Excerpts from

Our Pages Of Life

Volume 26a—Tuesday Morning Class/Fall 2000

There is in every human countenance either a history or a prophecy. I believe that if Samuel Taylor Coleridge would have been able to consider the impact of personal history on its writers and its audience of generations to come, he would have changed his observation to include *both a history and a prophecy.* For the past ten years, I have watched my students, writers of personal history, as they have read from their collections of life stories. Through their experiences, I have learned that in each of our lives we reflect both past and future. Stories become the thread that binds each generation to the next. I often ask my students to consider how their stories have affected those of whom they have written. Their responses convince me that we are writers, not only for ourselves, not even for an audience with only whom we are familiar. When our stories are told, we are also writing for generations yet to be. As I examine the work (and fun!) that continues in these unique classes, I am convinced more and more that I do what I do because of my love for people–and the generations that keep their histories and prophecies going. You'll fall in love with these life writers, too. You'll recognize stories of your past, and you'll probably see a faint reflection of a younger audience, one that anticipates its turn to turn prophecy into history. Enjoy these stories and keep creating your own.

Joan Stear
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Fall 2000

Thanks to the Horizons Department at Lafayette General Medical Center;
Life & Letters • an intergenerational company; and the English Department, the Ira Nelson Horticulture Center, and University College at University of Louisiana at Lafayette
for their continuous support of our efforts to write for the generations to come.
To my students–forever my teachers–thanks.
Acknowledgment also to my students for working so diligently as the editorial board for this publication.

FRONT COVER: *(Clockwise, beginning at top right corner)* Jim Jennings, 1921; Marjorie Matherne Stear; Stanley Fox Davis, Joan Stear, and Madge Burns, October 1999; David Spring Stear

This volume of life stories
is lovingly dedicated
to a man of three centuries,
Stanley Fox Davis.
Stanley, your friendship and inspiration
outlast the years.
You'll always hold the chair
of most honored guest.

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

Seated, left to right: Bea Murphy; Jacqueline Frynes;
Kitty Kelley; Stanley Davis; Rita Wellborn
Standing, left to right: Joan Stear, Instructor; John Lee; Betty Shoemaker;
Versie Foti; John Townsend; Fran Gross; Woodson Hopkins;
Joyce Maxwell; Jim Jennings; Joe Glorioso; Curney Dronet
(*Missing from photo*: Olympe Butcher; Johnnie Kocurek)

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A PRIVATE CONVERSATION THAT ONLY I REMEMBER

by

J.M. Jennings Jr.

My youngest son, John, at the time a junior in high school, would be a senior the following year when the fall 1971 semester rolled around. Although he was a good student, I feared John inclined toward shyness, to being an introvert, a trait he inherited from his father. As I look back, I may have been misjudging him, and he may have only been defending himself from an overbearing father intent on perfection, as close to the 99.44% of Ivory soap fame as possible. Would living away from home, at a boarding school for instance, or traveling, be good for him? I really believed that he would enjoy life more fully if he was a little more aggressive.

Life was good then in the autumn of 1970. John's older brother and two sisters had finished college at USL and were making their own way in life. The financial burden of three children in college at one time was gone. Margaret announced that she had stopped adding new recipes to her list of 97 different ways to serve wieners for supper. I had a new toy, a self-propelled Toro lawn mower, complete with a rear bagging attachment to collect grass clippings. Now I could proudly display the smoothness of our front lawn to all our neighbors. I enjoyed the outdoor exercise of yard maintenance, and I still do. The only neighbors I really got to know were those I met while we each enjoyed our weekly out door walking exercise.

The art of grass cutting and the intelligent maintenance of small, gasoline engines were two skills I believed necessary to the proper upbringing of a boy, a supplement to his traditional schooling. Our front yard was spacious, requiring about three-quarters of an hour of steady walking once every week in the summer time to mow while our back yard was larger and took an hour and a half for a good job. John became my assistant and did his share of walking back and forth.

During that summer of 1970, John was invited to attend a meeting hosted by the Foreign Study League for senior level high school students who might be interested in joining a six-week summer study group in Europe the following year. A second gathering for curious parents followed. Margaret and I became interested.

John wanted to go as did his friends, Fred Trappey and Joan Babineaux, the daughter of Judge Allen Babineaux. The Jennings family calculated that by careful

budgeting and returning to the 97 different ways of cooking wieners routine, we could afford the $995 all-inclusive two week sightseeing followed by a month's schooling in Switzerland.

