Excerpts from

Our Pages of Life

Volume XXIIIb—Thursday Morning Session
Spring 1999

We live close together and we live far apart.
We all go through the same things—it's just a different kind of the same thing.
From "Trifles"— a short play by Susan Glaspell—these words
spoken by Mrs. Hale, the wife of the county sheriff
investigating the murder of neighbor Minnie Foster's husband,
express the "oh—I-don't-think-I-knew-that"of our lives.

The experiences that inspired the stories in this XXIII volume collection
of *Excerpts from* **Our Pages of Life** become *a different kind of the same thing.*
The writers themselves, a bit amazed when they say it, often comment
on the sameness of the lives and stories of their peers as compared to their own.
These friends who began as strangers are treated to the ordinary and extraordinary
events of each others' lives. With these narratives, they are also introduced
to one of the most important lessons for us to learn—
We all go through the same things—it's just a different kind of the same thing.

Read. Enjoy. And pass on.

❋ Joan Stear, USL
Lafayette, Louisiana
Spring 1999

Thanks to the Horizons Department at Lafayette General Medical Center;
Life & Letters • an intergenerational company •;
and University College and the English Department at the University of Southwestern Louisiana
for their continued support of our efforts to write for the generations to come.
Thanks, too, to each of my students—my pages of life.

FRONT COVER: (*clockwise, beginning at top right corner*) Tony and Betty Speyrer,
and children Carole and Dick, 1945; Marjorie Matherne Stear and Joan;
David Stear, Susan, Freda, and Joan—Joan's first birthday;
yet another birthday—Margaret, Joan, and Ruth; Pat deLatte with sons Keith and Tracy;
(center) Jake Valentine and father, circa 1940's

USL LIFE WRITING CLASS
Spring 1999 • Thursday Morning Session

Seated, left to right: **Joan Ireland; Virginia de Gravelles; Marie Louise LaCaze; Marge deVillier; Betty Speyrer**
Standing, left to right: **Joan Stear, *Instructor*; Doris Bentley; Mary Anne Early; Jane Ellen Carstens; Tom Eby; Pat de Latte; Jake Valentine**

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LOUISIANA COFFEE
by
Marge DeVillier

I was introduced to this famous brew in 1949 shortly after my marriage to my husband, Joe, who was from Port Barre, Louisiana, when we took a trip to Port Barre to visit his family.

The beautiful demitasse cups the coffee was served in at every stop we made impressed me; however, I soon became nauseated from the strong brew of the dark roast Community State coffee which ranged from light to medium, to between roast, to a dark roast. The DeVillier method of making coffee was also new to me. I only knew about percolators and brands such as A & P, Folgers, Chase and Sanburn, and Maxwell House.

I saw my first white enamel drip coffee pot during that trip, too. I thought, and, still do, that these enamel drip pots have an interesting antique like appearance. I also thought it strange to have the pot sitting in a pan of warm water on the stove above a low burner with another pot of water on another burner with hot water to be dipped and poured into the drip coffee pot, as needed to allow one cup of water drip at a time. "How boring and time consuming," I thought. "No wonder it was so strong." I learned later that it was part of the coffee ritual which I learned to do and to like and found the drip method to be the most tasteful and satisfying.

How strange. In North Carolina, all I had to do was put coffee and cold water in an electric peculator and plug it in. It took me a while to learn the Louisiana way of making coffee and learning to drink it without getting nauseated, but I gradually acquired a taste for the strong brew. Now I have to take coffee (dark) roast Community Coffee with me whenever I take a trip away from home.

I even learned to make coffee in the unique Louisiana pots and the Louisiana way with the Louisiana State coffee when I started working at Abbeville General Hospital in Abbeville where there was always a pot brewing in every department in the little kitchen on each nursing unit. I soon grew to like the strong stuff; however, making and always having a pot of coffee made or at least one brewing became a

problem at times at the hospital because a line of visitors outside the nursing department kitchen was quickly formed by patients, visitors, and hospital employees whenever the aroma of freshly brewing coffee wafted down the corridors of the hospital. When these same people became so bold as to start requesting that nurses make a "fresh pot," a scheduled coffee time had to be instituted. The hospital then provided a coffee and juice break cart at 10:00 AM and at 2:00 PM rounds. This service was first executed by nurse aides and later by hospital volunteers.

The personal southern hospitality effect was somewhat diminished, but the regular serving times were more efficient. In fact, quite a bit was lost. It was kind of sad the day they picked up all those unique antique enamel coffee pots. The fresh brewed aroma wafted away completely. The congenial group in the little kitchens didn't congregate there anymore because the coffee was made in the main kitchen, poured into large, ugly coffee urns and pushed around on cold, shiny stainless steel carts. Even today, it is kind of quiet and subdued on those wards. No more interruptions in the nurse's routine and no more friendly trips across the hall to the little kitchens.

I guess that's progress, but it's kind of sad and lonely with the warm fuzzy wuzzies and free coffee gone. The aroma of fresh, brewing coffee has been replaced with the harsh smell of hospital cleaning chemicals and Big Corporate Management Companies who are more interested in the $ottom line than in warm Fuzzy Wuzzies.

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CAN OF WORMS
by
Joan Ireland

Have you ever gone fishing with a can of fat, writhing worms? Night crawlers, those extra-fat, undulating worms that are gathered using a flashlight at night on a smooth, close-cut lawn, are especially active once you disturb their resting-place.

At Cypremort Point, Marge and I fish with shrimp, which when we bait our hooks, are in a lifeless stage, or in other words--dead. I had almost forgotten the sensation of the night crawlers as they wriggle and squirm back and forth in circles whenever I try to extract one from the can to bait my hook. Oh, well, I might as well be honest. My Dad and later my husband, Ray, always baited my hook as I detest the sensation of slippery, sliding, squiggly worms on my fingers.

