriedly escaped home, I tossed my head back with a great smile, shoved open wide the gold and glass double doors to F. & R. Lazarus, briskly stepped inside--and with head high and shoulders thrown back, I strode straight up to the cosmetic counter (Chanel, no less) as confidently as though decked-out in diamond tiara. Then with the grudging assistance of Miss Snotty Saleslady with perfect hair and perfect skin and perfect make-up, I took great pains in selecting the raciest perfume and crystals of bubble bath in stock--Eau de Something or Other--I can't recall the name now, only its subtle erotic aroma. One small sniff of my wrist where Miss Perfection had dabbed the exotic scent,



and I was intoxicated--whisked off my feet and transported far away from the daily drudgeries of housewifedom.

At the very first whiff, my eyelids grew heavy. From a distant dim cabaret, an old familiar song wafted past--and the sultry low voice of French songbird, Edith Piaff, softly hummed the haunting strains of "La Vie En Rose." The melody sent me winging through fluffy white clouds and far across seas--reveling in a sip of sweet wine at a sidewalk cafe in gay Paree, strolling in the sunset along the Seine with some dark lover, participating in a moonlight tryst in a tiny candle-lit apartment on the Left Bank. And now, in a small thread of a voice, a little seductress sang--no--dripped, almost oozed, the soft steamy lyrics. "Giff your heart und soul to me, und life vill ulvays be, La Vie En Rose."

A second whiff of Eau de Something or Other proved to be even more deadly! I was eighteen again, laughing gaily, bikini-clad, racing along windswept Gypsy sands of the Riviera and splashing in high blue waves with the salty sea breeze caressing my long, blond imagined curls. "Eau's" exotic aroma emitted a wild and exciting sensuality, an innocence and sweetness, all at once. A fragrance of soft sunlight, of ocean waves pounding on warm sparkling sands--of hyacinths and roses and gardenias and clean-smelling lace-trimmed sheets on a lovely brass bed. The scent stirred visions of tempestuous romance. Longings for the loves of another time. Another place. A place of blessed freedom. And a place, I might add, where one isn't just an ordinary American wife (side kicking at long boring corporate dinners), an ordinary mother (concocting thousands of sandwiches for school lunch sacks). Oh yes! Just two little whiffs of the magic potion and--voila! Instantly, there emerged from the forgotten depths of your psyche, a reckless, wildly abandoned French film star--a bombshell no less-- with every teeny-tiny inch of her as daringly liberated as Bridgette Bardot herself! Exactly what I had in mind! Exactly!

Reluctantly, I began to emerge from the daydreams, semi-recovered from the long luscious whiffs. Then zooming back to reality once more, I blurted out to the astonished salesclerk, "Perfect!" I said pointing to my scented wrist. "This one's just perfect! I'll take the large economy size!"

Looking down a long powdered nose, the shocked clerk sneered, "My deah woman, you must know that fine French perfumes like this do not come in large 'economy' sizes!" Quickly and very firmly, she recapped the tiny bottle.

"No?" I asked innocently, wondering why not and taken aback by Miss Perfection's total lack of humor.

"No!" she snapped. Then from tousled hair to T-shirt to torn-jeans to sneakers, she looked me up and down--very slowly. "Now then, my deah, may I make one teeny suggestion?", she asked disdainfully.

"Well...", I gulped. "Yes. I guess so."

"Why don't you trot on down the street to the corner Eckerd's? Perhaps they have a quart of 'Evening in Paris.' Perhaps that's what you're looking for!"

"Perhaps it is!", I shot back and muttered under my breath something about know-it-all supercilious mind readers. Then, "Okay, okay--whatever," I added impatiently. "Just give me the bubble bath. And could you make it fast? I'm in kind of a hurry." I reached deep into the bottom of my gigantic pouch-purse and paid for my purchase in dimes and quarters stolen from the cookie jar--and then, God help me, I couldn't help but revel in Miss Superior's classic reaction--the raised plucked eyebrow, the gaping crimson mouth, and the glare of disbelief from below her taupe-shadowed eyelids. Then with pretty package in hand, I left.

Soaked in dreams of bubble bath and newly found freedom, I smiled all the way home. Wending my way north again, back up the Olentangy River Road. I rolled the car windows up, threw my head back, and meaning no disrespect but unable to contain the joy any longer, I belted out my own off-key parody of the old sixties' freedom cry, "Free At Last, Free At Last--Thank the Lord, I'm free at last!"

Home again, I chugged up the drive, got out of the car and strolled nonchalantly into the house--and voila, again! (As we say in France.) I was safe! Just like all us nonentities, I'd been missed by no one.

"Well," I thought, hiding my silver bowed package under the kitchen sink behind a giant box of dishwashing detergent, "so far, so good. It won't be long now and I'm ready!" For months I'd plotted and planned and prepared for my one "special day" and now all needed was for me to sit tight and wait 'till Tuesday. That's all! Thank goodness, it was almost time--and I was ready!

At last the Big Day came! Actually, that first Tuesday after Labor Day began with pretty much the same old routine as every other day in every other school year at Marburn Elementary, except that this time Phil, my youngest, was starting kindergarten. On this first day of school an undercurrent of excitement fairly sizzled through the air because every delicious detail of "freedom day" had been planned down to every scintillating second.

Well, okay. Obviously, I couldn't jet off to Paris, but I could soak in a candle-lit bubble bath and sip brandied coffee from a bone china cup. I could dress to the nines in my new A-line miniskirted red-silk dress and high-heel pumps died to match. I could meet my dear friend and fellow escapee from reality, Sharon Swintek, for a scrumptious champagne brunch at the Top of the Center and a special Tuesday matinee of "Camelot" at the Hartman--and I could still be home by the time the school bus arrived back on Island Court with my kids. So, okay! Maybe I wasn't Bridgette Bardot, but I wasn't Mrs. Midwestern Nonentity anymore, either. Today--Tuesday, September the seventh--definitely marked the beginning of my New Assertive Self!

Oh, please--don't misunderstand! I did and do love my kids dearly, but having had them so close in age in order to satisfy some childhood fantasy of a "Little House on the Prairie," had left little

time to myself. Only at nap-times, it seemed, had I a moment to grab an occasional cup of hot Lipton's tea and glance at the latest Time magazine to try keeping in touch with the world. Now, desperately missed were those quiet times alone I'd enjoyed growing up as an only child--and truthfully, throughout the whole last year I'd looked at Phil, the littlest one, and time and time again, God help me, these very words had come zipping through my mind--more than once, "I can't wait 'til that kid starts school! I just can't wait!"

Then--taa--daa! Finally here it was! Freedom Day! All aflutter, I rushed to pack four lunches this year instead of three, nimbly buttoned one more set of sweater buttons, quickly kissed them all, told Libby to hold Phil's hand, shooed them out the front door, and stepped onto the porch to watch as they traipsed two houses down to the corner bus-stop at Thomas and Island Court. Kath and Doug dashed far ahead to greet old friends. Libby took Phil by the hand, and I hugged the last two again and watched them walk together slowly down the front steps and away from the porch, across the walk, down the sloping driveway to the street, and turn left. Then spotting her own little friends and giggling merrily, Libby broke and ran for the corner. Phil tagged behind--alone.

Something strange tugged inside me. Something...so unexpected. I watched as my little boy walked along, slowly fading from sight--growing smaller and smaller. He trudged alone toward the corner with his towhead tucked down staring at the ground. He didn't even look back. Oh...oh...wait...My throat tightened. He was so much tinier than I'd thought, his hair so much blonder. Then his small shoulders slumped forward. With gigantic book satchel in hand, he plodded, along-- and his little feet kicked at pretty heaps in the gutter and scattered swirls of maple leaves, red and rustling in the autumn wind. Now--he was almost to the corner...oh...

Oh....please....wait....

Suddenly, my dear little son wasn't a nuisance after all...only a small boy not quite ready to leave home. Suddenly, I realized... the magic years for all my children were over. Gone forever. Suddenly, I realized I'd squandered precious moments wanting those years to be over. And suddenly...it was too late.

