Excerpts from

Our Pages Of Life

Volume 25a—Tuesday Morning Class/Spring 2000

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Each semester's end I search my palette for words to say about my students and their stories, words that go deeper than Webster's definitions, words that fly off the page to land in the heart of our readers. I search for words that say more than "Thank you," more than "This is good stuff," more than "You've got to read this!" I fail every time. Maybe my failure to say what I want to say paves the way to say what I mean. And I guess what I mean to say this time around is simply: "Thank you!" "These stories are good stuff!" "You've got to read them!"

Joan Stear
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Spring 2000

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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 Louisiana at Lafayette
for their continued support of our efforts to write for the generations to come.
To my students—really, my teachers—thanks.

FRONT COVER: *(clockwise, beginning at top right corner)* Johnnie Kocurek; Jim Jennings, on right, with brother Eddie; Kitty Kelley's aunts; Myrtle Schiller; Jacqueline Fryns with siblings; Warren & Betty Tripp; *(bottom center)* Betty Shoemaker, on far right, with friends; *(top center)* the Dupre sisters of Opelousas, aunts & mother of Adele Comeaux; Louis Duhon and sister Agnes (Bea Murphy's father & aunt); John Quincy Lee

LIFE WRITING CLASS
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Spring 2000 • Tuesday Morning Session

Seated, left to right: **Jacqueline Frynes; Betty Shoemaker; Myrtle Schiller; Stanley F. Davis; Johnnie Kocurek**
Standing, left to right: **Woodson Hopkins; Bea Murphy; Betty Tripp; John Townsend; John Quincy Lee; Kitty Kelley; James M. Jennings Jr.; Adele Comeaux; Versie L. Foti; Joe Glorioso; Curney Dronet; Joan Stear, Instructor**
(*Missing from photo*: Dotty Burleigh)

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THE CIRCUS AND THE ELEMENTS

by

James M. Jennings, Jr.

I looked forward to that night. I was old enough, a four- or five-year-old grown up, to go to the circus. Aunt Mary and Uncle Modoc were taking me to see the animals and clowns that I had admired in my picture books. The Ringling Brothers-Barnum and Bailey, Greatest Show On Earth had arrived on their special train that morning and set up tents on the vacant Lakefront Area of New Orleans.

We drove to the open field in Uncle's big black Packard touring sedan in the early evening twilight. I remember his car because the side windows had curtains of a black oilcloth material with viewing panels of clear, flexible plastic. During dry weather, the curtains were manually rolled up and secured with stout cloth straps sewn into the underside of the car's roof.

Summer heat lightening flickered across the still visible horizon as we drove, but the thunderclaps, which scared me, were almost too far away to be heard. After Uncle parked the car, we walked a long distance across a newly mown field and finally entered the huge tent. Although I heard distant thunder, the noise was easy for me to ignore in the excitement of the circus.

The acts were thrilling. Toward the end of the show, elephants pranced in one ring and in a second ring, lions and tigers performed in a huge cage. I became uncomfortable seeing flashes of lightening through the translucent top of the canvas tent. Then crashing, roaring thunder seemed almost inside with us. Gusts of wind whipped the tent sidewalls and tore loose the ropes holding them to stakes driven into the ground. The elephants commenced trumpeting at the sight and sound of the flapping sidewalls while the big cats roared nervously and prowled about their cage. When the felines started jumping up on and off the perches, refusing to obey their handler's commands, the trainers fled out of the cage to safety.

When my Uncle recognized the performer's concern, he stood up. "Come on! Let's go! We're getting out of here." We rushed for the entrance with a lot

of other people. That scared me. Lightening, thunder, bellowing animals, and nervous adults set me to crying. Uncle hurried to get our car and managed to drive almost to the tent entrance where Auntie and I waited. We scurried through the rain and mud into the open car. Rain poured through all the windows at once, it seemed. While both adults struggled to untie and lower the window curtains, I cried uncontrollably and buried my face in Auntie's lap. Finally, we started for home, and as we distanced ourselves from the thunderstorm, I calmed down and sobbed my fear and fright away.

I forgot about this experience until my children came along. Then, I got into the habit of taking each one at the proper age, in my opinion, to sit with me on a porch or in the carport during a thunderstorm to watch the lightening and feel the blowing rain and mist. I enjoyed the togetherness of those times, and I hope all five of our children did also. I'm sure that none are unnaturally afraid of the noise of thunder or the sight of lightening anymore.

Last year, my youngest daughter, Virginia, sent a Father's Day card to me. On it she listed a number of lessons for which she thanked me. Among them, she wrote, "Thank you for teaching me...to see the beauty in approaching, or far off, lightening. I still remember sitting with you on the front porch of our house on Shady Oaks Drive and watching."

We moved away from the Shady Oaks address 34 years ago, so Virginia has harbored that pleasant memory a long time. I don't think I ever told her about that little boy's fright at the circus, but now she knows why she sat on the front porch with me watching lightening and feeling rain and mist drift over her face.

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THE HOLLOW
by
John Townsend

I would normally describe a hollow as a dip or shallow bowl shape in the land. This hollow, however, was not such, but only an unusual open area in dense timber located on the northwest edge of Cross Lake, a few minutes out of Shreveport. It was one of our favorite places to travel to for bank fishing and picnicking.

It was discovered by accident while fishing with my Daddy. I was somewhere around 10 years of age, paddling the boat while he fly fished. Daddy began catching large blue gill and chinquapin bream just about as fast as the fly bait touched the surface of the water. Once in awhile he would hang a crappie or a two or three pound bass.

Since there was an opening where he could work his fly rod, he let me tie up and start fishing with a cane pole. Almost before the worm sank below the surface of the water I hooked a big crappie. I let out a yell. Daddy laughed, "Hoo, there. You probably scared all the fish off with that yell."

Grinning, I said nothing while I concentrated getting the hook out of my fish's mouth, then on the stringer. The fish were still there. I caught a half dozen more before they quit biting.

Daddy spoke, "Let's ease in to the bank and eat our sandwiches in the shade."

"Good, I'm hungry," I replied.

So it was we found the 'Hollow.' Everywhere were trees except for a clearing at water's edge which was almost a 30 foot circle of open area with a carpet of green mixed with the leaves of the prior fall.

While I ate my second butter and mayhaw jelly sandwich, Daddy walked off into the woods, following what seemed to be an old track. A few minutes

later he returned. I had gotten my pole from the boat and found an open area to drop my bait in the water. In short order I caught two or three fish.

Daddy spoke, startling me, "This will be a nice place to bring your Mama and brothers to spend the day. I think I found a way in here." A couple of hours later we had returned the boat to the camp and were on our way home.

About three weeks later Daddy asked Mama to pack up some food for a picnic, saying that he had found a new place on Cross Lake to bank fish. There had been rain a day or two before our excursion, so when we left the narrow blacktopped Mooringsport road, I expected our old Model B Ford to bog down. Daddy, however, was a master at driving in such conditions, and even though the car slithered and sometimes almost turned sideways on the non-existent road, we soon found ourselves driving into the hollow. He turned the car to face outward before he stopped.