Last spring my loathing caught up with me when I was in Connecticut visiting my sister, Connie, and her husband, Sterling. Johnnie, Ernie and I had driven to Connecticut to see my brother, Weston, who was in the hospital. We arrived at Connie's house late in the evening after our visit to Weston at the hospital. I was too tired even to walk up the stairs, so I bunked down on the sofa in the living room.

I was sound asleep around 6:00 AM when I heard the pitter patter of a thousand little feet (maybe eight?). I turned over facing the back of the couch and pulled the sheet over my head just in time. Suddenly, I felt a thump and then another one on my sheet-covered back and then it happened. Or was I dreaming? It felt like someone had emptied a whole can of writhing, twisting, twirling, squiggling worms over my head. I could feel their bodies as they moved undulating up and over, ever trying to find an opening in the sheet so that they could get to me—a poor, defenseless Senior Citizen who had just completed over a 1600 mile trip.

But wait, these worms are really heavy. *I wonder what kind of hook I'll have to use as they continue to twist around my head and shoulders?* I realized their bodies must be at least four or five inches in diameter, too big to catch a lowly six to eight inch trout. As I tried to pull the sheet more closely around my sixty six-year-old head, I felt sharp claws digging into my shoulders. Then, to my horror, something cold, wet and

slimy found an opening in the sheet that I was trying so hard to keep intact over my head.

By this time, Sterling came down stairs and saw my predicament. In a stern, although hushed voice, he cried, "Come on fellers, get off the couch and let JoJo sleep." Cautiously, I lowered the sheet until I had a small opening over one eye and saw the fellows. No worms at all, but two long, short-legged puppy dachshunds just crying for attention!

Later, I was formally introduced to Teddy, a six month-old, dapple gray dachshund with black and white spots, and Priscilla, his sister, who had a pretty, chocolate-brown coat. I watched their antics as they tried to get the best resting-place on our laps. They surely did resemble those squirmy night crawlers of my youth. The puppies were always together, usually following Connie from room to room, adept in escaping her feet. Even though there was a room full of empty laps, they had to be together on whomever's lap they decided to honor with their presence.

After that night, I decided to sleep upstairs in the bedroom that used to belong to my nephew, Kevin. However, I still enjoyed watching the two new additions to my sister's family—her can of worms.

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TRAINING SENSES
by
Tom Eby

In the dark of night, I heard the faint, lonesome sound of a train whistle on a locomotive still miles away. As I lay there in bed, I listened to it becoming louder as the train rolled closer. As it came closer to town, there were more road crossings and the engineer would blow the whistle more frequently to warn car drivers of the oncoming train. I was age 4 to 10. I lived in a house at 1717 Maple Street in North Little Rock, just a little over four blocks north of the largest freight yard in Arkansas, and my house was only two blocks east of a double set of tracks running north and south. I was familiar with all the sounds of trains. The switchyard was the place where the freight trains were made up or separated, sending different cars in different directions. The sound of trains being taken apart is similar to a series of small explosions as the engineer applies brakes and couplers are pulled apart. Often when one car is pushed into another string of cars the sound is like an explosion loud enough to be heard for miles. An engine starting to pull a long string of cars, starts, *ch----------*
--ch---------ch-----ch—ch and if the long heavy load causes the engines wheels to slip, I could hear sometimes *ch----------ch---------ch-----ch—ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch*. The sound of the engine's bells as they approach a crossing or a station has been relegated to the past.

These sounds were not the only way I sensed trains. At a crossing, I could hear the clickety clack, clickety clack of the steel wheels rolling across the joints in the tracks, but I could also feel the earth shake due to the massive weight of the engines and loaded freight cars. There was the smell and sight of the black coal smoke pouring out the stack. There was the white cloud of steam hissing and spewing forth when the engineer released excess pressure from the boiler.

Hearing trains, seeing trains, and talking about trains to the men who worked on and around trains—engineers, brakemen, switchers, conductors, oilers and others—caused me to think I wanted to be an engineer. I could go off to places I had never seen—only heard people talk about. When I would hear that distant sound in the night, I would imagine where that train was coming from or to what exotic place it might be going.

My first train ride was from Little Rock to Dallas, when I was eight years old. I remember most people on the coach car carried picnic baskets of food. I think many had fried chicken, biscuits, and fruit. A railroad porter walked through the coach car selling sandwiches, and I bought a sandwich.

My great train adventure came at age eleven with other boys going to summer camp. We took the train from Little Rock through St. Louis to Chicago. On the overnight trip in a Pullman car, I slept in an upper berth. The porter would walk into each car and announce when the separate dining car was open. He carried a small musical instrument like a xylophone that had four keys, which he would play the four notes to get attention. I enjoyed its pleasant, soft, tone, and I have looked for one to buy most of my adult life with no success. The sights along the way were impressive. I had not realized how poor the neighborhoods along the tracks were until I rode a train into St. Louis and Chicago. Beside the tracks stood many shanties and run down, abandoned, apartments, black with coal soot. Crossing the Mississippi River at Cairo, Illinois, by train was a thrill. We rumbled along next to Illinois's Joliet prison with its massive stone walls and towers. Seeing the enormous size of the train station in Chicago and the number of trains coming and going, hearing the departure announcements for such a vast array of towns, dodging people walking in every direction like a stirred up ant hill—all of it was an overwhelming experience.

Model electric trains to giant real trains tickled my senses, but it was many years before I realized how the senses can be sharpened. The educated eye of an artist or photographer can discern different shades of light and color that the untrained eye may not observe. I know that the trained eye of a geologist may look at a mountain and not just see the flora and fauna. He may see the composition of the rock, realize the history of how the rock was deposited, how many millions of years it has aged, what kind of upheaval, folding and faulting it has undergone and what's under the mountain.