The big yellow bus full of big rowdy kids rolled up the street and rumbled to a halt. Stretching his short legs to climb its high steps, Phil boarded the bus and disappeared. As its heavy doors slammed shut, I felt something warm and wet trickle down my face. Surprised, I glanced up at the sky and looked for some nonexistent rain cloud. With a trembling hand, I brushed the tear from my cheek. The big bus lumbered awkwardly around the corner--and vanished. I turned and walked away inside the empty grey stucco and locked the door behind me.

As planned, I brewed my brandied coffee, retrieved my precious bubble bath from under the kitchen sink, climbed the stairs to the bathroom, lit a lovely array of rose-scented candles, and sprinkled the sparkling perfumed crystals under the faucet with care. Then, turning the tap and drawing the long awaited tubful of warm soothing water, I stared as myriads of tiny iridescent balls sparkled to life and shined softly in the candles' glow. I slipped into the silky water.

Magically, one glassy rainbowed ball, small and perfect, drifted high and hung quietly in the air. Suddenly, it popped like a fragile dream--and was gone.

Oh...please....wait....

Slowly...I sank deep into the pretty bubbles...and cried.



## OH, TO SING LIKE A LARK

by  
Orpha Valentine

It is a terrible thing to be unable to sing. It is hearing but not hearing.. It is being unable to sing lullabies and rimes to your children. It is being unable to throw your heart filled with song into the air as meadowlarks do. It is a happy privilege denied.

I first learned in grade school that I could not sing. I would sing *My Country 'Tis of Thee* or *The Star Spangled Banner* with loud pleasure only to be told, and told again, "Boy! You sure can't sing." In high school we went in herd-bound bunches of girls to the movies. During the Coming Attractions I learned quickly not to sing *By The Light of The Silvery Moon* with the bouncing ball as it bounced, syllable to syllable, word to word, guiding theater audiences through wonderful songs. My friends had to stop singing in order to laugh at my singing.

Another blow to my singing ego came after I joined the Methodist Church choir. There I sang alto with gusto. Until! One night, my friend, Polly, who sat next to me in choir, and I were asked to remain after choir practice. We were thrilled. Maybe we would be asked to sing solo parts.

The choir director, Mr. Hobart, asked Polly to sing a line or two, dismissed her then asked me to sing the same lines. Mr. Hobart looked at the sanctuary floor then said in a quiet, pleasant manner, "Orpha Lea, on Sunday mornings would you please just mouth the words?" That was the end of my choir sing-a-long.

I was still trying to sing in public when Jake and I began dating at the University of Wisconsin. After hearing me sing only one time, like everyone else, he laughed, "You sing like my sister, Helen. She can't sing either."

I just could not believe that I could not sing. How could that possibly be? Everyone else could sing, and I just loved to sing. So, before I gave up singing forever I did my darndest, on my own, to learn to sing a repertoire of popular songs. I finally went public with two of my, at the time, favorites, *Little White Lies* and *It's a Sin to Tell a Lie*.

I test sang them before select friends, Jake included. Their response was positive, no laughter, until they knew which songs I was singing. My evaluators began laughing once again. "If we say that your singing is okay, we are either telling you 'little white lies' or we are committing a sin." Even I thought that was funny.

I recognize any tune I have ever heard but when I sing it always sounds to me like a faithful rendition of the music. I amaze those who hear my flawless monotone. In turn, I am surprised that they can't hear my pretty singing.

I still like to sing but only when I am alone. It is interesting to me that I do want to sing because as a child when I heard my dad singing a song, particularly, *Sweet Violet*, I knew I was about to be punished. Perhaps it was his way of counting to ten. Follow that with husband Jake who is a good, very good, singer. He sings often around the house. The first year of our marriage whenever he sang I would stop dead in my tracks. What had I done wrong this time?

I also credit my inability to speak a foreign language to my inability to sing. I have two years of Latin, one year of French and a smidgen of Spanish. Reading and writing a foreign language is a snap but, speaking it? Every foreign word I utter snaps me into its maw of treacherous sound. Once again, the laughter of others begins.

I enjoy playing the piano. No one laughs because I do not have to create the sounds. I do not, as my mother did so well, play by ear. Of course I did try to play by ear for a friend, Harriet, who could only play by ear. She had never learned to read music. "Orpha Lea, I have no idea what you are playing but don't!" And, I don't.

Perhaps some of you remember a radio personality from The Forties, Robert Q. Lewis? He is given credit for introducing Rosemary Clooney's very first, very big, hit, *Come Ona My House*. He also played recordings of a very wealthy woman who loved to sing opera. She was a serious voice student in New York City who recorded herself singing famous arias.

Too many friends called to tell me I must listen to Robert Q. Lewis play the records of Florence Henderson. (No, not the singing Florence Henderson who played the mother on the TV series, "The Brady Bunch.") The Florence Henderson I speak of was so awful that it was embarrassing to listen to her. Inside my head I can still hear her reaching for notes she never finds. Just like me !

Jo Stafford, another popular singer of the Forties, did some tongue-in-cheek recordings singing very off-key. It too was awful but so very funny. Naturally, some of my charming(?) friends gave me her off-key records as gifts.

If I can hear bad singing as being bad, why can't I sing like everyone else? It's a puzzlement!

I can't sing.

*As a singer I am not a success.  
I am saddest when I sing,  
So are those who hear me.  
They are sadder even than I am.*  
--Artemus Ward



## FOR WHOM THE TELEPHONE RINGS

by

ROSEMARY AYCOCK

*"No man is an Island, entire of itselfe, every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine... And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."*

*John Donne*

John Donne was not making reference to the telephone with his immortal lines quoted above. However, in another sense, if ever a "bell" has kept us a "piece of the Continent, a part of the maine," it is the telephone. Hence my rephrasing "For Whom the Telephone Rings." Granted, much majesty and solemnity is lost thereby even though, in reference to the telephone the word "toll" is related. For example, the charge for a long distance telephone call is a toll fee. Why then, do we make a telephone call rather than a telephone toll? I have no idea! What I do know is that my family's history and relationships could be chronicled accurately as evidenced by our telephone tolls and calls over the years.

My Dad's relationship with the telephone was controversial at best. He approached this instrument with as much friendliness as he would exhibit toward a slot machine, and Lord knows, Dad NEVER played that gambler's charm. The telephone seemed relegated to the same category. After all, it, too, took your money with nothing to show. And so, Dad's time of use of this instrument was limited and different. For example, as far back as 1940, my Dad had developed, or seemed to have developed, his own "television phone". I can remember hearing him say in his hurried fashion, especially on long distance phone calls, "I just wanted to check and see how you were doing," then, not waiting for my reply, "Glad to know you're doing O.K. You sure are looking good. Take care of yourself. Here's your Mother." "You sure are looking good," he'd say, and I would look better because he'd make me smile!

For my Mother, the telephone was her priceless enabler. In her lifetime Mother ran a neighborhood taxi service, a home health agency, a counseling service, and, along with that, some Church social service on the side. All without compensation, of course. The telephone kept her "in business." Appointments for the neighbors who called to be included in the several times weekly shopping trips to Heymann's downtown were set up early in the day and pick-ups were made without casualty even into her eighties. No casualties because with such a repeated route the car could probably drive itself! The "Pontiac Man" may have sold a lot of cars but it was Mother's Dodge Dart that tripped his mother, Mildred, to the grocery store, the doctor's, and most importantly, the beauty parlor. That was a very faithful car, that Dodge Dart, and Mother and Mildred grew to be "family" in it! And there were other "service" calls into Mother's phone. Sometimes the bell sounded signaling request for medical help such as B-12 shots, the "consultations" pre-calling the physician first-aid treatment for twisted ankles, or burns, or falls, and, yes, she did make "house calls". Other times the telephone bestowed the blessing of the Church as my "social worker" mother called her long list of members for contributions of covered dishes to be presented to the Catholic Daughter suffering a family loss. Mother' angel food cakes were consumed and enjoyed all over St. John Parish. Her

own initiated long distance calls were always categorized for spending to her "cigarette fund". Since Mother never smoked a cigarette in her life, we might well credit the telephone for saving her from cancer and promoting her healthy lifestyle to ninety-seven years!