We three older boys, Bubba, Dick, and me, scrambled to get our fishing poles, while baby Pete continued to sleep. Daddy helped Bubba, and Dick find a spot to fish, in a couple of instances using a small hatchet to cut down some saplings to make an opening.

I walked a few yards away and after throwing a chunk of wood to scare away a big water moccasin, I dropped my baited hook into the water. The water boiled and in a minute I was wrestling a nice size blue channel cat onto the bank. I yelled for Daddy after I'd been stung for my efforts to dislodge the hook from the fish's mouth. Daddy commented, "This one will fry up nicely."

After fishing for a few minutes with no luck I moved to another location and immediately began catching fish. Back at the clearing I could hear Bubba, and Dick speaking excitedly and knew that they were also catching fish.

At some point I realized that I smelled frying fish, then a minute or two later heard Mama say, "All right you men we have hot food." I propped my pole in the fork of a nearby sapling and ran to the hollow. Beside the fish, were fried potatoes, hush puppies, and baked beans along with orange juice for us boys, and hot coffee or tea for the adults.

About 30 minutes later I was back at my fishing spot and found my pole bowed. Only the fact that the butt of the pole had lodged under a branch of a second sapling prevented the pole from being dragged off into the lake.

On the hook I found another catfish even larger than my first. "Daddy!" I yelled. "I have a big one!"

In a few minutes he had the fish off of the hook, and I went back to fishing.
I don't recall how much longer we remained at the hollow, but the mosquitos began to get bad and I heard Daddy say, "Okay, boys, let's get packed up."

We made five or six more trips into the hollow before the fall, and in the next three or four years it was our favorite place for an outing.

During WWII the area became over fished by others who had found the place. Some of them left their trash so it became a haven for even more varmints, not to mention mosquitos.

When our bites were from the bugs and not the fish, we stopped going there but I still remember the hollow as a favorite place in my youth.

ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES
by
Bea Murphy

I have a certain memory that I cherish. I know it happened, but it still seems like a dream. I don't know how old I was at the time, but I must have been around five or six.

In my mind, I can see Daddy, Mama, Vivian, Jeanne, and myself driving along in Dad's car. Daddy is singing "I Get The Blues When It Rains." I'm almost sure we were going to Gromom's farm near Scott. Her house was one of our favorite places to go.

I'm trying to remember the car. It was not a big car, probably a Ford. Later on Daddy owned a big black Packard. He loved cars. He started driving when he was twelve. His family owned the first car in Lafayette Parish, a Dodge auto.

Daddy drove to California when he was sixteen in 1915. When he told me that story I asked him about the roads. He said "most of the way there were just paths."

I remember a picture of Daddy taken in California with a large redwood tree that was cut through the center that a car could drive through. I do not know what has become of this picture.

Daddy also loved to sing. My sister Jewell told me he told her he had been a street singer in Lafayette. If I had known that I would have questioned him. I'm sorry I didn't.

POST WORLD WAR II: MY TRAPPING EXPERIENCE
by
Curney Dronet

I was released from active duty to the Army Air Corp Reserve on October 12, 1945, two months after Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces. Rapid demobilization began immediately after the surrender. A point system was devised to ensure rapid and fair release of individual servicemen, taking into consideration, time spent in service, combat duty and the number of dependents. I accumulated fifty-two points, primarily, because of my three dependents, your mother, Phyllis and Sonny, and being state side, stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base, I was one of the first to be processed out.

Your mother had a small apartment in your Aunt Inez's house, which was conveniently located next to Grandpa LeBlanc's home. Upon arriving in Erath, I immediately went to work with Grandpa Joe in construction. However, sugarcane season was slowly getting underway, and as it had been the case since the war started, Erath Sugar Company was hard pressed for a "Sugar Chemist." Since I had some experience in the laboratory, I was immediately employed, not at twenty-five cents an hour they paid me in 1942, but at a nifty fifty cents an hour for a twelve hour shift. I assumed full responsibility for the laboratory, including the reports, and supervised several employees who did bench work, and gathered samples.

"Grinding," as it was always referred to, went real well that year. The weather was ideal for harvest, the farmers had a profitable year, the price of sugar was high, and Erath Sugar Company enjoyed a great season, completing the grinding by late December, well before the icy weather set in.

Mom and Dad, in the meantime, were trapping muskrats at Johnson's Bayou with John Paul Crain. I had met Mr. Crain the year before on one of my required cross country flights from Midland Air Force Base to Beaumont, Texas. Dad had been trapping with John Paul for the past several years and was really a supervisor for the area. Although the season was well advanced, he suggested that if I was inclined to this type of work, I was welcome to come in and share

the work load with Dad. The catch was good that year, and the price of the skins was excellent, selling about two dollars for a top "pelt."

Dad came to Erath on Christmas Day and invited me to join him, with the understanding that he would provide the traps, the boat and all the equipment and supplies that were necessary. Irene agreed, and preparation began immediately. All I needed were two pairs of hip boots, a slicker suit, and a razor sharp knife which was used to skin the muskrat. The slicker pants, incidentally, were worn daily because the marsh was under six to twelve inches of water, and as you ran your trap lines, there was always the chance that you might step into an alligator hole. The slicker pants were worn over the hip boots and would prevent the water from flooding your boots.

Irene and I were provided with a one room apartment in the community camp, which was shared by seven trappers. I was the only trapper with small children, Phyllis, three, and Sonny only six months old. The camp was accessible by car, conveniently located in a producing oil field, which provided the camp with natural gas. Interestingly, natural gas was used for cooking, but more importantly, it provided the heat to dry and cure the pelts. Muskrat pelts, or any fur animal pelts, must be properly cured and damage free in order to grade as "tops" and claim the best price.

I enjoyed my first season as a trapper. Be assured, however, that the job is not glamorous, by any means, but a dirty, back-breaking bit of labor from day-break to late afternoon. Trappers didn't come back for lunch, but ate a sandwich, usually on the run, and on returning to the camp, had to wash and dry the pelts, then fit them on the metal mold to cure the skin to preserve and retain a good quality fur. The day's work when the catch was good, seventy-five to one-hundred pelts, usually ended by late evening.

My trap line was located about two miles from the camp, and extended to the Sabine River, a distance of three miles more or less, then ran a return line to the point of origin, and, of course, to the boat. When trapping muskrat, you usually are provided with several hundred acres of marshland, populated, with numerous muskrat houses which provides shelter for muskrat families of up to fifteen or twenty. Initially you lay your trap lines on the outer perimeter, working towards the center of your plot, and hope to catch the large mature

muskrats, which produce the prized pelts. When you have depleted the mature muskrats, and this you realize when your catch provides small animals, you then move the line towards the center.