As the senses can be sharpened, they can also be dulled. I have lived across the street from train tracks that were in use day and night. I was able to grow used to the train sounds and become desensitized to the point of not even awaking when a train would pass during the night. I have been out on drilling rigs and been able to sleep next to the large, powerful, noisy Waukesha diesel engines when they were roaring to pull drill pipe from thousands of feet below. Sometimes I would wake up because the noise stopped when they were through with a trip. Just as a physician or nurse can become

desensitized to blood and look at and solve a body's problem we can all "train" our senses to sense the minute details or not to sense the blatantly obvious. As a boy I remember the repulsive odor when first walking into a horse stable. However, after saddling a horse and staying in the stable for a while, I did not notice the smell. I had become desensitized.

The senses provide methods of evaluating our surroundings and ourselves. We can empathize and feel the emotions of others. We can react to words which we hear and are only symbols of thought but convey real emotional effects on our body. "FIRE" and "HELP" are two examples of simple words that when sensed, place our body on alert and at a higher running rate. In the past, profanity disgusted people much more than it does now; however, now we have heard so much of it that we are becoming desensitized to it, and we ignore it. The training of our senses is often a product of our parents, teachers, associates, friends, and whatever we are exposed to accidentally or on purpose. These lessons apply to our common sense, or perceptions in common, what everybody knows. As children we learn to sense or ignore more quickly. Consequently, our thinking is more easily influenced.

Criminal psychologists have said: *Many a person who abhors crime, placed in the midst of criminals for an extended time, will at first be repulsed by crime. Then he will come to ignore crime. Later he will accept crime. Eventually he will embrace crime. Finally, he will commit crimes.* This is a process of desensitizing and training similar to brainwashing. *Everyone else is doing it. All the others have done it.* Does that sound familiar? Be careful how you become desensitized by the "training" around you.

TENNIS, THE SPORT FOR A LIFETIME: A GIFT OF LOVE
by
Patsy De Latte

"Wouldn't it be great if the new school had tennis courts right on the school premises? The team could practice during Phys. Ed. and play matches on their own courts," Bing mused, sliding the zipper on his tennis bag.

Bing and Red Dumesnil had just finished a set of tennis and were talking about the new high school the Catholic Diocese of Lafayette was building. It would consolidate all the high schools into one central facility. A huge undertaking, the project was funded with assessments from all the church parishes, as well as private donations. Because the construction costs had escalated during the planning stage, there were no funds available for such a project as tennis courts.

"Some individual or some Company would have to donate the money necessary to build courts," Red replied to Bing's suggestion, "Do you know anyone who would be willing to give a really large amount for that purpose?"

Bing thought for a moment and laughingly replied, "Guarantee Bank should be able to do it. You guys hold all the mortgages in town. Why don't you check it out?"

"Whoa! Can't do that!" responded Red. "Got any other ideas?" Bing hesitated, shook his head, but then quietly said, "Maybe I can do it. I sure would like to see those kids have tennis courts. I have a working interest in a potential oil well that's drilling now. We should be at bottom soon. If the well tests as good as I expect, I'll pledge enough to build not one, but five courts." With this conversation, the planning for tennis courts at St. Thomas More Catholic High School began.

During the drilling of the well, Red, chairman of the school's finance committee, monitored the progress. He knew that Bing's donation depended on the completion of a good, economically viable well. Just prior to logging, Red came by to wish us luck and jokingly related, "The nuns at Cathedral Carmel are saying daily rosaries. The beads are flying through their fingers!"

Fortunately, the well came in as expected. Perhaps the nuns were heard in "High Places," or maybe the geology was just correct. Whatever the reason, the well was producing enough for Bing to make good on his promise. The fifty thousand dollar donation allowed the construction of five hard surface tennis courts surrounded by the required fencing. The school wanted to name the courts "Bing DeLatte Tennis Courts," but Bing chose not to have his name on the courts. He preferred to stay anonymous. "The courts are for the students, not for me," he told the committee. "I love the game of tennis and hope the students will come to feel the same way."

On Wednesday, January 12, 1983, The Daily Advertiser carried a picture of Monsignor. A.O. Sigur thanking Bing and me for our donation. The caption reads:

> *New tennis courts for St. Thomas More Catholic High School were recently completed. The donators of the new courts, Mr. and Mrs. Irvin H. DeLatte (shown shaking hands with Msgnr. A.O. Sigur) have been promoters of tennis in the Acadiana area for many years. Mr. DeLatte is a past president of the Louisiana Tennis Association.*

After Bing's death in December of 1991, I was contacted by Red Dumesnil on behalf of St. Thomas More School. The tennis teams had won many state championships during the nine years since our donation of the five courts. The current team members and the Board of Directors felt it was time that others were made aware of the contributions made by Bing to the game of tennis and of his generous gift to the school. My family and I were invited to St. Thomas More to meet the school's new State Tennis Champions. My sons, Keith and Tracy, had been State Champions themselves at Lafayette High School in 1973. They loved the game of tennis as much as their Dad and continued to play long after school days were over. We were very honored to receive, in Bing's name, a dedication plaque to be displayed at the school's courts. The inscription read

IN MEMORY OF
BING DE LATTE
1931-1991

The moment was very special, filled with appreciation on behalf of the students, and with gratitude on behalf of my family. With his generous gesture, Bing had shared with untold numbers of students his love of tennis, *"his" sport for a lifetime.*

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JANE ELLEN CARSTENS
by
Jane Ellen Carstens

Jane Ellen Carstens finally gave in to death yesterday, after the Lord convinced her that things would be even more wonderful in Heaven than on earth. Just as she always predicted she would do, she fought and argued with Him until the very end. She reminded Him that she loved everything about life on earth (at least almost everything) – her family, her friends, her former professional life, "et cetera et cetera et cetera." "And," she told Him, "when I look out at the sky at sunset and see the gorgeous shades of peach and pink, mingled with the rays of the sun, and again when I look at the sky at night, when the moon is brilliant and the stars sparkle amidst the wandering clouds, I can't believe there could be more beauty surrounding us anywhere else, not even in Heaven."