John and I continued our weekly 2-3 hour sweaty adventures on the turf. During one blistering hot afternoon, we shut the Toro off and took a breather to rest and talk. (Mind you, this occurred before the dangerous, heat index idea was invented. My guess would have been a 110-115 degree index that day.) As we sat, the sweat dripped off our noses and brows faster than our towels could sop the drops away.

While we sat and talked and sopped, this dialogue took place, but I am the only one who still remembers it. John asked me a question, "Daddy why don't we hire a gardener to do this sweaty work like Mr. W next door does?"

"My boy," I replied, "I've thought about that. I asked our next door neighbor what it cost him. Would you believe he boasted that he pays his man $40 every week? You're good at math. We're about eight months away from that study trip you're dying to take. Quick, what is the answer to eight months times four weeks per month multiplied by $40 per week? I guess that is about what we'll pay for your trip. What do you think? What would your choice be? Mow the lawn or spend a month next summer in the cool Alps?"

I got my answer fast. "Daddy, I'll tell you what. Why don't you let me start the lawnmower and finish the yard. You go inside and bring us out a couple of glasses of iced-tea?"

He did and I did. We never talked about hiring a gardener again.

The European study experience went off nearly as described in the colorful promotional literature: three days in New York City, three days in London, four days in Paris followed by four weeks of schooling in the French language and history of France at a chateau in Leysin near Bern, Switzerland. At a joyful homecoming, Margaret and I welcomed back a converted extrovert.

ROSE HILL
by
John Townsend

I was seven or eight years old when we made the first trip to Rose Hill. I recall that school was still open, but only a week or two from being closed for summer vacation. The occasion was a birthday party for our cousin Louise Robb. When we turned onto the white rock drive off of the Greenwood Road, (Highway 80) it seemed as if we were moving into a portrait. Along the crest of the hill was a picket fence which was completely canopied with beautiful climbing rose bushes, the small pink and white blooms totally blanketing the fence.

Just behind the fence I could see a row of evenly spaced trees that I later learned were ash and English oak. When we had driven through the gate I saw that there were picnic tables set under or near the trees. I heard Mama say, "There they are, over near the pier."

Daddy nodded, "I'll park under the tree where the barbecue pit is. It'll give us some shade for the car."

"Where does the road go?" I asked.

Mama replied, "It goes across the dam and on up to where the plantation house used to be."

"Can we go up there?" I asked.

"We'll see. They may have a gate to block it off."

Once the car was parked Bubba, Dick, and I ran down to the pier where we could see Louise, Roland, Jr, and six or seven other kids we didn't know. One other car came in with another girl coming to the party, and Aunt Bess(ie) called us kids to come her. For sometime we played Pin the Tail on the Donkey, then Drop the Handkerchief, followed by Pop the Balloon. Every balloon had a slip of paper inside with a number written on it. Each of us got a prize of some sort. I think mine was an Indian on a horse which was made out lead.

I remember that Louise got a number of gifts, a lot were homemade, such as socks, or a blouse, as well as a Raggedy Ann doll, and some handkerchiefs. Being in the middle of the Depression do-it-yourself was to be expected, I guess.

Even our toy Indians and soldiers at home were probably cast by Uncle Roland though he held a good job with the Cotton Belt Railroad and may have purchased them from Silvers, Kress's, or H L Green.

With the games finished we had the "good" stuff – birthday cake and fresh churned homemade ice cream. There was vanilla, fresh peach, strawberry, and chocolate. It was a good thing that there was a lot of food because I heard Mama say that there were twenty-five people there.

The sun was dropping behind the trees when everyone began to leave. We were among the last to leave because Daddy and Mama helped to clean up the mess. The five of us Louise, Roland, Jr., Bubba, Dick, and I were also busy picking up litter.

Later, as we were driving onto the highway, I heard Daddy say, "They will be opening the lake to swimming the first of June. We'll have to come back again." We boys got excited about that.

And that was our next trip to Rose Hill. An adult could swim in the lake all day for ten cents; a child a nickel, or as a family twenty-five cents. When we arrived shortly after 3:00 p.m. we found that all of the picnic tables were taken, and we ended up where we'd parked at the birthday party, by the barbecue pit. We three boys were already dressed in our suits so we headed for the water.