Trapping muskrats, minks, and an occasional otter is not the only fun in the marsh, although it is the primary focus of the season. If you are a duck hunter, the opportunities to provide the table with wild life are always there. On slow catch days, I would carry my shotgun at ready, until I bagged two or three mallard hens or drakes. On many occasions, I would return early, eat a late lunch and go off again with a glean in my eyes for more ducks. I was the youngest trapper, so I would provide the others with their share of wild ducks. You may wonder why, if hunting is so much fun, didn't the other trappers do some hunting? The others were older, and as I said before, "trapping is tough, tiresome work."

I must tell you about my experience with the "Otters." I went duck hunting, again, late one afternoon. I used the "flat," a small boat that could easily negotiate the "rigoléts." Incidentally, (rigoléts are narrow ditches, about six feet wide, that are dug through the marsh which permits access where no canals are located.) I was parked in an area, well camouflaged, waiting for the ducks to come in for their evening roost. All of a sudden, up pops a furry critter, about twenty feet from the boat. I was startled! Then several others surrounded the boat, barking loudly. I was dumbfounded. Frankly I was scared. I raised my gun and emptied the chamber. I knew I had scored a hit, but the minute the shot was fired, the critters, the otters, dove and disappeared. The next day, Mr. Crain found one dead otter in a rigolét. It brought $30, a real profitable afternoon for someone who didn't know what the animal was. Yes, I did bring home a bag of ducks that day, about ten as I remember.

My trapping experience didn't end with the 1946 season. Irene and I were back in the marsh the following year, of course, after completing the season at the "sugar mill." My two trapping seasons netted over $7000 dollars, the total cost of our new home which my father, Joe, built for us on Broadway, following our first trapping season.

THE CORNER GROCERY STORE
by
Kitty Kelley

A long, long time ago we lived on Clinton Street. Around the corner from us was a small store named Gainiere's. It was a *small* store. There was no great freezer filled with exotic frozen desserts or frozen TV dinners. There were no such things as freezers and no such thing as TV, hence, no frozen TV dinners. There was no long shelf of fresh vegetables such as we have today. There were no exotic fruits such as kiwis or mangoes or limes. Apples, citrus fruit, and a bunch of bananas hanging from the ceiling limited our selection, but added to a special bouquet which made shopping a pleasure.

The counter where the cash register was located was not very long. Along the front edge of the counter were several large glass jars filled with jaw-breakers, peppermint candy canes, and a few other candies. Our favorites were what we called "toofers," meaning two for a nickel.

One day my sister, Chat, my cousin Ruth, and I went to Gainierre's to spend our nickels. (We never had quarters or dollars.) As we came out of the store we were quite excited to see an organ grinder and his monkey approaching. The man looked old to us, but I suspect he was about forty. He was short, dark, and quite handsome. He spoke English with a heavy Italian accent. While he played the organ the monkey danced. When the music stopped the monkey came to us with a tin cup begging for money. We had spent all our money in the store so our impromptu concert ended.

I thought surely I'd never see an organ grinder again, and as far as I know, he was the last one to come to Lafayette. I did, however, see another one, many years later in California at Fisherman's Wharf. (This later one was a hippy who just played for fun—he certainly wasn't getting rich that way).

Through the years, one by one, our small grocery stores have been forced out of business by large super markets which have none of the neighborliness of our corner groceries. Today, Tony's, Gainierre's, Thompson's, and Veron's are all gone.

The last such corner grocer I dealt with was forty-five years ago in Angelica, New York. Harris's was a typical little store. As I talked to Harris, his five-year-old son pushed my four-year-old, Steve, who landed on top of a glass-topped box of crackers. Steve crashed through the glass, shattering it, and smashing through several layers of crackers. Thank goodness for blue jeans. Steve wasn't cut at all.

I miss the corner grocery store where the bananas hung from the ceiling and the smell of delicious apples lured us in and the grocer knew everybody by name.

WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN
by
Johnnie Kocurek

The "Visitors" came to Hot Springs, for the hot mineral baths, to get massages, to eat fine food, to enjoy Hollywood produced stage shows in exclusive, expensive night clubs, to climb the foot hills of the Ozark Mountains, and to drink hot mineral water from the natural springs. And they came to gamble at the Oaklawn Race Track and wide open casinos, and to buy gold and Hot Springs diamonds, and to get ripped off at the auction houses on Central Avenue.

In 1944, a year before the end of World War II, Hot Springs, Arkansas, was prosperous, crowded and corrupt. The climate was most often pleasant during the tourist season which lasted from February until June. Each year more than 5,000 people from northern states brought their dollars into a small town, were caught up in the corruption, were ripped off and went home without their money. I was a part of the rip off.

Central Avenue, the main street in town and the only corridor between West Mountain and Hot Springs Mountain, sported eight large exclusive auction houses. Bright lights, glittering merchandise, wide open doors and a hawker on the sidewalk enticed customers inside to be seated in velvet cushioned chairs. Each auction house hawker, dressed in dark silk suits, stood on the sidewalk outside the auction house and competed with the neighboring hawker pushing his wares. The auctioneers inside, sold twenty dollar watches for fifty dollars, crystal rings called Hot Springs diamonds, European vases made in China, and many other unauthentic reproductions, ripping off the "visitors." Many of my classmates and I, including Lloyd, a cousin of mine, worked with the fast talking auctioneers as shills.

My friends and I were students in Senior High School and could work any night we wanted for the auctioneers. We entered the auction house from the street, sat in the red velvet chairs, and waited innocently for the auctioneer to give us a shill sign.

His voice boomed, "My friends, I offer to you this painting, taken from a wall in Carmen Miranda's mansion in California. The gold gilded frame alone is worth more than $200.00--the work of art itself is priceless ....a one and only. What is your pleasure? Will someone open the bidding with a mere $75.00 bid?" With the help of an assistant, he lifted the painting into the air. "One and only," he repeated. "Do I hear $75.00?"

From the back of the room came a wee female voice. "$75.00."

"I hear $75.00. She is stealing it. Who will give me $85? Do I hear $85?"

The room was silent. I knew I would get a shill sign. The auctioneer raised his hand. His index and middle finger touching, and his thumb and little finger together, he pointed to me then dropped his hand.

I got the shill sign. "$85.00." I bid, waving my arm.

"I've got $85. Do I hear $95? I got $85 once ...."

"95.00 dollars," the little old lady bid.

" I have $95.00 right over here," pointing to the little lady. "Do I hear $100.00?" There was silence. I waited for a shill sign. None came. The auctioneer had gotten $95.00 for a $25.00, one and only picture. A dozen or so exact pictures sat in a back room to be sold to a new audience in a week or two.

My friends and I had fun working as shills that summer of 1944, and we earned 50 cents just sitting on red velvet chairs in beautiful auction galleries a couple of hours a night, pretending we bought beautiful treasures.

I was fourteen the last summer I was a shill. Ten years later Bob and I took a trip to Hot Springs to visit my grandmother. I saw an article in the paper that my cousin, Lloyd, was conducting a sale at his "auction barn." I had not seen Lloyd in years, so Bob and I went to the sale, amused to see Lloyd auctioning instead of working as a shill. There were no velvet chairs and no

bright lights, only old metal folding chairs with ceiling fans hanging from beams of a dilapidated wooden barn.