"And how do I handle this? " she asked. "My mother died at the age of forty, when I was only twenty-two months old. If I die now at the age of 76, I'll be thirty-six years older than she. I'll be the same age as my Father was when he died. How would either of them recognize me?"

"What about the food in Heaven?" she queried. "Do the Heavenly waters have crayfish or crabs or oysters? If not, may I take a cooler full of them frozen? Has Community coffee found its way to Heaven?" she continued. "One thing I cannot do without," she said, "is Blue Bell Homemade Vanilla Ice Cream!" The Lord assured her that arrangements could be made for all of these foods to be delivered to her heavenly abode as soon as she moved in.

"There is one more thing that I've always wanted, Lord," said Jane Ellen. "I would love to have auburn hair! Is it possible for you to change the color of my hair while I'm en route to Your kingdom? I think I would make a much better impression upon your heavenly residents if this were done. The Lord assured her that this would be done.

Following the granting of her last request, Jane Ellen agreed to leave this earth at 6:15 a.m. yesterday. Her body will lie in state in the Children's Room of the

Lafayette Public Library, surrounded by the books that she loved and had shared with her students as well as with children.

Monsignor Alexander O. Sigur has agreed to return to earth to conduct funeral services at Our Lady of Wisdom Church at U.S.L. Luciano Pavarotti, who remembers meeting Jane Ellen in Central Park in New York City, will sing the U.S.L. Alma Mater. Camilla Mouton, a teacher at Plantation Elementary School in Lafayette, will have the opportunity to do what she promised Jane Ellen several years ago. As her body is carried out of the Church, Camilla will waltz along with her open umbrella, singing "When the Saints Go Marching In."

Pallbearers will be Winnie-the-Pooh, Peter Pan, Robinson Crusoe, Pinocchio, Dr. Seuss and Mother Goose.

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SURPRISE !! SURPRISE !!
by
Doris B. Bentley

In the fall of the year 1951, Pete attended Grady Cook's "Little Red School House." Every morning Bruce and Suzanne and I would watch from the driveway as one of the teachers picked him up to go to school. We would walk with Pete down the driveway to the street and wait for the car to come. Then we would wave goodbye as Pete was whisked away to school. How exciting the first days of school are for children and their parents.

Bruce was three and a half years old, and Suzanne almost two. She was a little girl who adored her brother Bruce, who was only seventeen months older than she. He, in turn, delighted in showing off for her and making her laugh at him. I was managing my time pretty well with three children, cleaning house, doing the daily laundry, and preparing the meals. A neighbor would occasionally drop in for coffee in the morning.

During the week, George and I enjoyed lunch together while the children were napping. We also enjoyed the bridge games with our friends in the evenings, and occasionally we had a couple over for dinner.

George and Genevieve Scheer were another couple whom we enjoyed. George was a book salesman and Genevieve worked in the library. They occasionally entertained at cocktail time—five o'clock. But the Scheers' cocktail time was not the best time for me—the children were tired and ready for their dinner, bath, and then bedtime. So I could never enjoy George and Genevieve's parties. Instead, we asked them over to our house for pot-luck suppers. All of that changed when Genevieve found out that she was pregnant! At forty years of age, she and Jeff had to make a lot of adjustments in their lifestyle. Farewell to the five o'clock cocktail parties.

At Christmas of 1951, Nananne came to Chapel Hill with Mama and Daddy. We had our usual Cajun Christmas, made special by Nananne's presence. When she got back to New Iberia, she made Mardi Gras costumes for the three children. Pete was a white rabbit, Suzanne was a yellow duck, and Bruce was a brown monkey. On Mardi Gras Day, I dressed them in their costumes and took them to the Library and to

Grady Cook's Little Red School House where Chapel Hill was introduced to Mardi Gras in Louisiana.

In the summer of 1952, the children and I went to New Iberia for our annual "vacation." I was expecting a new baby. One day Mama said to me, "Are you going to have that baby in Chapel Hill? I think you'd better get home, as you look like it's coming soon."

No wonder she was anxious for me. The twins surprised us on July 16, 1952. I couldn't believe that the Lord had sent TWO babies. How in the world was I to manage? My concern lasted all of one day. They were identical. They were healthy. They were beautiful.

We named them "Richard Camos" and "William Childress." Richard was George's father's name, and Camos is Mama's family name. William was named for Bill Joyner and George's sister Willie. Childress is Miss Sallie's family name. I thought that giving them their grandmothers' family names would help all the children identify their family roots, since we were away from either family. The twins were called, "Richard" and "William"—no nicknames.

What a commotion they caused. Everybody in Chapel Hill knew we had had twins. Mama came to help for a month, and she brought little gold identification bracelets for them. The only difference between them that we could tell was that William had a mole on his tummy. So we had to lift his shirt to see which baby we were taking care of, or check the ID bracelet. Mama stayed long enough for us to christen the twins. We had the christening dress Mama had had made when Bruce was born in 1948, which Richard wore. Our friend, Jane Wilson, lent us hers—an old-fashioned, three-foot long baby dress for William.

William Joyner, who had recently returned to Chapel Hill from Harvard Medical School, was doing his residency at the hospital in Durham. He was assigned to pediatrics just in time to take care of the twins, one named, "William." Jane Joyner was expecting their baby a few months later, and she came to our house every morning to bathe and feed one of the babies. It was not only helpful to me, but fun for both of us.