Mama insisted that we wait on Daddy before we got into the water, so we stood and watched some of the bigger kids and adults slide down a cable that was attached to a 'high' tower at one end and metal pole about a hundred feet into the lake. I qualify "high" because when I was a few years older I learned that the cable was only twenty-five feet above the water.

Every so often I heard a squeal from some boy, girl, or woman in the water. Once in awhile it would be a man who'd say, "Dog-gy," rather than another expletive.

Then we saw Daddy atop the tower and a moment later he was flying down the cable. When it seemed he would crash into the pole in the lake he let go the sleeve about the cable and came down half sitting to splash into the water. A moment later he was swimming back to the bank.

We waded out to him and for a few minutes he catapulted us up and into the water. It was great fun for us but soon he was ready to call it quits. There were a number of other kids there, and we played 'splash' and 'catch me.'

By this time it was getting late and Mama told us we could swim for another ten minutes while she laid out the food. Things got quiet in the water. I was righting a wooden sail boat, its mast broken, that someone had discarded, when suddenly I felt something nibbling at my leg. Before I could yell out, a girl a few

feet away screamed and began trying to walk on water as she went toward the bank.

For some reason I was no longer scared and looked down into the relatively clear spring water to see four or five small, minnow size, catfish busy nudging at my leg, just above my knee.

They were a part of the mystique of the lake as the years passed. The worst thing that one might encounter was to step on one that was buried in the mud out past where the sand bottom ended. This occurred with Bubba, or Dick, I'm not sure which one, but I do remember that it was slow to heal.

After a couple of people were injured on the cable some years later it was removed. Then, the tower was torn down when a man dove off into the shallow water and broke his neck. There was no ladder so he had to scale it to reach the top, while ignoring the warning signs.

And, yes, I went off the tower riding the cable – one time blistering my back. The boy that dared me chickened out.

Sometime during or after WWII the lake was closed, I'm sure partly because Shreveport then had four or five pools about town and also because of health reasons with polio on the rise.

But I still have the memories of those fun-filled days, and the squeals as a new swimmer was introduced to the Rose Hill Lake catfish.

LA GRAND BOUCHERIE

by

Joyce T. Maxwell

Every summer Dad picked out a hog or two and put them in a special pen to fatten up for "the boucherie." Now that was an exhilarating event for me and one I anticipated with excitement! We had to wait for the first cold spell.

All of our neighboring farmers did the same thing. A diet of corn only was fed to the hogs. As a matter of fact, corn had to stay in the trough at all times. We used hog lard for cooking so the fatter they became, the better.

There wasn't any refrigeration in those days, so one farmer would have his boucherie and shared the meat with everyone, and in a week or two another farmer had one. All the neighbors came, and together we children had so much fun playing, learning, and eating.

Excitement made us rise before dawn. Wood chips and logs were stacked around the big black kettles; by daybreak the water was boiling. The women were busy chopping shallots, cooking rice, getting pots and tables set up, anticipating the arrival of the meat. Every person was good at doing one particular job, so everyone knew how to prepare his own area.

The hogs were killed next to the pigpen away from the house. They were knifed in the throat and one of the ladies used a deep bowl to save the blood for making black boudin. The men poured scalding water over the pigs and scraped the hair off the hogs. The skin was very white. We children watched as they slit the hogs open from the throat to the tail. We marveled at how the insides were laid out. A man carefully took the liver out first because if his knife slipped and cut into the bile, the liver would not be good to eat. One woman was waiting with her pan for the heart, liver, spleen, and kidneys. Her job was to make a cowboy stew for dinner and boil the rest to put in the boudin. The small intestines were given to another lady so she could scrape them clean to make casing for the sausage and boudin. The stomach was scraped clean to stuff with rice dressing.

The fat was removed from the meat and placed on a large wooden table that had been scrubbed clean in preparation for the moment. Several men began to cut the fat in strips and then into cubes to make cracklings. When there were enough cubes cut up, they were placed into the same big black pots that were used to boil

the water. The crackling maker knew just how much water to put at the bottom of the pot to start the cracklings melting. He had a tough job because the fire got extremely hot and the pots had to be stirred constantly so the cracklings would not stick to the sides. Most of the time there were two pots going at the same time so there was more than one man assigned to that task. Of course, there was always a boss man. He knew what to do if the cracklings were stubborn in bubbling up and when the cracklings were just right to dish out.