Lloyd waved as we walked in the building. He was auctioning a large chest of drawers and sold it to a man sitting near us for $30. He signaled his helper to drag a large cardboard box onto the makeshift stage. The box was filthy, stained with water of unknown sources, cracked open in several places and crushed on two corners.

"Gimme fifty cents sight unseen," Lloyd demanded from his audience. "You'll get the surprise of your life. One half dollar, that's all. Do I hear 50 cents?" I heard a voice behind me yell. "50 cents!" "I got 50 cents!" shouted Lloyd. I looked at Lloyd and thought, "Shame on you."

Lloyd smiled at me and pleaded. "I got fifty. Do I hear seventy five?"

Our eyes met and quick as a flash up came Lloyd's hand and he gave me a shill sign. I shook my head no and he gave me a hard shill sign, pointing his fingers directly at me, holding his hand motionless in mid air.

"75 cents," I reluctantly bid.

"I got 75, and I need a dollar. Just one dollar. Do I hear a dollar? Last chance, going once, going twice, going three times. Sold for 75 cents to number 8!" The gavel hit the podium top as I glanced down at the number 8 auction card in my hand.

Lloyd insisted I pay him the 75 cents. I gave him a quarter, having deducted the 50 cent shill wage I had earned. I didn't want the old box, but Lloyd insisted that it contained something I would really like. Bob and a helper crammed the dirty box in the trunk of our car. When we arrived at Gaw's house, the box was dragged out of the trunk and abandoned in the back yard. The next morning I went outside to view my 25 cent purchase. Strewn over the yard were old, soiled, rotten sheets, blankets and pillows, home, no doubt, to many generations of rats, mice, and roaches. But Lloyd was right. I really liked one thing that was in the box. There, radiating deep blue streams of light into the bright sunshine lay a beautiful large bowl made of cobalt glass.

My career as a shill paid off. Without my shady past in the rip-off business, I probably would have never started collecting cobalt glass.

Marilee and Vic, my dear grandchildren, you have always loved my 500 plus pieces of cobalt. You expect, as I have promised, to inherit the collection some day. I'm sure you will laugh when you are older, telling how your grandmother was a part of the corrupt rip-offs in a gambling town, in the forties, working with hawkers and crooked auctioneers, shilling her way to your inheritance when she was only 14 years old.

A CHILDHOOD EVENT
by
Stanley F. Davis

The story I am about to tell to you is not an event of my childhood, but an event that happened to my Grandmother Davis as a little girl and which she related to me when I was a little boy.

My grandmother's father, Jesse Randolph, was an innkeeper in Salem, West Virginia. The inn was situated on the turnpike, an old time highway stretching from the East Coast to Ohio and further West.

One day when my grandmother was about eight years old, she sat playing with her dolls in the hotel "Tap Room." The only customer of her father's in the room was a weary traveler who had stopped early and was sipping his cool beer (not cold because of no refrigeration).

My grandmother was surprised when the traveler went to the mantel over the fireplace and carefully examined a display of red ripe "Love Apples," which had been placed on the mantel for decoration. At that time "Love Apples" were believed to be extremely poisonous and never eaten. The man then turned to my grandmother and said, "Little girl, please go to the kitchen and get me a sharp knife and some salt."

Being the dutiful daughter of the innkeeper, she immediately went to the kitchen and returned with the knife and the salt. Then to her astonishment, the traveler selected the biggest and ripest "Love Apple," cut it into quarters, sprinkled a little salt on each quarter, and ate them with obvious relish. Horrified, my grandmother expected to see him drop dead at any minute.

When she saw the man return to his chair, take a swig of beer, and resume reading The Salem Herald, she ran to the kitchen to tell her father and mother. Her father listened to her story, then said, "I have been hearing rumors for the last few months in the Tap room that "Love Apples" may not be poisonous and that some people on the East Coast are eating them now with a sprinkle of salt

and cooked like vegetables. If our guest is not dead in the morning, we too, soon may be eating "Love Apples".

How right he was, only now we call the red fruit *tomatoes*.

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EARLIEST REMEMBERED EXPERIENCE
by
Adele Comeaux

Probably my earliest remembered experience is the birth of my youngest brother: the eighth living child, born on the eighth day of the seventh month, July 8,1936. Coincidentally, he was named Octave, after our Uncle Octave, not because Octave means "eight." Octave was a big, beautiful, healthy baby. He had huge brown eyes, a smooth, fair complexion, and gorgeous brown curls. My Aunt Lil said that he was the best argument against birth control: the tenth child born when our mother was forty-four years old.

Uncle Octave was the doctor who delivered my brother Octave at home, which was a common practice then. Hospital births were rare. He loved to deliver babies and he also loved to eat. Because of the latter (loving to eat), he had a tremendous stomach which protruded in front of him as he walked. I had been sleeping in a baby or child's bed in the rear bedroom of our home. I remember seeing my Uncle Octave's stomach (with my Uncle attached) coming through the door from the hall into the bedroom. He walked in and said "You have a new baby brother!" I was only three years old.

Some time after my first memory of Octave's birth, he won an Opelousas baby contest. I was very happy when his number, number ninety-four, was called as a winner!

As he grew, Octave became very attached to our nursemaid, Hattie, and would cry whenever she left. To avoid this scene, Mamma would take Hattie home in our "Model T." Aunt Lil would distract Octave with a little gray rubber mouse as she repeatedly said" Rat-ta-ta-tat, come home." Otherwise, Octave would scream if he realized that Hattie was leaving.

Octave and I played together and were close as we grew up. We still enjoy each other as we do our other siblings.

YOUNG ADULT YEARS
by
Betty Tripp

Warren was discharged from the Navy in April, 1958. We were both 23 years old, Mom and Dad to a two-year-old daughter, and looking forward to happy times together. I was employed at a nursing home in Norwood, Massachusetts, so we had some money coming in while Warren looked for a job. He finally was employed by a Mr. Harkowitz, (better known as Mr. Harkey), who owned a chicken farm and sold the chickens at a store in Dedham, a suburb of Boston. Warren's job was to kill the chickens, clear them out, and then deliver them in Dedham where the chickens were sold either whole or cut up. Warren had done the same kind of work when he was a teenager, so it was a job he was trained for. We had plenty of chicken to eat, a compensation for the pay.

Warren and I were going to have another child and needed more room. Since he did not like the idea of paying money on rent for an apartment, Warren mentioned to Mr. Harkey, who owned a real estate business, that we would like to buy a house. Warren had bought US savings bonds while he was in the Navy, and I had saved some money from my job, so we could use that money as a down payment on a house.

In August, Mr. Harkey said, "Warren, I have a house out in West Medway that would be a good starter house for you and Betty. Why don't you go take a look at it and see what you think about it?"