Will Joyner stayed in Chapel Hill to practice medicine with our good friend, Fred Patterson. After he retired, he and Jane visited here on two occasions. We still enjoy hearing from Will and Jane.

Needless to say, the routine in the Bentley household changed drastically. George and I both fed the babies at the 10 o'clock feeding, then at two o'clock, we would each feed one and see who could burp the baby and put it down first and get back to sleep. Then if one baby cried, we each said it was the other's baby who had not been burped well enough.

I remembered Mrs. King's advice that there are only 24 hours in the day, regardless of how many children you had. It was not easy to manage the household with five children. Some things were just not done, and there were times when I wished I had somebody to take the children for a few hours while I cleaned house. I had not yet read the book, "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff."

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THE HORSE WHISPERER
by
Betty Speyrer

During this past summer, I went to see the movie "The Horse Whisperer." It took me back to my childhood when I was a little girl growing up on a farm in Iowa. I have always loved horses, and in those days I literally lived on a horse. Our neighbors often said they were sure I had been born on horseback.

My earliest remembrance of the horses on our farm began when I was about four years old. As I remember, we had several farm horses which Dad used for different tasks. The two that I remember the best were named Mabel and Snap. Mabel was a gentle, placid horse and let me bridle her and ride her with or without a saddle. Snap was ill- tempered and would bare his teeth at the slightest provocation, or kick up his heels if something displeased him. Dad warned me to stay away from Snap. One day, Dad came home from a sale with two beautiful huge plow horses. I was thrilled to see them, and we named them Tom and Dick. Dad cautioned me that he did not know if these horses had been broken to ride and not to go near them. I thought that to sit on one of those broad backs would be very exciting.

Once, when I was barely four years old, Mother watched in horror from our kitchen window as I entered the barnyard, got an ear of corn from the bin, then climbed into a wagon and enticed the horse called Dick over to me. I then climbed onto his back. When he had devoured the ear of corn, he started to walk off. I had no way of halting him or guiding him as he did not have a bridle on. After walking around the barnyard for awhile, he decided to go into the cool basement of the barn. I began to panic as the barn door was just tall enough to clear the horse's back, and I was on it. Since there was no way I could stop him, I began to think what to do. If I jumped off, I would certainly be hurt. Besides, it was a long way to the ground. By this time, we were near the door, and the horse was not going to stop. Instinct told me to lie down, which I did. My back was scraped slightly, but that was better than being pulled off under the horse's feet. By this time, Mother had reached the scene and helped me to dismount. Of course, I got a scolding and never pulled that trick again.

Another time, on a Sunday afternoon, Dad and Mother hitched two of the horses to a buggy and we went to visit the neighbors. As we were getting ready to go home, I insisted that Dad unhitch the horses so I could show our neighbors how I could ride. Of course, Dad did not honor this ridiculous request and I put on quite a scene, kicking and screaming that I wanted to ride the horse. Now if one of my great grandchildren had done the same, I would have told their mother they were probably tired and hungry and not to punish them. I don't know if my parents had this same philosophy. In fact, I do not remember what happened to me. I just know that I wanted to show the neighbors how I could ride.

Eventually, after much begging and pleading on my part, Dad bought a Shetland Pony for me. He paid $10.00 for the little horse, and I named him Duffy. He was red with a blond mane. Duffy's little legs were too short to go very fast, and he was not very exciting. In a year or two, I had outgrown Duffy, and he was sold to a neighbor for his children to ride. I then had to resort to riding Mabel as I felt I had to go on horseback to round up the cows in the evening. It would have been unheard of to walk the short distance to the pasture where the cows grazed.

One day, Dad again came home from a sale with a pretty little filly that I could use as a riding horse. He had also bought a new bridle and saddle for her. I was in seventh heaven and named her Dixie. Dixie and I spent many happy hours together. She was wonderful help in herding the cows into the lane for the last leg of their evening journey to be milked. Sometimes, I was allowed to ride Dixie to school, but there was really no place to tether her for the day, so I gave up that practice. Dixie and I spent many Sunday afternoons riding over country roads. Often, some of the neighbor children joined us. What good times we had! But all good things must come to an end. I was sent off to Ottumwa to attend High School, and as a teenager, other interests took precedence over my love for horses.

THE FLYING MELINDA
by
Mary Anne Early

May 1959 found, Dwight, Jim, Mary, and me living in our new house. It wasn't a new house. In fact, the three story ten room was over 100 years old. A smaller five room house was located on the corner of the property. This house would be Jim and Kay's after they would marry in September. Dwight, Jim, and I loved the rural location, but Mary would have preferred to live with neighbors nearby. She soon realized her friends loved to spend the weekend in the country.

The big challenge too was the beautiful green grass that covered approximately four acres. Our budget after the move did not allow the purchases of the new model Gravely mower, so it was off to the Rent-All for a mower.

Mowing had not been part of my education on our ranch in Kansas. The task had looked simple enough when a worker mowed inside the circular driveway in front of our house. The least expensive mower seemed appropriate for our purposes. It was a push mower like the one we used on our ranch. When Jim unloaded the mower, he realized the power would come from his efforts. It was going to be impossible to cut all four acres in a single day.

Jim had a bright idea. "I'll get my motorcycle and pull it. All you have to do is guide the mower." Easy enough! Jim backed his motorcycle in place, tied it to the front part of the mower, and told me, "Now I'm going to go real slow."

Kay was standing on the porch watching us idiots getting ready to take off. The motorcycle made its usual abnormally loud noise, "Ready, Mom?" asked Jim. "Yes," I replied, from behind him. We took off. Instead of mowing, my hands clung to the mowers handle, but my feet were in the air. I glanced at Kay, who was doubled up with laughter. Jim turned back and stopped the forward motion. We, too, were convulsing with laughter, but finally recovered from the first attempt.