I watched for when they cut the pigtail off so I could take it and put it in the crackling pot. I loved watching the skin sizzle and pop into bubbles all around it. I stood next to the pot in anticipation of it being ready to eat. That was my treat because it had plenty of meat and very little fat on it, and I liked the meat the best of all! Of course, everyone teased me for liking the tail but I did not care one bit. They just did not know what they were missing! When the cracklings were done, someone sprinkled salt on them. We were allowed to eat while they were all nice and hot. Hog butchering sure was an all day eating affair!

Other men prepared the rest of the hog into different cuts of meat. The shoulders and hindquarters were made into roasts. At least one roast and one side of ribs went in the oven for dinner. Usually the backbone was cut lengthwise in a strip and then cut by pieces. This backbone was used to make a fricassee'. When a backbone was cut out, it eliminated being able to make chops.

The meat that would ordinarily be the center cut of a pork chop was sliced thin and highly seasoned with salt and cayenne pepper plus vinegar, thereby marinating the meat and preserving it a long time. It was, however, the first meat eaten since it would not preserved as long as other methods. It could be prepared in so many different ways that we never got tired of it.

One lady took the hog head which she disengaged, cleaned, and made into hog's head cheese. This lady knew how to make it without it being too greasy. She made it with plenty of meat, usually highly seasoned, and dotted it with onion tops. It was not one of my favorite dishes, but it made a fair sandwich for a hungry stomach.

The tongue was scalded in boiling water and the thick skin was peeled and scraped off. After it was clean, holes were punctured in the tongue and the holes were stuffed with garlic, onions, bell pepper, salt and pepper. The tongue was usually cooked in the same fashion as a pot roast. It was browned in a black iron pot, smothered in onions and bell pepper, making a thick tasty brown gravy.

I liked to help make the boudin and sausage. The meat and liver for the boudin were well seasoned and boiled before grinding. I turned the handle of the grinder while the lady stuffed the meat into it. Every now and then she would get a good lean piece of meat and give it to me to eat.

After all the meat was ground, it was given to the boudin and sausage stuffers. They added rice, extra seasoning, and onion tops to the boudin meat. Then it was stuffed by hand so that the rice would not get mashed. The horns of cows were sawed off and used as funnels for boudin stuffing. The pointed end, in which a hole had been cut, went into the casing and held by one hand. The thumb of the other hand was used to do the stuffing. The hog blood was added to make black boudin. The white boudin did not have the blood in it. They were then boiled very slowly being watched constantly so that the casing did not break.

The meat for the sausage was ground raw, seasoned with salt, cayenne pepper, and onion tops. The sausage was hung on a line to dry. When it was cured, the sausages were fried real crispy and stored in crock jars in the fat that was drained out of them. That is how they were preserved. The lard from the cracklings was also stored in some crock jars. These jars were anywhere from 5 to 12 gallon containers.

The bony parts of the hogs were salted and stored in crock jars and used as salt meat. The pig feet were pickled. The men secretly gave the boys the bladder to be blown up as a balloon. So when hearing the old saying, "Only the squeal was thrown away," you know what that means!

Everyone had brought his own container. At the end of the day each family took a portion of everything that had been prepared. A lady was in charge in the division of portions. It was understood that when someone was given a shoulder roast (for example) they were to return the same pieces to that particular family when they butchered their hogs. Almost every week in the fall, our families shared the work, fun, and food at the boucherie.

TWO PHOTOS

by

Jacqueline Fryns

Two photos.... With about fifteen years in between, two pictures of our house in Liege, can tell a long story. A story of war, of suffering, of a certain courage and hope.

My father, Sous-Chef d'Etat Major in the Belgian Army, was required, to go higher in rank, to command a regiment, for as a rule in the Belgian Army, to attain a certain grade you had to have commanded a regiment. Since his young years he had always been in or near the high commandment (Staff Officer, maybe?), and he never had the chance to have a regiment under his command. So at a certain time in his career he had, in a way, to go down to be able to go up.

So he became at that time, responsible of the regiment's flag. He had (we had) to keep it in our house. So each time the flag was needed for a ceremony or other reasons, music ahead, (not the whole regiment but only a delegation,) came to get the flag with all the mandatory protocol. The avenue on which we were living was large and rather long, so, people could hear the music all along our street. Curious, they came to their windows, to watch what was happening. I can still see that flag, many war victory names and dates embroidered with golden threads. In my Daddy's office, in the corner near the chimney it stood and rested heavy with age and glory.