Now, once in a while this Alexander Graham Bell invention proved to be a nuisance rather than an asset to one of our family members. For instance, I can't determine if my older brother Buell would get angry at the telephone home for capability or at Aunt Mae for her use of it. Whatever the case, he did a lot of stomping and exclaiming when Aunt Mae would call from New Orleans and ask to talk to him, then, after the first greeting, tell him she was putting Microbe, her toy Chihuahua, on the phone and coach Buell in a conversation with the pup! This mild mannered boy would become a raging bull with her request as he ranted, "Talk to a dog on the telephone--and long distance at that! What next!" In the end, though, that's why Aunt Mae was one of our favorite aunts--or at least our best remembered!

Then there was the time the telephone saved Adrian, my, then, fourteen-year-old brother, from near starvation. He and his clarinet-playing buddy, Lionel, had gone to New Orleans, via a roundtrip bus ticket, to treat themselves to listening to the Jazz musicians in the Paddock Lounge in the French Quarter. Evidently their energy and enjoyment in listening lasted considerably longer than their spending money because when upon returning, Adrian called Mother from the bus station, his request was two-fold, "Mother, can you come and get us, and, please, would you bring a sandwich?"

With the younger generation, I realize that the telephone is an entirely different cultural instrument. Best proof of that is furnished by my nephews, Tom and Andy. For both of them the telephone has become an exercise machine, picked up, elbow bending, shoulder elevating to hold in place at their ear. Daily, and sometimes more than once daily, this exercise is repeated so that via long distance, Tom here in Lafayette and Andy in Virginia Beach can discuss the latest hockey games and players' exploits. Come to think of it, their fingers get the most exercise dialing each other's numbers as the toll goes on! But considering the fact that such "exercise" is saving them from other horrendous activities available to the youngsters in this day and age, I end up giving thanks and helping them pay their tolls!

In our family, the person for whom the telephone is a symbol of all that is good in America is my husband, Bill. A retired Bellsouth Pioneer, Bill repeatedly recounts tales of his life before Rosemary, which I have, over years of listening, divided into four groups: his highwater episodes, his right-of-way scouting days, his Union battle times and his habitation hardships. Pictures of him in a skiff afloat almost at the height of the telephone poles punctuate the stories of flood time repairs. Jokes about dealing with stubborn landowners enliven his tales of scouting for right-of-way to extend lines and service. A lasting, not to be reasoned away, hatred of labor unions is a left-over from his days of crossing picket lines as a Bellsouth manager. And throughout his forty years of service Bill managed to follow his family or have them follow him, until finally, as teenagers, the kids said, "You can go to New Orleans, Dad, but we're staying here!" And so he, too, remained in Lake Charles and said "good-by" to his last promotion.



As a result of Bill's commitment (obsession??) to the company, we have a phone in every room of the house except the two bathrooms, but give him time! We are fast becoming a SCB museum with the antique telephone in the den which, made into a lamp, lights up when the receiver is removed, another SCB machine records numbers of incoming calls, our answering machine is part of a service through the SCB central office and our nine most frequently dialed numbers can be reached by the magical instructions of modern day SCB! That my phone/address booklet goes with me when I leave the house is a given. After years of dialing/punching 2, 3, 4, etc., I've no memory left of phone numbers of those near and dear. Try dialing 2, 3, 4, or other single digit numbers from the office, the grocery, a friend's home or elsewhere!

Bill's patience with Sprint and MCI TV ads is totally nonexistent! Their viewing is cut off with clicks of the remote that would be nuclear warheads shot to destroy! The smiling Candice Bergen is never allowed to finish a sentence!

These days newspapers carry stories of the "mother" company ATT experiencing competition from the "baby Bells" as companies merge, break away, and develop new services. As if reading a family member's obituary, Bill experiences the grief accompanying the pain of loss. Mourning the sudden fragmentation of this once united "family" he hears the sound of the "bell" of change. Feeling in his heart the break-up of his "continent", his "maine", he realizes Donne's poetic words, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

However, speaking realistically, should the stock market react consistently positive to the new competition I have no doubt that Bill will count his earnings, rejoice in his good fortune, and consider each ring of the telephone an Halleluia chorus!!!



## HUCK FINN AT THE CIRCUS

by

Jacob M. Valentine, Jr.

I was fourteen when Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus came to Racine. The Racine Journal Times announced that the circus would come to town next week, Saturday. I hoped I could get a job to earn a ticket to the Big Show. On that exciting day I woke early, got dressed in bib overalls, and a tattered shirt. Wearing Pop's old black fedora, I walked the three miles to city-owned grounds on the South Side of Racine near Lake Michigan. It was right there on top of the hill where the water treatment plant is now.

Reaching the grounds just as the glow of the sun was peeking above the lake, I saw brightly colored railroad cars pulled up on the railroad spur that comes out of Cases Tractor Works. Roustabouts were already unloading the circus wagons from the flat cars. The elephants, trumpeting for their morning hay and water, stood rocking as they strained at their chains. Lions in their cages roared in anticipation as the trainers walked by carrying buckets filled with huge chunks of meat.

Everywhere in the dusty field there was chaos, but everyone seemed to know what to do. A Special Attraction tent was first put up so the monkeys, bears, brightly colored macaws and parrots and other animals would be shaded. Once fed, elephants, camels, dromedaries, horses and their riders, would line up for the parade.

While watching the Big Top as it was laid out, I saw a tall man wearing a huge white cowboy hat who seemed to be in charge of everything. After directing the men straightening the folded tent, he stood looking at the elephants. In a flash I ran over to him and asked, "Do you need someone?" Quickly, I added excitedly, "I'll do anything you want." Without hesitation, he said, "Yeah. See the elephants? See that hose over there? See that bucket? Fill that bucket with water and take it to the first elephant. Then get another bucket of water and take it to the second elephant. Then get another bucket and fill it with water. Keep filling and carrying 'till them Packy Derms don't want any more water. Get it?"

"Yes sir," I said. For a kid Yankee, it was hard to say, "Sir." It seemed servile or militaristic, but it paid to be polite at the circus. All the roustabouts seemed to be Southern. Then I was off. "When you're through come and see me."

I followed the boss's instructions. Got the bucket, found the hose, and filled the bucket and carried it to the first elephant. Before I watered the second elephant, the first one was ready for more, but he'd have to wait until the last one was watered. There were nine of them in a row and all impatiently rocked back and forth, pulling on their chains. It was back and forth, back and forth.

I didn't think I'd ever finish the Job. I drank more water from the hose than the elephants did. When they started playing in the water and squirting their backs. I knew they weren't thirsty. They knew the routine, better than I did. They didn't care who had to carry the buckets. .

In about an hour, "Captain White Hat" came by to see what I was doing. "Okay, you did good. Now, see those bales of hay? Pull a couple close to the elephant line and break 'em open, and see that pitch fork over there? Take it and give each elephant about a quarter of a bale. When you're through, come see me." Still polite, I shouted, "Yes, sir!"

Pitching hay was easier than lugging buckets of water to nine thirsty elephants but every time I opened a bale I had to go back to the water hose and get a drink. The circus must have gotten a big water bill, what with the elephants and me. Once the hay was piled in front of the elephants they settled down and just stomped their big feet when the flies got too bad.

When the hay Job was finished, I sat on a bale and watched four men in unison pound in the stakes at the sides of the Big Top which was spread out on the ground. Then they slid in the huge center pole securing it at the top of the tent with ropes. The pole was anchored in a boxed-in hole in the ground. Pretty soon everyone working at their own jobs came over and pulled on the ropes. Guys under the tent pushed the pole up, while the outside guys on the ropes pulled.

I ran over and there was Captain White Hat. When he saw me he motioned with his head and said, "Get in there, Hopalong." I did so in short order. It was fun feeling the power surge of all those guys chanting and pulling at the same time. Soon the tent pole was balanced. Then part of the crew started stretching out the tent and hooking the tent to the stakes that men with sledges had pounded into the ground. It didn't take long to get the Big Top up.