Jim instructed me another time. "Mom, I'm going to try it again. I'll go real, real slow this time." "Real, real slow" resulted in a repeat of the same scenario. We were

finally convinced that Jim would have to push the mower, now dubbed "The Flying Melinda." Jim and Kay had had a hearty laugh and decided their entertainment was worth my poor choice.

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MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH CHARGE CREDIT
by
Marie Louise LaCaze

During the 30's and early 40's, small farming communities in Louisiana suffered great financial depression. This was very evident in Church Point. Both landowners and tenant farmers experienced serious difficulties.

The bank where Daddy had been the cashier failed. Of the farms which he owned, there were some which he could no longer afford to maintain. His solution was to dispose of some of the land. His philosophy was, "When your ship is sinking the only solution is to bail out." And bail out he did.

Mama told me that one of the first things Daddy did was to let go of his farm in Pointe Noir on which he had a rice-growing operation. Because of the irrigation required, rice was a very expensive crop to grow. He probably sold it for little or nothing.

Since we had a large house situated near the school, Mama offered room and board to teachers. She explained to me that this had been her way to put food on the table.

Tenant farmers lived on Daddy's small farms. Among the things that they were provided was a house, a barn, and a water well. Cotton was the main crop. It was planted and cultivated by the farmer, his wife, and children. To prepare the land for planting, the farmer used a plow drawn by a mule. The weeding was done with a hoe and the cotton picked by hand. The tenant farmers had a garden to provide themselves with vegetables. One or two cows supplied them with milk. Chickens were a good source of food and eggs. Pigs provided them with meat and lard. Corn was grown to make cornmeal and feed for the cows and mules.

From grocery stores, the tenant farmers needed sugar, coffee, and flour. Most of the families needed kerosene for cooking. By summer, any lard that had been rendered from pork was either rancid or exhausted. This created a need for vegetable oil or an item similar to Crisco for cooking.

Daddy had an arrangement with some of the grocers to advance credit to his tenants. He assumed responsibility if they would not be able to meet their indebtedness.

On this very hot summer day, Mama and Daddy had driven out of town for the day. I was about thirteen years old and had remained at home with Memére. About four o'clock in the afternoon there was a knock at the front door. Mr. Ozemé Daigle, a tenant farmer, had come to see Daddy. He became visibly upset when he found out that Daddy was not at home. He told me that he left his work in the cotton field to come to town to get a few groceries. Mr. Dewey Harmon, the owner of the grocery store where he dealt required a note from Daddy before he would sell groceries to him. I immediately felt sorry for Mr. Ozemé. My compassion was aroused. I had no doubt in my mind that Daddy would want him to be helped.

At thirteen, I was presumptuous enough to telephone Mr. Dewey Harmon and relate the situation. I asked him if he would help Mr. Ozemé. He readily assented, but told me I would have to send him a note. In retrospect, I wonder how many of the town's businessmen would have responded to a request made by a child in behalf of a tenant farmer.

I then asked Mr. Ozemé to tell me what he needed. Though he could not read and write, like most of the Cajun farmers of the day, he could calculate simple math in his head. He told me that he could get by with 15 cents worth of coffee (green coffee that required parching was 15 cents a pound), a 5-pound sack of flour, a pack of Bull Durham tobacco, and some cigarette papers. He told me that this would amount to seventy-five cents. I wrote the note and he proceeded to Main Street to make his purchases.

When Daddy returned, I told him, "Daddy, I don't know if I did the right thing, but I took it upon myself to try to help Mr. Ozemé." Daddy smiled. I think that he was amused at the thought of my trying to help a farmer. He listened as I told my story. Then he said, "I approve of what you did, but you should have authorized the purchase of more than that. He is going to have to return to town in a day or two to make more purchases." He patted my back and added, "You were right to try to help him."

That was my first and last attempt to authorize credit. Some years after that, Daddy opened a grocery store near our home. It served as a neighborhood grocery and as a commissary for his tenant farmers.

I often worked in the store and came to learn much about the needs and struggles of farm families in the 30's and early 40's.

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THE GOOD SOLDIER
by
Jacob M. Valentine, Jr.

I was drafted into the U. S. Army on 23 April 1941. I had been working for the J.I. Case Tractor Works in Racine, Wisconsin, and except for the money, I hated my job which was stock chasing. I ran around the Tractor Works finding parts to be used on the line. I quit my job, and then knowing I soon would be drafted, I spent a lot of time traveling around scenic sites of Wisconsin with Bob Bingham and my cousin Roger Sorensen. I took my first airplane ride in a small Cub equipped with skis over the Dells of the Wisconsin River, an exciting ride, after a bumpy takeoff in the snow covered air field. We climbed the East Wall of the Devils Lake Bluff.

After induction I went to Milwaukee Examination Center where I was sworn in. Then our group was sent to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. At Camp Grant we were given our uniforms and our first shot. We also took a comprehensive "intelligence test." (I scored 117). The Army had another name for the test. There were three parts: vocabulary, a set of piled blocks with pieces missing that you had to determine how many were missing if the blocks were in a square, and an arithmetic test. I did very good on the vocabulary; fair on arithmetic, and poor on the blocks.

The next day we boarded a train for Camp Livingston, located near Pineville, northeast of Alexandria, Louisiana. Along the way I met Ben Stewart, who became one of my best friends. My diary written on the train reads: *Going thru Ark now. Very interesting country. Lots of negro hovels scattered about. Seem very friendly. Very flat topography. Arrived at Camp Livingston 4:00 p.m.* My next entry reads: *28 April, Camp Livingston. Army life began this morning. Drilled, School of the Soldier, Courtesy and Discipline, Organization. The sun is pretty hot and some of the boys are burning. Army Life is now in earnest.*

We were assigned to the 129 Field Artillery, 32nd Division. The 32nd Division had been a National Guard outfit that had been "federalized" in October 1940. There were about 200 draftees, as we called ourselves, mostly from Racine, that were enrolled in a training battalion. We were taught the rudiments of soldiering, marching, artillery, manual of arms, hygiene, and any number of arcane subjects by a cadre of officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs). I had spent nine months in the

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), so I was familiar with much of the army routine, such as kitchen police (KP), bed making, shoe shining, all the jobs that are of magnified importance to the army's ruling classes. I did my jobs as they came up but made myself as inconspicuous as possible. Ben and I would sneak off to the Service Club whenever we could get away with it.