I remember that room, too: the furniture, a huge library, a huge desk in blond oak. And on the walls, the many frames with photos of the war, with pictures of my grandfather and great- grandfather in uniform. I remember with a special feeling, a small round table on the side, one yard in diameter, holding a considerable lamp. Its purple lampshade seemed to me so large and beautiful. The lamp was two feet high or so and had three angels carved in the dark wood. ("My three children," Mum used to say.) When it was time to go to bed, we went there to say Good Night to our parents. Daddy at his desk, busy studying or writing speeches or what? Mum, next to the lamp, sitting there quietly, sewing or mending clothes. It is still a lovely photo, tinted with warmth and love and shaded light, I cannot show it, for it is graven, only in my heart.

Days of glory? What is glory? What's all that about? And anyway, so many years later, what is left of it?

Our house stood near the end of the avenue, the second one after the corner house. Continuing along the avenue, a large bridge spanned the Meuse River. At the four corners of that bridge, four huge columns had been built, on top of which were four tall golden angels holding a trumpet. That bridge had been built for the 1900 International Fair, and during the war was a strategic target. The Germans damaged it, but the American bombs destroyed it later. By miracle or by the stupidity of destiny the four columns stayed proudly up at the Four Corners. Only one of the angels fell. When I returned from China in 1947, we still had to take a boat and pay to pass from one to the other side of the river.

The second photo was taken when many houses were already rebuilt. The corner one and one directly on its side were still in ruins. Of course, the street itself had been cleaned of all the rumbles and broken glass. At the time of the American bombardment that neighborhood was forbidden specially at night. It was too dangerous to walk by the gasping ruins, and it was on those nights that thieves roamed about, raiding property. Objects which hadn't been broken, were lost anyway. What those thieves were especially after was the pipe and every piece of steel, cooper and so on. Everything was torn, if not by bombing, by larceny.

Our house, having the roof and the last level snatched, the rain and snow could reach the first level. My sister and her husband were living on the first level apartment of a house farther on the other side of the bridge. That house had suffered some damages, but it was still possible to live in it. My mother joined them and for three years lived in the cellar.

The other day in trying to find a photo for my story I saw those two pictures. It strikes me how everything on this earth comes and goes. What is important? For what have we to be sorry for? Or happy? That first photo is the past. ..the second one, too. Should we take a third one showing how they cut on the driveways to let a four way avenue for the many cars and autobus? Or the corner having now a modern and functional building of don't know how many levels? Nothing stays the same. We age, we suffer a blow of destiny, we get over it, we enjoy our children and newborn grandchildren. Life is so strong above all, that however overwhelming with joy or sorrow as the event can be, there is always a tomorrow. And hope.

MY MILITARY AVOCATION
by
Curney Dronet

I received my commission as a 2nd Lt. and my wings as a bombardier-navigator on September 2, 1944, and was then assigned as a flight instructor at Midland Army Air Corp Base. I was there less than a year when the United States launched their atomic bomb strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, forcing the Japanese to unconditionally surrender. The war was abruptly over, and demobilization began immediately. With three dependents, and being stateside, I was released to the inactive Reserve by October 12, 1945.

Returning to Erath, and having been assigned to the Army Air Corp Reserve, my interest in the military did not diminish. However, to participate actively in the Reserves, I had to travel to New Orleans where my closest unit of interest was located. I didn't even have wheels on returning home, and it was 1949 by the time I was able to buy a car.

In 1947, the reconstitution of the National Guard began in earnest. Although Louisiana, pre-World War II, had only two battalion size units, one an Artillery unit in New Orleans, and the other an Infantry unit in South and Central Louisiana, both were organic to the 31st Infantry "Dixie" Division, with Headquarters in Mississippi. Upon re-organization, after World War II, Louisiana was authorized two regimental-size units, the 156th Infantry in South Louisiana, and the 199th Infantry in North Louisiana, both regiments of the 39th Infantry Division, with Headquarters in New Orleans. The 39th Infantry Division was split with Arkansas, which was authorized one regiment and the divisional field artillery units.

The 156th Infantry Regiment was headquartered in Lafayette, and was commanded by Col. Simon Castille, who had served in Europe as a Battalion commander in combat. The 1st Battalion of the regiment had their headquarters in Houma, the 3rd Battalion in Lake Charles, and the 2nd Battalion in St. Martinsville, commanded by Lt. Col. Dan Ritchey. The infantry company-size units of the 2nd Battalion, the battalion of interest in my case, were organized in New Iberia, Breaux Bridge and Opelousas.