West Medway is a small town about 30 miles west of Boston. The house was what I called, "out in the country." The house, a small shingled house next to a wooded area, belonged to the people who lived next door. They wanted to sell it as they were aging and couldn't keep it up. There was a living room, small kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. There was a large front and back yard and a garage that would give the children room to play. The heating system was a floor furnace that ran on oil. The house needed some repairs, and the owners agreed to pay for some, and Warren would do some fixing up after we moved in.

We moved into the house in October 1958, just after Susan's second birthday. I had to quit my job at the nursing home as it was too far to drive and we only had one car.

After our move, the first thing I did was find a doctor to care for me during my pregnancy. On the recommendation of Warren's Aunt Flora, who lived in West Medway, I went to a general practitioner who had an office in Medway. He was an older man, seemed very kind, and I liked him. He estimated I would deliver around the middle of March and said I was in good health. The hospital he used was in Natick, a small city about 20 miles from West Medway.

That winter was one I do not want to experience again. It was either raining, snowing, or sleeting, and the yard was very muddy or covered in ice. One evening we were going somewhere, and I slipped on the ice and fell on my side in the mud. Warren was ahead of me getting Susan into the car and had to come back and help me up. I was more upset than hurt and had to go back in and change my clothes. The baby started moving soon after so I knew the pregnancy was doing well. The floor furnace was also a major problem that winter; as some times it did not work, it cost a lot for the oil, and it seemed we were always borrowing money from the bank to pay for repairs to the furnace and pay the fuel bill. I wanted that winter to be over with!

Warren's health insurance with his job did not cover the pregnancy until the 15th of March, so we were praying I would not deliver early. Around the 10th of March, I was having some contractions and thought it was the start of labor, so my sister-in-law Dot Tripp, took Susan home with her to Walpole and I spent the night in the hospital. The next morning my doctor said it was false labor and that I could go home. It was snowing heavily, and Warren was busy taking chickens to Dedham, so Mr. Harkey drove me home over roads covered with snow.

I began having contractions again on the night of the 15th and went to the hospital in the early hours of the morning of the 16th. This time it was "real" labor, and Donna Leslie was born at 6:30pm, March 16, 1959. She weighed 8 lbs., had a little bit of dark "fuzz" on her head, and I was so glad she had finally arrived! She had a skin tag in front of her left ear that had to be tied off with a

suture before we went home. I had not seen Warren at all while I was in labor, so I was glad to see him for a little while that evening. Babies were brought to the rooms for feedings during the day only, and visiting hours were only between 6-8pm.

Two days later I was ready to go home, and Warren went to the business office to check me out. The receptionist said, "We need to have $50.00 as a deposit before your wife and baby can be discharged." Warren said, "I do not have $50.00 right now and will not have it for another week, so I guess you will have to keep both of them." The office manager decided to let us go if we promised to pay the money as soon as possible. So Warren brought Donna and me home, and Dick and Dot Tripp brought Susan home that evening.

Money was very "tight" at this time as we still had to pay for the oil for the furnace, property taxes were about $1000 per year to be paid quarterly, plus the other expenses of living. We survived that summer, but facing another winter with that furnace was something we did not want to do.

Warren and I had several discussions about the pros and cons of staying in that house or selling and moving to Louisiana to be nearer my parents and to get away from the snow, ice, and property taxes. We knew it would be hot in the summer, but, at the time, the weather did not seem to be a deterrent to our "going south."

We sold the house to a couple from Boston who thought it would be "wonderful to live in the country." In September 1959 we packed what we could into a U-Haul trailer and our station wagon and sold the rest. I flew to Louisiana with Susan, who was almost three, and Donna, six months old. Warren and his brother, Phil, drove the car and the trailer to Louisiana. Our family and friends warned us, "You will be raising those children with alligators and other terrible things," but we assured them that my family was surviving and hopefully we would too.

After 40 years, I think the move to Louisiana was the best solution to our financial problems we were having at the time.

EARLIEST REMEMBERED EXPERIENCE
by
Jacqueline Fryns

Have you ever watched a Beef Stew or a sauce or simply water in a kettle, at the point of boiling?

The liquid, which was still and uniform, starts to make bubbles. More and more, each of them soon burst into vapors one or two at a time. When I received my first assignment for this class I felt my sleeping brain very still, refusing even to move. As I shook it and forced it, it started to warm up, and even to boil. Now I don't know which bubble to choose to tell my story. There are so many memories coming from my first years, that trying to find the very first one seems impossible.

After the first war, my father, commissioned into the Belgian Army, was sent to Germany with the Interallied Occupation Forces to an industrial town with coal mines near the Rhine River. His job was to supervise the disarmament of the region and detect unexploded bombs in the river. All the family, Maman, Andree, Christian and I, went with him and we lived in the second floor of a house requisitioned by the Belgian Government. The Director of the coal mine, the owner of the house, had to share it and let us live there. A rather big home, framed by a yard well maintained.

I was the youngest of the family, my sister being seven and my brother three years older than I was. I don't remember my age, probably I was around two at the time.

The director's wife had always dreamed of having a child, but they never had one. So when they saw me, they fell in love, adopted me, and tried to spoil me. But my parents wanted to protect our privacy, so we couldn't go downstairs as we wished.

A child even very young can be very smart. I suppose I was smart for I saw directly the advantage of such a situation. When my mother was cross with me, I quickly got on the landing, at the top of the stairs (not going down...it was

forbidden and I wanted to be obedient) crying more aloud and screaming: "Madam... Madam!" At once the compassionate lady was out in the corridor asking with adoration: "Honey, my poor little one, what did they DO to you? Come." Then (having the permission from her, on my butt, for I couldn't get down normally yet—I was so little—I went downstairs to hide in her arms. I quickly learned to speak German with them. My father called me often "Little Devil!" I think I was! Now, maybe I heard my mother tell this story so often that it is only my imagination which pictures the event. How can I know?

We stayed more then two years there before our family returned to Belgium. But what I am sure of is another memory. I clearly see myself, 'proud-smart-spoiled', sitting on the knees of the husband, enormous, red in the face, and sharing with him his thick slice of German bread loaded with raw onions. How delicious I found the taste of the Forbidden Apple! I loved it. I was never sick and I guess it built me a strong stomach for the years to come. They loved me, spoiled me, were crazy about me!!! However discerning their real kindness, I am sure my parents had to swallow their saliva more than once, wanting to keep normal acquaintance with the German couple.

We left Germany by car, or was it an army truck? We all were packed in it. Around us a heavy atmosphere of sadness and tears matched the awful weather; it was raining and cold. And foggy. As we came farther we had to pass a bridge. The vehicle at walking speed shook, rocked. I could see by the window the alternative iron arcs, which suspended the bridge. They were coming one after the other on top of my head, moving. I was mute with terror, unable to scream, as I wanted to. Since then I have hated bridges!

Germany! That first episode of my experiences ends there.