The next job was to put up the stands and the seats. The roustabouts hooked the metal stands together. I didn't get in on that except to haul some of the iron braces over to the stands. A huge pile of long heavy seat planks lay off to the side that we had to put on the stands. It was all I could do to carry one, so another kid and I doubled up and carried one between us. Captain White Hat watched us for a couple of minutes; then he walked away shaking his head.

After about a half hour hauling planks, I told my working buddy that I had to go to the john. He shrugged his shoulders and sat down, then he wandered down to join another bunch of benchers. I couldn't find a latrine but I found a secluded spot behind some cars on the railroad tracks. Then I wandered around looking at the sights. There was a Freak Show attached to the circus so I meandered my way down there. Big signs showed: "HALF MAN, HALF WOMAN," "FATTEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD," "TOM THUMB, SMALLEST MAN IN THE WORLD," "THE GEEK, EATS LIVE CHICKENS," "ATLAS, STRONGEST MAN IN THE WORLD," and "LIVE CALF WITH TWO HEADS." Where did they find them all? On the outside platform near the ticket stand, I saw FAT LADY sunning herself on a huge rocking chair. She asked, "How you doin'?" "Sonny?" That was my family name which I hated. How did she know?

Another tent sign showed: "CUSTER'S LAST STAND, LIVE." Later in the afternoon, I heard the barker shouting, "See the great *massacree* and the *Siuxxes* that done it."

My "Packy Derms" were off parading, but "CAT MAN" was in the cage shouting and snapping his whip trying to get a big male lion to jump through a hoop onto a platform. Fat "SIMBA" just lay there making a great roaring yawn as if he was in pain.

By now I was overwhelmed by the need to sleep. I had been up over ten hours, I was hungry, tired, and sleepy. I went over to the hay bales and lay down on one. In the warm sun, I was soon out of it.

I awoke when I heard somebody holler at me. It must have been about an hour after I had fallen asleep. "SABU, THE ELEPHANT MAN" had returned from the parade, "Hey, kid *heiraus!*" *Sabu* wasn't Indian at all but Heiney, the Dutchman, but obviously knew elephants. During the show, except for a pair of baggy shorts and one of those funny hats the Indian swamis wear, he was naked and his skin was painted with yellow grease paint.

"Hey, kid, wait a minute. You're the kid that watered my sweethearts, *Nicht*, ain't you?" I nodded my head in a sleepy daze. "*Gutt*, well, do it again. That's a good boy." So it was back to the buckets, and the hose, and the water. Those "Packy Derms" were sure thirsty after their long walk, but I got through that chore just as Captain White Hat came up. "Where you been, kid?" "I finished the seat job and came over here to give Sabu a hand with the elephants. How about my ticket to the show?" He said, "Okay, kid, I guess you earned it." Then he opened up his wallet that hung by a chain on his belt and handed me a general admission ticket to the matinee show.

The matinee began at two o'clock. When I handed my ticket to the taker, he asked, "How you doin', Huck?" The show was great, but the best part of that day was when the ticket taker called me "Huck." It must have been Pop's old black fedora that did it.



## **THE RAISED DONUTS RISE AGAIN**

**by  
Joan Ireland**

Dunkin Donuts, Donuts Plus, Krispy Kremes and Tasty Donuts are only a few of the local bakeries that make donuts on site in Louisiana. Today, most popular superstores make their own donuts. Today, in 1997, even if we ignore the many calories and cholesterol in donuts, no one ever thinks of whipping up a batch at home. We merely get in our late or almost late model vehicles and drive to the nearest bakery or store--no walking to lose any of the pounds from consuming those epicurean delights.

Living in Maine, buying donuts was not an option, especially not in the summer of 1949, while we were living deep in the Maine woods in Aroostook County. Because school was not in session, Dad had moved all of us, which included six kids at that time, into a two-family woods camp while he and my older brothers cut pulp for Great Northern Lumber Company.

Our only neighbors were Roland and Idah Kerr and their two boys, Keith and Robbie. Our home was located about 100 yards from the Allagash River. The base of this river wasn't dirt like our rivers in Louisiana, but was very rocky and sandy, making it a special place to play and swim on hot, summer days. The water was so clear, we could even drink it.

The nearest store was more than 40 miles away over a rough, gravel road that had many deep ruts, making daily trips impractical. At the nearby company store we could buy the basics such as flour, sugar, milk (canned), baking powder, cream of tartar and salt. Mom bought these commodities in bulk and stored them in large, glass jars. If you wanted something to eat, you had to make it.

One day I decided to make raised donuts. I had watched my mother make them many times before and, as I usually helped her, I knew I could make them. Already, I had baked biscuits, cakes and cookies and they always came out fine. Mom was next door visiting with Idah Kerr. The older boys were in the woods with my Dad and, as the rest of the kids were playing outside, I was alone in the kitchen.

I got out all the ingredients and started to measure them into the large bowl we used for making bread or donuts. I made sure the water was the right temperature and mixed it with the yeast, salt and sugar. I added eggs, a little shortening and vanilla and then flour to make the batter the right consistency. I didn't have enough flour after I had added all we had in the large flour container. I went back to the cupboard and found another container. The label was almost rubbed off, but it looked like flour, so I used about two cups until the donut dough looked perfect.

While the dough was rising in a warm place, I got the floured board out so that I could roll the dough out and form the donuts with the donut cutter. I cut the donuts and set them aside on floured cookie pans to rise for the second time. They looked so pretty as they began to rise.

By this time, I had a pan of hot grease on the old fashioned, iron cookstove. I carefully slid the raised, soft doughnuts into the hot grease and fried the first batch. They came out so brown and puffy. Mom couldn't have made them any better.

Just then, company arrived. Some young frenchmen from Quebec, who were working a few miles up the river, appeared. They couldn't speak English and we couldn't speak French, but during the summer we had become acquainted with them through music.

Idah Kerr, who lived in the other section of the house, played the violin and piano. She didn't carry her piano into the woods camp, but she had her violin, or, as the Frenchmen pantomined, her fiddle. On rainy days or on weekends, we all gathered in her living room listening to her play and singing choruses as she provided the accompaniment.

One day these young men heard her play and they brought their piano accordion and fiddles and began to play near the river. Idah and Mom promptly invited them into the house. From that time, many times, during the remainder of the summer, they would walk down the river and we would spend hours playing music and singing. *We didn't have to have TV to provide entertainment.*

The donuts smelled so good, I gave one to one of the young men who had stayed behind while the rest went next door. He ate the whole thing, then another. He said, "Pomme de terre," which I thought meant, "the good biscuit," and rubbed his stomach. Then, to be neighborly, I took a bite out of one, ran promptly to the bathroom, got rid of the disgusting material and then gave all of the remaining donuts their final resting place in the swiftly running river.

That second container, I found to my chagrin, contained cream of tartar. I sometimes wonder what went on in that young man's mind when he ate those donuts. *Could he have been dazzled by the young cook?*

That night we checked the water level of the river and it had risen two feet. *Could it have been my donuts?*



## The Rickety Old Lantern

by

Marge DeVillier

I was recently reminded of a memorable event when my 85 year-old sister wrote and thanked me for some of the things I had done for her when I was young and living with her and her husband. The event occurred on the night she went into labor with her first child. I was about eight or nine years old at the time and living with Ida and Bill on a small farm in eastern North Carolina. There was no phone at their house.

The doctor was too far away, and my sister's labor pains were too close for my brother-in-law to go fetch a neighbor. He didn't want to leave his wife alone, so they decided to send me to walk two miles to our closest neighbors, the Hartungs.

The only portable light we had was a rickety, old, dented, rusty lantern with a broken, wired together handle that flickered and threatened to go out with every step I took. I was scared beyond description. It was so dark out there. The sounds and lack of sounds were equally scary.

We lived on what was called "C" canal with a canal on one side of a very narrow dirt road with high weeds and thick tall brush on each side--much taller than me--which added to the darkness and fear of what was inside or on the other side of that brush. Wild animals and snakes, even demons or monsters, could be lurking in the brush.