Abbeville was organized as the combat support company with Captain Bob LeBlanc, commanding. The newly designated units were activated late in 1947,

and the intention was to recruit prior service personnel with emphasis on prior service veterans, which should insure a degree of proficiency in teaching, as a minimum, the basic school of the soldier. The units were conducting two hour drills each week for 48 weeks during the year and were required to attend a fifteen day, active duty for training summer encampment. The unit in Abbeville, Company H, was conducting their weekly training at the second level of the Bank of Abbeville building, on the comer opposite Magdalen Square. It wasn't until 1950 that the State of Louisiana built a maintenance shop on the Abbeville Airport grounds, which was initially used as an armory.

Organization and administration in the units developed satisfactorily, and recruiting produced results, but effective training of the soldier was slow to materialize. Fortunately, the recruiting officer service personnel contributed significantly to a degree of effective training. However, it wasn't until the mandatory six months rept training, the basic training of the individual soldier, was instituted that training began to improve.

At the end of the first year since activation, the unit had recruited between 40 and 50 personnel, a bare minimum to staff two platoons. This was sufficient, however, to provide "honor guard" for the burial services of the soldiers killed during the war, which were being returned to their families. At one such funeral, in mid-1949, Bob LeBlanc recruited me as a Lt. to fill the vacancy as the platoon leader in the anti-tank platoon. (I didn't realize then, how much influence the National Guard would have on my life). I had to learn the fundamentals; how to strip, clean, and operate the 57-mm anti-tank weapon, along with the eight men in my platoon. However, I was proficient in the school of the soldier, close order drill, manual of arms, drills and ceremonies, individual weapons qualification, and the many mundane but necessary requirements that a soldier must be proficient in, if he is to survive on the battlefield.

My entire military career, up to this point, had been in the Army Air Corp, flying at altitudes of up to 30,000 feet, where the battlefield appeared like a dot on the ground. I had to reorient my thinking to the ground, to the terrain, to the individual M-1 rifle, to the anti-tank weapon, to the 60 or 81- mm mortar and to the terrain studies using contour maps and the hand held compass to lead my platoon, my company, or my battalion in meaningful training. It was a very difficult transition from an airman to an infantry grunt.

I graduated from the school in the top third of my class, and in 1969 was promoted to the rank of full Colonel, and assigned as Deputy Brigade Commander of the 256th Infantry Bde. In 1971, the Department of the Army

instituted a two-year controlled correspondence course, with a four week active duty phase, at the Army War College, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which paralleled the regular nine month War College course. I was the first one selected from Louisiana for attendance, and graduated in 1973. In October of 1973, I assumed command of the 256th Infantry Brigade, Separate, promoted to the rank of Brigadier General, and served for five years, until my retirement in 1978.

MY FIRST VISIT TO ST. JAMES

by

Rita Wellborn

When I was in high school at St. Vincent's Institute, a Catholic girl's high school, two girls, Dot and Mary Aline Henderson, whom I thought to be orphans, attended the school. They lived with Mrs. Armitage, a rather elderly widow who lived around the corner from our house, and were rumored to have been adopted by Mrs. Armitage. I had heard that they had parents who lived in St. James, but I didn't know anything about their family. I assumed, like the rest of the girls in the school, that their parents were very poor because Dot and Mary Aline, we heard, were from a family of six children. It just seemed to me that unless the family was extremely poor, they wouldn't give two of their children away to be adopted.

So when I met John Henderson, and he told me that Dot and Mary Aline Henderson were his sisters, I assumed that they must be very poor. After we had been dating a few weeks, Johnny asked me if I would like to spend the day at his house the next Saturday. I was eager to go, but I was prepared to find the family living in abject poverty. I was a little apprehensive and in my mind was wondering how I would act before this poor, unfortunate family.

Johnny came to get me early on Saturday morning so that we would have a long day to spend together. All the way to St. James(only eighteen miles, but it seemed long), I was a little nervous about how I would act when we got there. I needn't have worried. The Hendersons lived in a very nice three bedroom house. His father was a very successful carpenter/contractor and his mother was a Graugnard, of the wealthy Graugnards, sugar cane farmers in St. James Parish. Mr. John Henderson, Sr. had been in complete charge of the restoration of Oak Alley Plantation, a project which took ten years. The Hendersons had lived in a nice house on the Oak Alley Plantation during the restoration of the main plantation house. Needless to say, I was dumbfounded by this turn of events. I couldn't bring myself to ask Mrs. Henderson why she had allowed her daughters to be adopted by someone when they seemed to be able to take care of six children themselves.