THE BIG TOP CAME TO WAYCROSS
by
John Quincy Lee

In the fall, following graduation from high school, I made the decision to attend business school in Waycross. This was a thriving little community at that time with the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad shops located there, which really helped relieve the depressed area during the Depression. I felt very fortunate to be able to attend this business school, which was an extension of the University of Georgia called "The School of Opportunity." I lived with my Dad's brother, Uncle Ed, who was the second son of my grandfather, Hardy Lee. He was a barber by profession, and worked in the Phoenix Barber Shop in the old Phoenix Hotel building. He married Beatrice Lee and had three children: Buddy, Frankie, and Peggy. They welcomed me with open arms, and we enjoyed many good times together. The most outstanding of which was the day Uncle Ed informed me that the Ringling Brothers-Barnum and Bailey Circus was coming to town for a one day show.

As a country boy I had never seen a circus, or any of the animals. I could hardly wait!! The fair grounds, where they planned to set up tents, were only a short distance from where Uncle Ed lived. The parade route from the train station, where they would unload, would pass right down the street, only one block from the house.

I was awakened by Uncle Ed at five o'clock on the morning of the circus trains arrival. "Wake up, it's time to get to the train station to watch them unload and line up for the parade," he yelled! He knew he would have to hurry back to the barber shop, but he directed me to walk to the corner from the house and sit on the curb in front of Sasser's Grocery Store.

The parade would be coming right by that corner around 8:30 that morning. I was there in plenty of time to get the best seat. In the distance I could hear the band playing, the roar of lions, and bellowing of elephants, as the parade moved in our direction. First, the colorful band was led by numerous brightly clad clowns doing all kinds of acrobatic acts. Next, the perfectly groomed horses of many different colors: whites, blacks, browns, reds, and even

a group of Shetland ponies--the lead pony was ridden by a tall, long legged clown whose feet were dragging the ground. I couldn't believe my eyes! The riders with their colorful costumes were on top of elephants as they walked in line with the tail of each one encircled with the trunk snout of the one following. Then came wagon after wagon of caged lions, tigers, leopards, monkeys, baboons, and bears of all kinds. Following came the beautiful horse drawn decorative carriages carrying the colorfully dressed circus performers. For all eyes to see came none other than the man himself, Mr. P. T. Barnum, riding in a gold trimmed Pheaton, drawn by a pair of gorgeous black horses--the finest in the world! Everybody cheered to high heaven, including me as I was completely mesmerized!

The crowds from the street sidelines followed along behind the parade, and I found myself going along with them to the fair grounds. Business school was the furthest from my mind at that moment. I watched the circus workers drive stakes, and raise the tent, which was laid out on the ground with pull ropes extended. Then they brought in elephants to pull the ropes for lifting and securing the huge structure. I wandered through the fair grounds to see all the animals again, just wishing I had a ticket for the afternoon show, but I just didn't have the money during those depressed times.

Suddenly I realized it was after lunch time, and Aunt Bea would be worried about me. I didn't want to, but I had to get back into the real world!

BUCK AND JOE
by
Versie L. Foti

Daddy probably had at least one dog as far back as he could remember, as most farm boys do. The first dogs I remember were a pair of brindle bulldogs named Buck and Joe. They were from the same litter, broad chested, with white markings on the head and around the eyes. Buck was a little larger than Joe and seemed to be the dominate one. Joe was blind in one eye, the result of having been hooked by a bull.

Dad kept the dogs for farm work. At milking time, Dad would open the barn-lot gate and call to Buck and Joe, "Go get the cows, but don't run 'em."

Off the pair of dogs would go as fast as they could run to the back of the pasture. Once they were there, they yapped a little until the cows started toward the barn. Then they slowly ambled behind the cows, keeping them in line until they were inside the barn-lot and Dad closed the gate. While Dad did the milking, Buck and Joe frolicked and wrestled with each other.

In the early spring when Dad wanted to cut the cows out of the herd for calving, he saddled his horse, Sally, called Buck and Joe, and they headed out to the south pasture. As he separated the pregnant cows, he headed them toward the west pasture. Buck and Joe kept them moving in the right direction until Dad had completed his job. Then, Dad rode behind the cows through the gate. Once the cows were locked in the pasture away from the herd, Dad and his trusted dogs trotted back home.

At branding time, Dad counted on Buck and Joe to cut a calf out of the herd. A man on horse-back roped and threw the calf to the ground while the hot branding iron was slapped onto the calf's hip as the creature bellowed loudly. Dad's brand was left to mark his cows. A similar procedure was used to brand the pigs, except Buck and Joe held the pig by the ears until a helper could tie a rope around the pig's neck and feet to keep it on the ground until Dad could brand it on the hip.

Dad could dispatch Buck and Joe to get Sally, the saddle horse, or Pete, the white mule, or Jake, the brown mule from the pasture. The dogs raced them to the barn-lot at top speed. I never gave a thought, at that time, as to how the dogs knew which or how many horses to bring in, but they never seemed to make a mistake.

The summer my youngest sister, Jean, was crawling, I was almost nine years old, so I remember vividly that Buck and Joe learned a new occupation. Our house faced north and a porch spanned the width of the house but there was no railing. A wide set of four steps led from the ground to the porch.

Jean loved being outside and would crawl to the screen door and cry to be outside. It wasn't always possible for mama or one of us older children to be on the porch to keep her from crawling off. Mama taught Buck and Joe to watch Jean when she was outside. When Jean would crawl too near the edge of the porch, one or both of the dogs would get between her and the edge. If she tried to crawl around the dogs, one of them would catch her clothes in his mouth and slowly drag her back amid her howls and screams. This was a call for someone to hurry out to move her.

Sometimes we would stand inside the house and watch through the window or door as the dogs worked to protect Jean from falling off the porch. Friends and family members marveled at the way Buck and Joe cared for Jean.

The dogs were our companions and playmates, too. Every afternoon during the summer, we swam in a pond across the road from our house. Buck and Joe were always with us and our friends when we went to the pool. Many times we saw them attack and kill water moccasins and other snakes around the pool, in the ditches or crossing the road.

Buck and Joe were friendly with the children, relatives and friends who were frequent visitors. However, if a stranger drove up, he was not allowed to get out of the vehicle until a member of the family went outside to call the dogs off. It was unnecessary to lock the doors or worry about intruders stealing anything around the farm. The guards, Buck and Joe, were always on duty.

The pair of dogs were constant companions. They worked together, played together, ate together and slept together. Seldom did they even growl at each other. They slowed down a bit as the years passed, but they never gave up their chores.

When the dogs were about twelve years old, Dad noticed that Buck appeared to be ailing. A neighbor and friend, "Tut" Lavergne, treated animals, probably using home remedies. I don't think he had any formal training. Tut was called to take a look at Buck. He administered some medication and left some to be given later. I don't think he made a diagnosis—probably only a guess.

Too weak to do his chores, Buck lay on the pile of sacks Dad placed on the floor of the barn for him. Joe kept a constant vigil, even refusing to go about his regular routine. Dad brought food and water to them and left a light on in the barn. As Buck quit eating and drinking, Joe's appetite noticeably diminished, as well. Within a week, Buck died.