I was sure something with a head or heads, fiery eyes, long arms and big hands was ready to jump out at me at any minute. Wild animals like big, black bears and wild cats, common in the area, with sharp teeth that made gnashing sounds as they chewed on their prey, not to mention slithering snakes with snapping, slimy tongues could be waiting for me. Frightened, I still had a job to do.

I had to get to Mrs. Hartung's because I wanted to see that baby so bad. I loved babies and wanted one of my own. I kept trudging, walking, even running at times. I was never so glad as when I finally arrived at the little bridge over the canal to their house. I had finally completed the hundred miles of my two mile trip.

Mr. and Mrs. Hartung drove me back to our house, and my nephew Harlan was born sometime during the night. The next morning when some other neighbors came by, I ran outside to greet them.

Everyone laughed when I declared, "I had a new baby last night." After all, I had had labor pains too, and delivered Mrs. Hartung in time for my sister's delivery for my baby with the help of a Rickety Old Lantern.



## SHOPPING IN THE CITY

by  
Lois Diehl

In the 1940s the occasional shopping trip to Harrisburg was an all day exciting experience to a young girl growing up in a town with a population of 1200. Sometimes I would go with my mother and her mother, Grandma Baker. Other times I would go with my Aunt Helen, Dad's older sister, and Grandma Meals. Aunt Helen had no children until my cousin Al was born just a few weeks before my ninth birthday.

We would always leave early enough on a Saturday morning to park on the island by the Market Street Bridge so we could arrive at the doors of either Bowman's or Pomeroy's just as the stores opened. Starting at one end of Market Street we stopped at almost every store before reaching the end. The big glass windows with their enticing displays were a window shopper's delight. Just before holiday time the windows were filled with spectacular displays--usually with lots of animation: Santa's workshop, carollers, Santa's reindeer.

Sometimes Aunt Helen and I were on a mission. The objective was to find a special occasion dress for me to wear at Christmas or Easter. These Saturdays were the pre-mall days. Every department store had many floors filled with all sorts of delights for a little girl. Scattered between the department stores were the five and dime stores--Woolworth's, Murphy's, and Kresge's and White Castle--the predecessor of McDonald's and Burger King.

The day always seemed to pass very quickly as I selected armloads of dresses to try on and preen in front of the large mirrors. Never would we buy a dress in the very first store. It was a given that we would have to return to at least one store before making our final selection. A demand stop was always made to look over the toys, dolls, and stuffed animals. A mental note was made of which ones to include on my everchanging Christmas and birthday lists.

I always looked forward to eating away from home with anticipation. Lunch was sometimes a 15 cent White Castle hamburger and a nickel fountain coke. Other times it was finding stools at the lunch counter at one of the five and dimes for a chicken salad sandwich and possibly a vanilla ice cream soda. A final stop was made at Troup's Music Store in one corner of the old square. After studying the racks of sheet music, I always left clutching a Troup's paper bag containing my selection.

Vivid in my memory is the yellow dress with the large lace trimmed white organza collar Aunt Helen got for me one Easter. Another remembered purchase is a pair of red loafer type shoes. I also remember my fascination with the escalator along the right wall just inside Murphy's front doors. I was always reminded to be very careful when getting on or off and, "Hold on!" I remember the Saturday when I turned around to say something to Grandma Meals who was behind me. I watched in horror as she tumbled from about the sixth step. She lay sprawled out on the floor, her black purse



handle still over her arm. Her black hat was askew, but still on her head. Customers and employees were running toward her to help. Embarrassed, she got up a little shaky, but okay.

I made several trips back to downtown Bowman's and Pomeroy's in the early sixties with Kevin trying to recapture the magic of those Saturdays of my youth. A lasting memory as a mother was an announcement over the PA system throughout the store when I was totally engrossed in my shopping. "We have a little boy in our office by the name of Kevin. He says his Mommy is lost. Mommy, please come to the fourth floor." When I arrived at the office, Kevin was perched on the counter surrounded by several employees. He sat there giggling, eating a lollipop, and talking a mile a minute. He had become impatient and went searching for the toy department.

Today several large hotels surround the square of Harrisburg. Market Street is lined with offices, restaurants, and pawn shops. Pomeroy's moved to a free standing building near the Camp Hill Shopping Mall. Now it has become the Bon Ton Department Store. Bowman's and Troup's Music Store no longer exist. And I don't know the demise of the five and dime stores. In the nineties shopping in the big city is a trip to the suburbs and the many malls scattered throughout.



## FARM LIFE AT THE EDMOND BROUSSARDS

by  
Doris Bentley

The story of "Vieux Mom" and "Vieux Pop", as my grandparents were known to me, was passed along to me by Daddy and Tante Tacia, my aunt. Vieux Mom was only sixteen when she married Vieux Pop. She was the daughter of Ozeme LeBlanc from the Scott area. Tante Tacia told me that Vieux Mom's father was one of the founders of Rayne. They lived on "the prairie". And Rayne was certainly "the prairie" in the 1860s.

When I was young, Daddy told me the following story: Vieux Mom's parents were living on the prairie during the Civil War. When the Union soldiers came to the house, Vieux Mom's father didn't move from his rocking chair on the front porch. Her mother, with Vieux Mom, the baby in her arms, was imploring her husband to "do something." "There's nothing I can do," he replied while continuing to rock. The Union soldiers took what they wanted--chickens, potatoes, whatever--and were tying the old man to his rocking chair ready to drag him off. Vieux Mom's mother, standing on the outdoor steps leading to the attic of the Acadian cottage, held up her baby and implored God to save her husband, "Please, Lord, in the name of this innocent babe." When the captain heard her calling on the Lord, he said to his soldiers, "Untie the old man. That woman is calling on the Lord. The old man can't do us any good, and we'll have his life on our souls." They untied the father and drove away.

When Vieux Mom and Vieux Pop married, Vieux Pop hauled their house from somewhere and placed it where it is today, on the Edmond Broussard Road out of Loreauville. My cousin, Camille Broussard, lives there and has restored it to its original state. Vieux Pop planted the beautiful oak trees near the house. Today in 1997, they are now about 120 years old.

Both Vieux Mom and Vieux Pop worked in the fields. As the children came along, Vieux Mom would take them to the field and lay them on a quilt on the hedgerow while she worked alongside her husband. What a life!

Vieux Mom had a baby every year or two. People helped each other in those days. Somebody--her sister, Tante Lolo, (Mrs. Whitmeyer) or perhaps a cousin--would come to live with her when her babies arrived. As the children grew old enough, Laura and Connie, the oldest, helped with the younger ones. I expect that the boys did their share of helping with the babies too until they were old enough to go into the fields and work with Vieux Pop.

Vieux Mom had a kitchen garden where she grew her vegetables for the table. If there were any vegetables or eggs sold in town, this was HER money. (She was an early feminist!) Daddy told me that the kitchen garden was high priority. The dirt was prepared and planted first, even before the fields were tended in the spring.

Farm life was not easy. The family was up before daybreak. Vieux Mom made hot biscuits or cornbread, grits, and eggs and poured plenty of fresh milk for breakfast. By daylight everybody was in the field. They had cows for milk, pigs for meat, chickens for eggs and for the Sunday table, sheep for wool for the blankets, and the garden vegetables for the table. Vieux Pop had to grow a lot of corn to feed the animals. I remember that there were chickens, ducks, geese, and guineas in the yard. In the back of the house was the yard for the mules and horses.

The yard around the house had fig trees, pear trees, and peach trees. Vieux Mom made enough preserves for the family's table during the year. A neighbor had a mill to grind the corn to make grits for the family and feed for the chickens. Nearby was a syrup mill where the sugar cane was taken and syrup was put in barrels for the yearly supply. There was no want for food. But everyone had to do their part. As soon as the children were old enough, they would have their share of family chores.