It was "Rise and Shine" before the sun was up with a quick shower and shave before breakfast. I came adept at marching and learned to give commands to my squad. We marched on the parade grounds, stood many inspections, and hiked the camp roads and fields that surrounded the camp. I soon made friends with Beeler Badten, Dennis Tatman, and Carl Ameian. My diary notes constantly mention the heat, but also remark on the cool breeze coming from the Gulf. Ben Stewart and I went to the canteen everyday where I drank pop and ate ice cream and candy. I always hungered for sweets. It rained every day. We went on an eight mile hike with field packs and pitched practice pup tents on 9 May, a very hot day. Much of the training weeks were spent in close order drill, lectures, and hikes.

We discovered a great place to swim at Fishville northeast of Camp Livingston. The natives called it "the laziest town in the world." Fishville was a drab little resort town with a bowling alley and about twenty small cottages of mixed pedigrees. A rope hung from a tree leaning over the creek that beckoned kids and us to swing out and plunge into the water. En route to Fishville, on a Sunday, we'd walk the 9-10 miles on country roads. As befitted sun-worshiping Yankees, we took our shirts off. For some reason this offended the old biddies coming from church. They'd holler, "Put your shirts on!" I don't remember what we retorted, but being in an exotic country we were polite. We'd heard of lynchings of innocents down here. And stories of chain gangs were not too far removed.

The Louisiana maneuvers were the next step in my army experience. The wire crew I was with laid wire along the country roads around Leesville. I was struck by the abject poverty of the people living in their tumbledown houses with their porches crowded with old washing machines and couches. We rarely saw a man. Perhaps he was behind the shacks working in the fields, or like us, had been drafted into the Service. The tired faces of the women were gaunt, lined, and yellow, not with age but with work and pellagra. The women never smiled or waved, but just looked at us as if we were from some strange place.

On 3 June 1941 one phase of the maneuvers was completed. The next day I was paid $25.00. After taking $4.00 for insurance and $6.00 for canteen books, I had about $15.00 left. Diary: *On 5 June we went to Monroe for a pleasure trip. Kids, women waved us all the way—very friendly. Pitched tents behind Merrill High School. Held a formal retreat. Speech by mayor. Barbecue. Went swimming in a wonderful pool. Walked around town with Ben, Ralph Balzer, and George. Talked with several girls.*

We spent most of a year on the Louisiana maneuvers. On the first night of the maneuvers, I discovered that the sandy soil of central Louisiana was quite uncomfortable for sleeping. So the first time we had a break I went into Monkey (Montgomery) Wards and bought a three-quarter length air mattress, one of my best purchases ever. I carried it for the next three years until it rotted so much that I had to blow it up many times during the night. I would wake up when my body hit the ground. But it served me well. Whenever there was a delay on the road, I'd throw it down and take a nap.

On 16 June I boxed with Beeler Badten and Hank Duda, the Division Boxing Champ. Ben Stewart in jest called him, "Canvasback." I wrote in my diary that I had hurt my ear from a round house blow from Hank. A couple days later I took a dive into a bayou out in the woods. On 26 June I woke up with an earache. From 27 June through 9 July I was in the hospital with a swollen jaw and a bad ear infection. I was in and out of the EENT (Eye, Ear, Nose, and Throat) clinic for most of July. The treatment was mainly an infusion of alcohol in my ear. Apparently sulfanilamide was not yet in general use. That infection has bothered me throughout my life. Nearly every time I went swimming in a pool I would get reinfected.

Life in camp was quite uneventful. Chiggers, or red bugs, as we called them, were bad in mid-July 1941. My ear infection would flare up, and I'd have to go to the clinic. Carl Ameian and I would go to Alexandria nearly every weekend to go to the movies. We often bought a couple pints of whiskey and went down to the Red River levee to drink and talk. Or we'd wander through the bars drinking our own booze. During the days I often had KP or latrine orderly. I read You Can't go Home Again by Thomas Wolfe. Ben Stewart's girlfriend, Lois Wirsom, from Racine, visited him. He married her after the war. On 21 July, I wrote in my diary that *It rained like hell. Cold!* A strange weather report for July in Louisiana.

On 22 July we went out in the field where we donned gas masks; and went into a tent where we smelled several poisonous gases. On 25 July we had a long weekend in New Orleans. Diary: *25 July 1941. Left in aft. for New Orleans. Long ride in trucks. Arrived 11:00. Ben and I rode the roller coaster at Pontchartrain Beach. Hitch hiked, street car into town. Walked down Canal to River. Back to the Recreation Center at Beach. 26 July. New Orleans. Went on tour (car) with a Catholic Women's Association. Went all over town. Beautiful town. Saw: Metairie Cemetery, Tulane, Loyola, Stadium. Went through Huey Long's home. French Quarter. Went on walking tour through the French Quarter with Govt. Guide (WPA). Crossed River on ferry to Algiers. Saw interned Norwegian and Italian ships. 27 July. New Orleans. Swam in morning at Lake Pontchartrain Beach. Wonderful water.... Warm! Left for camp.*

During the last days of July and early August, we were on alerts, went on "regimental police," and out to the pistol range. Read Audubon's America by John Culross Beattie. In August we went on maneuvers for a couple days where we laid wire near Leesville. There wasn't much going on: we cleaned our equipment and I got a quick notice as an assistant driver to go to Camp Shelby to transport troops to maneuver areas.