Dad put Buck in the wheelbarrow and with Joe, now quite weak also, my sister, my brother and me following behind, he pushed the wheelbarrow to a place behind the garden. There, he dug a hole, and as we sadly looked on, he buried Buck.

We tried to coax Joe to return to the house with us, but he lay down near the dirt mound. With his eyes watching us, we finally walked away, leaving him to grieve his loss alone.

Just before dark, Dad went to the barn to check on Joe and bring him food and water. Joe had not eaten his food earlier nor was he in the barn. Dad called to him and finally he came, slowly walking with his head down. Dad tried to get him to eat, but he only smelled the food and lapped a little water. Dad finally left him there and returned to the house.

The next morning when Dad went to the barn, Joe was dead on Buck's bed of sacks. It seemed he just had no will to live without his brother.

MY FIRST PLAYHOUSE
by
Betty Shoemaker

Mean's pasture was a wonderful place to play. There were hills to climb, streams to wade in, and wild grape vines to conquer. The pasture was in back of our house. Its wooded area protected us from the hot sun.

When Wanda and I went to the pasture to play house, I took Gerry, my two-year-old baby sister. That way Mother was free to clean the house and do the laundry.

I divided my rooms by raking rows of pine needle about six inches wide and eight by eight feet in diameter. On the right side of the house, I had a living room, dining room, and kitchen. On the left side I had two large bedrooms with walk in closets and a hall in between. The outdoors privy was in my make believe back yard.

My Mother made a wire bail and connected each end to a small hole punched in each side of a Maxwell House coffee can. In the can Mother placed about a half cup uncooked rice, water, and a pinch of salt. Wanda and I cleared a small area which provided a safe place for our outdoor cooking. We made a fire with some rocks we found in the stream bed.

While the rice was boiling, Wanda and I waded in the stream looking for small crayfish. When the rice was nearly done, we added the washed tails to our rice. While waiting for lunch I placed Gerry on my bed of straw and changed her diaper.

My play house was clean. I had a real live baby to care for and lunch was ready. What more could a ten-year-old kid want?

MORE MEMORIES
by
Myrtle Schiller

I was having pain in my knees and started rubbing mentholatum on them. The pungent cool soothing aroma of the salve suddenly brought back a memory of the time I was about five or six years old.

Mom had just announced to us that we were going on a picnic. "Where?" we excitedly asked. "Well," she said, "It's a place called Cypremort Point. There is a beach there and places for a picnic." She said we were invited to go with Lester and Manilla Trahan and their family. Mr. Lester drove a big touring car, a Dodge, and worked for Stamm Motors in Rayne.

All of us were so excited to be going, Mom, Nettie, Eleanor, Mim, and I (Dad had to work, so he couldn't go). I wonder how we all fit in the car? The Trahans had four children also, Belle, Marion, Lois, and Buddy.

Excitement mounted, and everyone climbed in. Mom sat on the front seat with Mim on her lap. All of the other children piled into the back. I was the last one to get into the back seat, and someone slammed the door shut. Yeowie! I let out a scream. The door had slammed on my hand! Blood spurted, and I thought surely my hand was broken. Everyone scrambled out of the car. Mom ran into the house and came out with a big jar of Mentholatum and bandages. She carefully put wads of the salve all over my badly bruised and mangled hand and wrapped it like a mummy. I gingerly held it up so the blood would flow away from the wound. Bruised hand and all, we piled back into the car and took off.

I suppose today we would have driven directly to the Emergency Room, surely ruining our day. By the time we got to the second part of our outing—the ferry crossing—Mom unwrapped my hand, which had long since stopped hurting and it was just fine, no sign of cuts or bruises. Just goes to show that old fashioned remedies worked.

Now for the ferry crossing, a first time for all of us children. There was a wooden bridge on an incline that went out to meet the ferry, held by ropes to the pier, but every once in a while the water would ebb and there was a space between the bridge and the ferry. We were told that sometimes a car would slide into the bayou if the boat didn't connect just right. Well, you talk about ascared group of kids and ladies getting out of the car while Mr. Lester maneuvered the Dodge safely onto the ferry. Then the ferryboat captain handed each of us over the gap once he had the car safely anchored. Whew! Thank goodness the other side wasn't so hazardous.

Do you know, I don't remember the actual picnic nor the return trip. But I do remember our ride there and all this memory came flooding back when I opened a jar of mentholatum this morning almost seventy years later. Strange!

FLYING MACHINE
by
Joe Glorioso

In the spring semester of 1991, I, as a good, interested student in writing my memoirs, religiously followed the suggested topics listed in the student's guidelines. One of the first stories ordained by the class's guidelines required the use of the five biological senses. My daughter, Sissy, read my early effort at writing and thought it was very good. The story reminded her of her memory of the sights, noise, and smells of her own first grade experiences.

Candy Boat, Amy Hewes, Freetown, Elm, Slave Story, Fishing are some of my favorite stories that I wrote, extensively using the biological senses of touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. I recalled "The touch of the fingertips on the raised imprints of Braille on paper, giving sight to the blind," or "The exhilarating sensation of the tongue and throat of Prohibition's home-made wine and home brewed beer and the intense burning, choking surprise of moonshine whiskey remain forever in your head." Again "The smell of the hundreds of bouquets at weddings and funerals lives on forever." From the *Candy Boat,* "The sound of the calliope on the candy boat and the turbulent sound of the paddle wheel slapping bayou water." will always be perceived as yesterday's experience, but today's clear memory.

In this paragraph, the long sentence embracing the five senses cannot be found in any one of my stories, but a once-in-a-while long sentence is worth the risk as a writer. As you and your favorite other sat on a park's bench, the youthful experience of the *touch* of her hand on yours, the *taste* of her red lipstick on sharing your first kiss, the *smell* of heavenly perfumed hair, the *sound* of breathing, and the glorious *view* of a full moon slowly rising over the lake are valued memories. The memories of those first five behavioral senses will forever remain your most vivid recollection of all.

Of course, I am well aware of the value of the five biological senses in writing, but I also believe that writers have a sixth sense. The sixth sense may be of the soul, of the spirit, or of a permanent persuasion for the universe. I choose to name the sixth sense *immanence* because the word has embedded

within its definition a heavenly multi-sense of the soul, the spirit, and the universe. The sixth sense includes the words *intuition*, which the female of the human species is heavily endowed, and *analysis* and *insight*, which are provinces of the male human. The sixth sense also include dichotomies of love versus hate, compassion versus indifference, and passion versus apathy. The sixth sense also includes curiosity, patience, forgiveness, imagination, sensuality, and many more.

Contrary to the popular belief that the ability to speak and the function of the opposing thumb separates humans from the lower species, the sixth sense of immanence, permanently pervading the universe, is inherent in the human species and sets us miles apart from microbes, insects, and beasts.