Close family friends were called "aunt" or "uncle." Aunt Alta (Mrs. Tom Grace) was Mama and Daddy's friend who befriended me when I attended LSU. She told me about the fun times at the Broussards. It was a house full of warmth and hospitality. As young men, the boys had gorgeous horses. Horses in those days were like automobiles today. The young men each had a horse of his own. They would bathe and brush their horses to show them off when they went to church on Sunday. It was the custom to invite whomever they wanted to come home for dinner. Aunt Alta was often among the invited. I suspect she made herself available. Vieux Mom loved company and there was always enough food for everyone. It was said that she never knew how many were coming for Sunday dinner. These family get-togethers were the primary family entertainment.

As Vieux Mom's children were growing up, there was a "garconniere" in the yard where the boys slept. On Sunday mornings Vieux Mom would send a tray with a pot of coffee and a bunch of cups out to the garconniere because she never knew how many boys had spent the night. Sounds like "open house." Her hospitality was boundless.

On some Saturday nights, there were dances in town at "Moon's" Daddy must have been a good dancer, because he proudly taught me to waltz. The musicians were all local ones, of course, just as we have the cajun bands today. Daddy nor my mother ever referred to the music as "cajun music." Although Daddy learned to play the cornet and mentioned people who were musicians in Loreauville, I did not get the impression that he played with a band.

Daddy's best friends were Dick Windybank and Otto Mestayer, who was Ray Mestayer's father. Dick Windybank died on the boat going to Europe during World War I. Otto Mestayer, as I mentioned before, went to LSU and eventually became a lawyer. I wish I could remember some of the escapades Daddy told me about. It seems that they were all a fun-loving lot.



## HISTORY IN THE MAKING: I

by  
Jane Ellen Carstens

The very first political figure of whom I have vivid memories is the former governor of Louisiana, Huey Pierce Long, better known as Huey P. Long, deemed by some to be famous and by others, infamous. I think all of my immediate family, including aunts, uncles and cousins, considered him to be the latter. Papa's brother, whom we called Father, is said to have died from a violent heart attack, brought on by something that Huey did which upset him.

We saw and heard Huey campaigning for office (I can't remember if it was for governor or president) on the New Iberia High School campus, where a platform had been built--right across the street from the side porch of our house. At the age of ten, I learned the meaning of the terms "ranting and raving" after watching and listening to him. The platform was still standing the following day, and we neighborhood children had fun imitating him there.

At the heart of Huey's career as governor, someone gave us a beautiful black and white dog that won our affection immediately. His name was Huey. We often found ourselves explaining to people who commented upon his name that we were not responsible for it.

I was still in high school, when one day as I stood outside the building with a group of friends, waiting for the bell to ring, someone came running and announced that Huey had been assassinated! Although this happened 63 years ago, the whole incident has surfaced many times up to the present, with questions raised as to who actually shot Huey.

In contrast to my family's disdain for Huey was their ardent support for and admiration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. There was no television in those days, but Mim let us stay at home from school that day to listen to his inauguration ceremony on the radio. She viewed this as a significant epoch in American history. Little did I know, as I listened to this program that some day I would actually see President Roosevelt.

For several years, the Daughters of the American Revolution sponsored what was called a "Good Citizenship Pilgrimage" to Washington, D.C., where they held their annual conclave. The "Pilgrims" who went to Washington were high school seniors, one from each of the then 48 states. I was lucky enough to represent New Iberia High School at the state D.A.R. meeting in Shreveport, and, as a result of a random drawing, I had the good fortune to represent Louisiana as one of the Pilgrims!

There was a hurry and scurry to have clothes made. We Pilgrims were to be presented at a ball and I needed a suitable dress for the occasion. My cousin Amelia brought me to Lafayette to buy shoes. I found a suitable pair at Saloom's. Mrs. Pharr, a New Iberia D.A.R., gave me my first pair of silk stockings.

The trip to Washington was indeed one of the most exciting in my life. Mrs. deGravelle, a member of the D.A.R. in New Iberia, was going to the conclave, and invited me to go with her. Her daughter, Martha, was also going along. Women did not drive long distances in 1938, so Holcombe LaBauve was asked to drive. A short time ago I found the diary that I kept on the trip. I smiled when I read it. I was so impressed with everything that happened, the sights along the way, staying at what might be called bed and breakfast places today. I soon ran out of adjectives to describe all of these things, and kept using the term "magnificent." Mountains, skyscrapers--everything was magnificent to this small town girl. And, of course WASHINGTON, D.C. went far beyond anything I had ever imagined.

We Pilgrims were housed in a lovely hotel (the name of which I have forgotten), and we were soon brought together to get acquainted. There were all sorts of tours planned for us, including visits to the House and Senate buildings, the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, AND--the White House!

Our visit to the White House was not an ordinary one. Eleanor Roosevelt (F.D.R.'s wife) was still a member of the D.A.R. in those days, and she invited the Pilgrims to tea at the White House! What an unbelievable opportunity! Mrs. Roosevelt stood in one of the reception rooms in the White House, with an aide by her side, who introduced each one of us to her as we approached, giving our names and the states and towns from which we hailed. She smiled warmly and shook hands with each one of us. I found her to be far better looking than any picture had ever portrayed her, and I got the impression that she was genuinely glad to have us there.

Only a few days later, on Easter Sunday, after each of us attended service at the church of our choice, we were taken to the Episcopal church where the Roosevelts worshiped. Here we saw Mrs. Roosevelt again, as well as President Roosevelt. That glimpse of the President was one of the most exciting moments of our entire trip.

Prior to going to Washington, I had written Uncle Rene Clerc, a representative of the port of New Orleans in Washington about my trip. He took me to lunch at the Senate Restaurant and introduced me to several senators who came up to greet him. He embarrassed me greatly by telling one of them that when I saw the lobster on my plate, I exclaimed that it was the biggest crayfish I had ever seen! I just knew that this politician would think I was a dumb little girl from Louisiana.

The D.A.R. Ball was the highlight of the social side of our trip. Here each one of us was presented with a great deal of fanfare. The second highest ranking officer in the National D.A.R. happened to be from Louisiana. After she presented me to the audience, she gave me her bouquet of orchids--48 of them! I had never received even one orchid, much less 48! What a thrill! I would love to have brought all of them back to Louisiana, but that was not practical, so the next day I gave one to each of the other Pilgrims

When I returned to Louisiana, I learned that I was to be interviewed by someone at a Lafayette radio station about my trip. Despite my nervousness, I enjoyed relating some of the wonderful experiences that I had had, and which are still vivid in my mind today.

This trip stands out in my memory as the most exciting that I had ever experienced. It was indeed a significant moment in history for me!



## LEARNING TO DRIVE

by  
Betty Gerard

One spring day in 1941, Don took me to lunch at Hunter's on Farmington Road. Hunt's, a drive-in, is still at the same location in Peoria. Their specialties are pork tenderloin sandwiches and shakes.

After lunch we drove around and ended up on Grandview Drive overlooking the Illinois River. This road was named by Peoria's radio station as the "World's Most Beautiful Drive"--words that form the call letters for the radio and television stations, WMBD. The street begins in Peoria Heights, Illinois, and winds down through Peoria, Illinois, ending at Adams Street. We then stopped and climbed the three story tower that overlooks the Illinois River. Oh, what a beautiful scene!

We could see all the shades of green on both sides of the Illinois River, the freshly plowed farm land, and the boats moored at the Peoria Yacht Club. I never tired of the scenery from this area.

That afternoon Don and I talked about me learning to drive. When we climbed down from the tower and were back at the car, Don opened the driver's side door. "Get in," he said. "Now is as good as any for you to learn to drive."

Don had a 1940 Buick, four-door sedan that had automatic drive. After a few instructions, I took off down Grandview Drive. I was doing great! All the curves, the big hairpin curve, and soon we were at the bottom. Even Don was proud of me. I drove a mile or so, and then turned onto Van Buren Street where I lived.

Don was working the second shift at Caterpillar Tractor Company. He had to be at work at 4:00 p.m., but still had to go home and change clothes. We figured he'd have time since it was only 2:30 p.m. Don's house was on the west bluff, and my family lived below the bluff.