On 10 August went into Hattiesburg, which I called a "dead town." A day or two later we headed back but stopped at Baton Rouge, a "nice town." We went to the top of the Capitol. On the 13th we were back on maneuvers. On 14 August my diary read: *Bivouac area near Longville, La. Today is Sunday. We're almost ready to move out. The problem began last night 12:00. Life has been easy. Exercises in the morning. Then lectures for an hour or so. Or perhaps we clean guns or pack equip. Then, the afternoon has been off. Had a talk by the General Fish, commander of the 32nd Division. The morale is very down. This is because of the 18th month extension. I met "Shorty" Moriarity with whom I was in the C's. He was drafted in April and now has been transferred to Reg. HQ. My air mattress is pretty good, a life saver, in fact. Sleeping on the ground is hell.*

When the Louisiana maneuvers were over we loaded our trucks and drove to North Carolina to participate in the maneuvers there. By this time it was fall in the piney uplands of the Carolinas. When the Louisiana and Carolina maneuvers were over, we loaded our trucks with all our equipment and clothes and headed for Fort Devens, Massachusetts, ready to go to Italy where the Allies were fighting the

Germans. Our route took us through Mississippi, Alabama, North and South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D. C., where I hugged the cold columns of the darkened Nation's Capitol. It seemed the thing to do.

We drove only about 200 miles per day, stopping at army camps. We often were able to go into towns to view the sights. Along the highway near Selma, Alabama, I saw negroes in chains, a real chain gang. I knew about them from reading I was a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang written by a white Jewish man who was arrested as a vagrant but managed to escape from the clutches of the Law. We stayed at Fort Devens for about a month getting clothes and equipment suitable for the cold climate of Italy. We saw snow, and I got in to Boston where I searched for a restaurant that served the famous Boston baked beans. That night I visited the dives and dance halls of Scollay Square.

Our trip to Italy was not to be. Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs were concerned that the Japanese might invade Australia. In fact, we were on board ship while the Coral Sea Battle was in progress. We boarded a train that took us to Chicago and on through Ogden, Utah, and into the Great American Desert. Outside of Winnemuca, Nevada, the train stopped and we were all ordered out on the desert to exercise for an hour.

An exciting experience was the train ride down through the Feather River Canyon, past the California gold fields, down along Sacramento River to the fabulous San Francisco. In Frisco we lived in the empty Cow Palace where the redolence of rotten ice cream still permeated the air. I went into Frisco several times to visit the Coit Tower, Fishermen's Wharf, where I ate Pacific crabs and fish. Joe DiMaggio's father's restaurant was a famous and popular landmark along the Wharf, but I couldn't afford that luxury. We felt minor earthquakes, but nothing that shook the building. From Frisco we sailed on the USS Monterey to Adelaide, Australia, in April 1942. The diary that recounted this trip was lost. My next account began 1 August 1942.

On 1 August, I wrote that someone had stole my musette bag that held 30 pounds, my knives, etc. In my entry on 27-28 July 1943, Kagaru-Flinders, Australia, I wrote that we were on a field problem and I was acting as the wire chief. Diary: *Beckman and Todd Winkler caught a koala bear in back of camp while we were out in the field. He scratched Todd when he tried to pick him up. They knocked him out of the tree and ran him down. He'll bite if provoked.*

During 29 July-1 August 1943, we were in and out in the field. We had inspections every other day. I tried to learn how to use climber spikes from Carl Ball who had worked for Bell Telephone. I took hikes alone and tried to learn how to use the compass and read maps. It was winter in Australia. Diary: *It's pretty nice sleeping in a pup tent with a Coleman-type lamp throwing off heat. Tatman and I are sleeping in the same tent.*

On 2 August we were out in the field and at Camp Cable preparing for a move to Newcastle for amphibious training. I wrote that *it rained, making life miserable.* On 9 August we headed for Newcastle. *Carl Bowman and I are driving a weapons carrier.*

Diary: *Some pretty country but most of it is uninhabited. Went thru the mountains. Stayed at Tenterfield in pup tents. Did not go to town. Carl and I take turns driving every 2 hours. I'm getting better at driving. 10 August. Left Tenterfield. Went thru Glen Innes, Armidald. Some nice country. Slept in an Aussie barracks. John, Krafty, and I went down in the camp, saw a show. 11 August, 1943. From Tampworth thru Murrundi to Greta. Stayed at Aussie AA camp. 12 August: Went thru Maitland and New Castle. Crossed on the ferry. Arrived at Camp Bunanda at Nelson's Bay. Beautiful country. Swell Beach. Climbed the hill behind camp. You can see for miles overlooking the bay and the ocean.*

13 August, Nelson's Bay. We're fixing up the camp. Moved into Doyle's tent with John Hintz, Francis Cronin, Eddie Suchosky, Kurt Hofmeister, and Phil Doyle. We've got a gas lamp, stove, and radio, so it's very comfortable. The next day I went for a walk along to beach. Couldn't beat it. Saw some Aussie fishermen pull up a long seine. They caught thousands of small fish like shiners. They caught a 2 foot shovel nosed shark, a foot long blowfish (porcupine fish). He blew up like a football with big spines all over. He grunts and puffs when fully distended. The Aussie's would roll him around showing him puff up. There were also a number of small garfish, several bream, and 2 squid.

The next day, a Sunday, I went for a walk with John. Walked along the rocks where there were anemones—two types, a yellow black kind and the other black purple. With long spines. There's a kind of shellfish called sea squirts by the Aussies. When you step on it, it squirts water like geyser. A fisherman from Malta showed me how they eat the anemones. He cut it in half and scraped some yellow eggs. He said