As a six-year-old first grader in the New Iberia Central Grammar School, I sat in the last desk in a row of ten next to a wide window that looked upon St. Peter Street. During an important phonics lesson, I heard a whirring and roaring sound above the roof of the school. Rushing to the window and gripping the windowsill with my hands, knuckles and fingertips white with tension, I tucked my chin on the windowsill. I saw under a canopy of blue sky sprinkled with wispy clouds doused by brilliant sunlight two red wings, a red tail, and a helmeted figure in a white body with its wheels hanging down. The red wings, red tail, and white body with wheels hanging down passed over my Central Grammar School, over the post office, over the *Shadows on the Teche*, over Bayou Teche, over the woods, and into the great beyond.

The teacher in the front of the class loudly gave a phonics lesson in the sound of the letter "S" and my classmates in chorus repeated the phonetic sound of the letter, but I had heard a whirring and roaring sound. Seeing me at the window, the teacher said, "Joseph, please take your seat." I listened again to the whirring and roaring sound of two red wings, red tail, and white body with wheels hanging down. Again, "Please, Joseph, find your desk and sit down." I had heard the whirring and roaring sound of two red wings, red tail, a white body with wheels hanging down. The teacher quickly came down the aisle, heels sharply tapping the wooden floor. I felt her grip on my arm and the gentle push into my seat. Once again in chorus the class phonetically voiced the latter "S." But I heard the whirring and roaring sound of two red wings, a red tail, and a white body with wheels hanging down.

The bell's clapper in the belfry tolled the end of the school day. I rushed home, finding Mame in the kitchen warming a half-glass of milk. She served two cookies with the milk on a marble-topped table. My hands gripped the edge of the marble-topped table, knuckles and fingertips tensioned white. A six-year old alive in a flying machine under a canopy of blue sky sprinkled with wispy clouds doused by brilliant sunlight passed over the Central Grammar School, over the post office, over *the Shadows on the Teche,* over Bayou Teche, and over the woods beyond. I snuggled in the cockpit behind a whirring and roaring sound, wind rippling my cheeks and whistling past my ears. I gripped the joystick, knuckles and fingertips white with tension, behind two red wings, in a white body with the wheels hanging down. I flew into the great beyond of tomorrow, tomorrow, and many tomorrows.

HUEY'S LUCKY DAY
by
Woodson Hopkins

Gosh! Huey loved to go to the movies, particularly when he could watch a little "cotton top" named Shirley Temple tap dance her way across the silver screen; into hearts of millions of depression-ridden Americans.

Huey was not "ridden" by anything in those days except a sense of being bound to his mother's "apron strings." When she went shopping he had to go along. Hours of dodging scurrying shoppers in Foley's bargain basement were more than he could endure. The icy stares of the floor walkers at Levy's made him shiver. Then there were those mortifying moments when he had to sit in the middle of Sakowitz,s lingerie salon among swarms of chattering females.

The day came when Huey had enough. He asked his mother to give him a dollar. He was going to a movie. His tone was down right demanding, leaving him unsure how she would react. She stared at him intently for a moment then willingly reached for her purse from which she extracted a bill to hand him. Bewildered by her sudden "cave-in" Huey rushed toward the front door under the scrupulous gaze of a nattily attired floor walker who had observed their little tete' a tete'. Acting impulsively, Huey started to "make a face," but thought better of it. He had been liberated from boredom by being firm with his mother. He would not test his suddenly acquired boldness on a stranger—not this day, the day he had gained his freedom. The day he became an ardent movie buff.

Once outside, he hustled over to Main Street sill amazed by the ease with which his Mom had relinquished her maternal reign over him. If he hurried perhaps he could catch the matinee at Lowe's State theater then step next door to the Metropolitan for another show before four o'clock---the appointed time for them to go home. His pace quickened as he neared the theaters. From across the street, a half a block away, he could see the marquee at the Met. With eyes squinting, he read out loud, ignoring the puzzled pedestrians who stopped to stare at him. He could not contain himself when he saw Shirley's name up there in lights. His heart pounded as he reached up to place the dollar bill his mother had given him in the ticket window.

Huey thought the day was the luckiest of his life. He had been freed from the ordeal of shopping with Mom. On that day she had given him over to the streets of Houston.

On another day under a bright California sky a tour bus made its' way along Rockingham Avenue in the western hills of Los Angeles. Huey and Billy sat side by side in the seat in front of their mother. Their father had stayed behind to locate an automobile dealer to ask why their new car was eating up tires. Billy fussed that he had rather have gone on the excursion to Catalina island than look at movie star's houses. Huey agreed with his older brother after he realized they were seeing little more than stucco walls. No one behind those walls had come out to greet them. Hollywood wasn't a very friendly place Huey concluded. The guide sensing restlessness among his passengers told the group that rarely stars were seen out in the afternoon. "Most are still at their studios," he told them. Billy snickered and rolled his eyes, annoying their mother who was soaking up the man's every word.

"On your right ladies and gentlemen is the home of George Raft. Sunshine Tours happens to know that the green car in the driveway, the Packard roadster, is Mr. Raft's favorite automobile." Billy leaned over to whisper in Huey's ear, "Ask him if it has bullet holes in it." From behind them their mother spoke, "Billy what have I told you about deviling your brother?"

"Sorry, " Billy snorted.

On they rumbled through Brentwood Heights, the guide reciting his well-rehearsed monologue. Billy slumped in the seat and shut his eyes while looked out the window and wondered what the people behind the stone walls were really like. "Give your attention, ladies and gentlemen, to the house on the right. That is the home of Twentieth Century Fox's Shirley Tem...Temple, and whaddya you know, there she is, there's Shirley!" Every head on the bus snapped right. She was standing behind a big iron gate that separated her world from theirs. Billy came out of his seat alerted by the excitement among those on board the bus while Huey sat frozen in disbelief. Their mother cried out "STOP THE BUS!" The driver had already applied the brakes and was asking if anyone would like Shirley's autograph.

"Yes, wait!" their mother shouted back while fishing in her purse for a souvenir paper napkin from the Brown Derby restaurant where earlier they had been denied service because they had no reservations. "Use this," she urged Huey before dropping it in his lap. Huey's eyes were still riveted on the figure behind the iron gate. He was too star struck to move. Billy lurched forward grabbing the napkin with one hand and Huey by the shirt collar with the other. He pulled his young brother from the seat and began pushing him down the aisle toward the opened door of the bus.

Outside on the driveway leading up to the big house, Billy, with hand squarely behind Huey's shoulders, kept shoving his reluctant brother along. Short of the gate where Shirley stood, Huey's resistance stiffened and Billy left him and went on intent on securing the autograph. Shirley appeared somewhat amused by Billy's hard work and Huey's shyness.

Huey sensed that there was something different about her, but had no trouble recognizing the effervescent smile, or the trademark dimples. Not so long ago those famous curls hung in ringlets close to her face. Now they were loose, pushed back, her hair was longer, darker. She seemed taller. Gone was the "little doll" look, the look that drew millions of troubled Americans to the box office during some mighty trying times. Billy passed to her the napkin and pen through the rungs of the gate and she signed her name. Huey noticed that she was both cordial and engaging, talking to his brother while writing. As they boarded the bus Huey turned for one last look at "America's Little Princess" and wondered if there would ever be another.