As we passed my house, I waved to Mom and Dad and Uncle Gale and Aunt Rosa, who were visiting from Aurora, Illinois. There were also other aunts watching me. After all these years I'm not sure which aunts were there. I turned in at the corner intending to back out so I could pull up in front of the house. Pow!--I had backed into the curb and blew a tire!

Don got out of the car and went to the trunk to get the spare tire. Dad and Uncle Gale came quickly to help. Soon the tire was changed, and Don was on his way. I took a lot of ribbing about that tire from my family. Needless to say, I didn't have any more driving lessons that spring!

Don had the "winning number" in the draft to be sent for Army service. In the first group of draftees from Peoria, Illinois, he left on May 6, 1941. His car was put on blocks and stored in a cousin's garage. He was to be back in one year, but the attack on Pearl Harbor extended his time.

When Don did come home on a medical discharge in 1943, he sold the Buick. We married and later moved to a house on East Corrington. At that time we had a 1937 Oldsmobile. Our neighbor had a 1940 Oldsmobile. It was a joke! We never knew which Olds was going to start in the winter. Whichever one started first would have to give the other one a push down the incline on Corrington to get us started. Don always said that this was good practice for my driving.

Don had been retired for 19 years when he died in 1992. During these years I didn't drive often. Don always got in the driver's seat. When I did start driving again in 1992, different people would say, "I didn't know you drove." You really don't forget, you just need the practice to drive again.





## **POP AND ME--OR HOW TO HOLD YOUR MOUTH RIGHT**

**by  
Betty St. Dizier**

My father, whom I always called Pop, was an avid salt water fisherman. From spring until first frost, we spent almost every Sunday on Pop's boat on the canals in and around Vermilion Bay. Several of his friends and their families would meet us at a designated spot where the men thought shrimp were running. A couple of the boats would travel for shrimp while the others tied up on the shore and the families fished and crabbed.

I loved to sit on the top of the boat while Pop and his buddies taught me how to fish. I was never very successful. Pop would pull fish in right and left. When I complained that I was not having any luck, Pop would say, ""Your problem is that you don't hold your mouth right"; or "You talk too much"; or "The radio is too loud." Though Pop and I were sitting side by side, the fish could always tell when there was an amateur on the end of the pole.

After catching enough shrimp, crabs, and fish, the men tied up all of the boats on the shore and built a large open fire. Then they chopped seasoning and herbs, cleaned the seafood, and made the pot ready to concoct a delicious stew or gumbo. the cooking was a long drawn out affair, and by the time it was ready, everyone was ravenous!

Anytime I smell seafood of any kind cooking today, I am reminded of those lazy Sundays. Pop was strictly an outdoor cook. He and his friends were masters of the open fire.



## OUR SLEEPING PORCH

by

Louise de Beus

A recent visit with my brother Homer brought, as usual, an onrush of childhood memories. One particular memory always creeps into our visits, a memory slightly cobwebbed by forgetfulness brought on by the passing years. The mere mention of "sleeping porch" brought peals of laughter, followed by a lengthy session of hashing over that beautiful day when I was only five.

As one of five children, I had the joy of being the "baby" of the family. My two elder sisters, Lucille and Flo, lovingly called Cille and Faloon by the rest of the brood, were loving and kind babysitters--as long as I did what I was told to do. Our mother was Postmistress at Jefferson Island; her days were long and busy due to the hustle and bustle at the salt mine. The post office was small and part of the only grocery store on the Island, about one block from our house. Of course, "one block" is city talk; we kids always spoke of the post office as being "our yard and the oil well away," (and we truly thought we were so explicit!). Our yard was an expanse of lawn and trees up to the ditch about half way to the post office. From the ditch to the road bordering the post office was an area of wild grass and bushes, vine covered trees AND THE OIL WELL. A good producer, I might add, but it belonged to the salt company, alas!

From the post office, Mom was able to keep an eye on us and survey our games in the yard. Because our yard was the largest on the Island, our playmates came to play with us. Frequently our raucous shouts and laughter were a bit too much and reached Mom's ears. She would then step out on the porch and simply point to the house. We knew well what she meant, and meed as little lambs we'd bid our playmates "Adieu" and file into the house to the bathroom where we immediately knelt alongside the bathtub, knowing we'd get a good talking to when Mom arrived. Within ten minutes or so she would arrive, a bit breathless from the short but rapid walk, ready to scold us but always willing to reason with us. As a team we put up a good defense at the beginning but eventually had to admit that yes, we knew why we were being punished. She'd smile gently, give each of us a big bear hug and kiss and shove us out to play.

Brothers Eldridge and Homer were the little devils of the family, though I must admit Faloon played her part like a star. Of the five, Lucille was the eldest, only 12, but our surrogate mother when Mom was at the post office, and believe me, what she said WENT! Next came Eldridge who was 11, followed by Faloon, then 9, and before me came Homer, age 7. At that tender age Homer already showed great talent as an entertainer, imitator and comedian. He was nicknamed Hi-Gear, and in high gear he was 28 hours a day. Through the years he kept Mom highly entertained with his amusing rendition of "Sonny Boy" in the old Al Jolsen style, face smeared with soot from a burnt cork, on bended knee, arms out flung, singing his heart out, and then he'd bounce up and give Mom a big smooch as she chuckled with happiness, not realizing how much soot he had left on her face. Hi-Gear was a bright star in Mom's life.

In the summer of my fifth year, the salt company decided to add a sleeping porch to our company-owned house, "to house the little monsters" as the company official announced with a grin. Our excitement ran high and we well knew that every bang of the hammer brought us closer to our sleeping porch. When we asked Daddy how big the porch was to be, his measurements ran something like this: "Now I'd say it will be about from where you are standing to the tree over there and as wide as from the garage to Prince's house." That was about 45 feet in children's language and about 12 feet wide, as long as our German Police dog did not move his house. We oohed and aaaahhed and clapped hands to mouth in utter disbelief. Windows ran completely around the outside walls giving the porch an airy and tropical look; we really thought we were just the richest people in the world. We came firmly down to earth when window washing time rolled around. We five little monsters moaned and groaned, but none of that helped. We washed!

The floor, made of 4" wide planks, still needed to be sanded and painted. This work was to take place the following morning. Mom and Daddy left us at noon for a hurried trip into New Iberia, something almost unheard of in the middle of the week--we usually went to town on Saturday nights, never in between, so we kids were aghast at the thought of our having to remain at home.

Our regular Saturday nights were spent at the movies while Mom and Daddy parked in front of the old Taylor Drugstore and visited with friends after first stopping in at the drugstore to greet Uncle Fel, Mom's only brother who owned the drugstore and was the head pharmacist. Visits were short as Mr. Felix, as Uncle Fel was called by the country people, was extremely busy as these people considered him a doctor and came to him with all their health problems. However, he and Mom were extremely fond of each other, and he'd find spare minutes for a hug and kiss and a short chat. After the visit, Mom and Daddy would stroll up and down Main Street visiting with old friends who had also driven in. Mom and Daddy were not gone long, and when they returned, they busied themselves for a few minutes and arranged chairs on the sleeping porch at the back end. As we were settling down, Mom returned with two large shoe boxes in her arms and sat with us.

**CURIOUS?** You bet your life we were. We could hardly restrain ourselves from grabbing the boxes and tearing into them--which would have meant to bed and without supper. When the contents were at last revealed we hopped up and down shouting with glee! **ROLLER SKATES, AND WE HAD NEVER EVEN HELD A PAIR OF ROLLER SKATES IN OUR HANDS!**

Who were the first two to don the newly bought skates I do not remember, but without a doubt, they sailed away on their knees or bottoms. Oh, it seemed to be so easy and such fun! Fun it was, but after I had tried, different parts of me were bruised and did hurt. However, we got the trick of it after a while and had such fun racing or being artistic, yet, in a way, eager to pass the skates on to see how well the newly gathered onlookers would do. Up and down, up and down the length of the porch we skated, bumping into each other, bumping into our friends who by now were moving along with the skaters.

In the midst of all the fun, Daddy had slipped away and soon returned with as many of the neighborhood kids as he was able to round up. Most had heard us whooping it up, to say nothing

of the strange noise of the skated mucking up the newly laid floor, and all were consumed with curiosity. When they saw what was transpiring, they stood wide-eyed and gaping, nudging each other with sharp jerks of the elbow or clapping with joy. But soon it was their turn to try their luck. Wide grins on their faces told us how much they were enjoying themselves. We on the side lines proved to be a rip roaring cheering squad, urging them on and on. But finally our fun had to end, and at supper time we sent happy little friends away, had a quick supper, and went to bed to dream of the glorious day we had just had. Without a doubt, Mom and Daddy had a long serious talk before retiring, wondering how best to explain the condition of the floor on the following morning.

That day proved to be the highlight of the summer--and the year--not only for us five little monsters, but for the neighborhood kids as well. Our "Let's remember" games always brought forth peals of laughter when the "sleeping porch" was mentioned. It is a day I remember with great warmth and happiness, but foremost with love and respect for the wonderful parents we were blessed to have.



## MY STAY IN A SMALL TOWN

by  
Mildred Joy

During my twelve year stay in Patterson from June 22, 1979, until October 15, 1991, I met and made some everlasting friends. Mitty used to tell me, "Mildred, you haven't even been here a year and you know more people than I do, and I have lived in Patterson all of my life." Mitty's routine was taking care of Joe. Her outings included going to the post office for the mail and to Roy's groceries. Joe's outings consisted of going to the everlovin' Shell Station. He cut grass with the John Deere tractor twice a week during the summer, only once when its growth slowed down in the winter. He would cut the grass so short it really didn't have a chance to grow. Of course, I would try to tell him to let it grow a little longer but he never did. I would tease him every so often about it being so short he was killing it. Didn't do any good, though.

When Joe passed away, one of the first things I did was to raise the lawnmower up about another inch. We had planted azaleas down the side of the house and in front. Along the driveway coming into the homeplace, I had made a rose bed, which grew beautiful roses of every color in the rainbow. I had planted five of the real tall skinny fir trees but we had that horrible freeze in 1990, and it killed all of them, plus all the bamboo around the homeplace. It was quite an ordeal to clean all of the bamboo out. We did, though, and kept it out, too!

One day I had come home from the flower shop for lunch. There in the yard was the black top paving equipment. The workers told me they were getting the driveway completely paved. Before I could leave to go back to the flower shop, the man was knocking on the door for his money. Mitty got up to get her checkbook to pay him. I walked out and discovered all they had done was pave about twenty feet by two car widths wide. I told that man, "You must think you are dealing with an idiot. You had better get back on your equipment and start paving this entire driveway or the police will be here pronto. I can't believe you thought you were going to take this lady and my husband. What are you going to do?" He tried telling me that is what he had told her he was going to do. I told him, "I don't think you are going to get \$4,500.00 for that, buddy. You wait right here. I'll be right back." I started in the house and he came behind me and said he would get the men on it right away. I was headed into the house to call John L. Robichaux, sheriff, who was a personal friend of ours. It wasn't necessary to make the call, though. I did call my partner in the flower shop, Juanita, to explain that I was not going to leave until the work was finished.

I asked Mitty and Joe not to make decisions like that again until I was there to help and to see what they were getting for their money. They never did anything that big again without us all sitting down and talking about it. We did make the decision to put vinyl siding on that 3400 square foot homeplace. Can you guess what color? Naturally, it was WHITE. Remember, I told you previously that everything around our house was white except for my little red barn. The homeplace was not just 3400 living area, but it was tall enough to put a second story above the first floor. We had 14' ceilings in the homeplace. It was wonderful.

The first Christmas we were there we got a flocked Christmas tree which lacked touching the ceiling by about two feet. It was beautiful, even if I do say so myself. The funny part was we had a new little kitty named Blue, who insisted on climbing up the branches. We didn't worry too much because Blue was so little and the tree was so huge. It covered the front hall almost completely. We enjoyed it so much that year and again the next year. I took the tree out to the side in the English garden and placed it in the hedgerow, leaving it in the stand just to see what it would do. It did great. The second Christmas I dragged it from between the hedgerow and hosed it off good, left it for a day to dry out and then I flocked the empty branches. Joe helped me get it in the house. It was different and quite a conversation piece. That way I didn't mind paying the \$65.00 for it the year before. Oh, the kitty didn't climb it this year. Smart cat, I'd say.

Mitty could not believe our home at Thanksgiving and Christmas. It was always a feast. All the children and grandchildren would visit for several days. She and I would be tired when it was all over. So much fun, though. I wish I had the energy now that I had then.

In a town the size of Patterson you dare not talk about anybody because they are somehow related by marriage to everyone. I never understood it fully, but they were. Johnny Carbonelle, who did work on the old homeplace, was from Savannah, Georgia. He knew my Uncle C. M., who was a shrimper out of Morgan City long years ago. Johnny and Betty and Joe and I took a trip in my new van the first of March before Joe passed away on the 29th. Betty took a picture of Joe and me on Pensacola Bay which I treasure very much. We had such a good trip.

After the first year in Patterson, I talked Juanita into our opening a flower shop, I really wasn't concerned about making money as much as I was interested in getting out of the house. Joe was smothering me. I enjoy working and creating with flowers, so I felt the shop would be a great thing to do. Joe worked himself into delivering the flowers. He didn't want me to go to strange people's houses to make deliveries. I not only got myself out of the house, but Joe came along, too! It wasn't bad, though. I had never had anyone to worry over my well being as Joe did. Drove me nuts at times! One particular instance was when my cousin Andrea had moved to Bayou Vista. She and I had gone down Cotton Road to fish. It was getting dark and we started home. We had gotten on Highway 90 heading home when I spied Joe headed the other way on the four lane. I told Andrea, "I'll bet you money he's going to see if we are still fishing." When he got home I asked him, "Where did you go?" Sure enough, he had gone looking for us. He thought we may have been broken down or had a flat tire. I told him, "Joe, I am old enough to look after myself, and Andrea and I stay after dark if the fish are biting, so don't come looking for me 'til 'bout nine, okay? I love that you care enough to come looking for me to see if I'm all right."

Joe and I seperated once for about a week because of his drinking. He talked me into coming back, so I gave it another chance. He did great for a while until one night when he was really getting high. I started to put his bottle up when he complained, "Oh, Savannah, I just want one more drink." I took the lid off and poured him a drink. Then I took the bottle to the sink and whacked it right across the sink, breaking the bottle. The whiskey went down the drain. I think that is possibly the only time Joe has truly been mad at me. He jumped out of his chair and went to take a look into the

sink. I turned on my heel and walked to the living room. Mitty was sitting in her chair at the kitchen table not saying a word. She had jumped when the bottle broke. Joe followed me to the living room, stood over me and said I had no business breaking his bottle. All I said was, "Well, you said you only wanted one more drink and that's what you got!" He went back to the kitchen and guess who got him? That's right, Mitty got him, too! The next morning he apologized and all was well.

On Joe's 60th birthday he drove to Lafayette to have lunch with Buzzy. They had a long lunch. Joe got home about 6:30. Mitty and I were really mad. We had gone shopping for his birthday to buy a new sofa for Joe to lay on and watch TV. We had wanted to surprise him. He was the one that surprised us by coming in so late, tipsy, too. Buzzy never called to see if he made it home. I guess he was looking at the adage, "No news is good news." Naturally, I chewed him up pretty good and then went to bed. Then it was Mitty's turn. When he came to bed, I was asleep--supposedly. It's really called ignoring. The next morning, one more apology and then I found out that this southern gentleman did not want to be sixty years old. In looking back, I wonder if he felt that being sixty meant he wouldn't be around much longer.

I am sixty-five at this writing, and I look forward to seeing my grandchildren grow up into fine citizens. Who knows, I may even see these great-grands marry and have more. It's wonderful to be able to see all the happenings in our lives. Some good and some bad, but, hey, that's life!

I loved my life in Patterson, and I dearly loved the people in that small town. They were all so caring toward one another. I thank the Lord for this time in my life.