Much later, when I knew her much better, Mrs. Henderson told me that Mrs. Armitage was her aunt and lived alone in Donaldsonville. Mrs. Armitage suggested to Mrs. Henderson that she would love to have Dot and Mary Aline

live with her during the week so that they could attend the convent, as we all called St. Vincent's. Mrs. Henderson, who herself had attended the very exclusive, very expensive, Ursuline Convent in New Orleans, consented to have the girls live with Pal, the family name for Mrs. Armitage. At first they came home every weekend, returning to Donaldsonville every Sunday afternoon for school the following week. Then after a while, because of one activity or another, they began to miss weekends. Either there was a party they wanted to attend, or there was a basketball game or a football game, and soon they were spending many more weekends in Donaldsonville than in St. James. It wasn't long before the girls were really living in Donaldsonville and visiting occasionally in St. James.

One day Mrs. Armitage (or Pal, as everyone called her) told Mrs. Henderson that she would like to legally adopt Dot and Mary Aline. She was a very wealthy widow with no one to leave her money to. She, of course, by this time had begun to think of Dot and Mary Aline as hers anyway. Mrs. Henderson told me that she thought long and hard and decided that it would be a shame to deprive the girls of the opportunity of this inheritance so she decided to allow Pal to adopt them. For all practical purposes they were really living with Pal anyway. However, every time this subject came up, I got the feeling that Mrs. Henderson never did reconcile completely with the idea of giving her girls up for adoption. The family relations were always pleasant, but I sensed that Dot and Mary Aline were thought of more as cousins than sisters to the other Henderson children.

THE HAND OF BACH

by

Kitty Kelley

Years ago I decided my sons needed lessons in music. All children do, don't they? Visions dreamily crossed my inner thoughts of the two boys dressed in their finest suits, with white shirts, and shoes shined, with faces clean and hair combed, seated at the piano in concert.

I went out and bought a fine piano, a very worthwhile investment. I don't remember how I found just the right teacher, but very soon, Irma Jones showed up. She was a gem. She came to the house and began to teach the boys to read music and play. The boys were not overjoyed with lessons.

They thought a few lessons and they would be playing like professionals. They didn't like the time practicing took away from their outdoor activities.

At that time Sheilah was four years old, so we hadn't planned lessons for her yet. She stood right by the piano and absorbed everything Irma said. It wasn't long before she was picking out simple tunes on her own. Irma started giving her lessons too. We began to realize Sheilah was musically gifted. At age four she learned to read music before she knew how to read or write words. Before long she was composing music.

The boys were ready to give up lessons at the end of the first year. Steve joined the school band and became very proficient on the trumpet. David quit the piano and took up guitar lessons for several years.

Sheilah was so happy with music that we soon bought an organ for her. She studied with George Brown from the university. Brown traced his teachers back all the way to Johann Sebastian Bach, so Sheilah can make the same claim. Sheilah continued with piano, also at the university, with Nolan Sahuc. From time to time Sheilah would bring home from school various instruments, namely, a violin, flute, and even a full size accordion which she enjoyed playing. Eventually the school bus driver asked her not to take the accordion on the bus anymore because it was so bulky he was afraid she would fall getting on or off the bus.

Sheilah has that magical something called perfect pitch. She can play any music she hears even without the music. She continued her piano and organ study until she left Lafayette to attend LSU. She is now a student consular at Surfside Elementary School in Satellite Beach, Florida. After school she teaches

clarinet to five band students. Sheilah plays clarinet in the Melbourne concert band. The band performs often at Epcot Center.

I simply have to admit Sheilah is the prefect daughter I always wanted. I never asked her to quit any other activities to "practice"; I always asked her to play some music for me to wash dishes by, or dust by, etc.

While Sheilah was in high school she played the organ at the Christian Church on University Street and for a time she played the organ at Our Lady of Fatima Church on Johnston Street. When Sheilah moved to Florida I gave her the piano. The organ has fallen into disrepair so now I have an excellent electric keyboard which we all enjoy and look forward to hearing her play when she comes on holidays.

RATTLESNAKES
by
Stanley Fox Davis

In the early spring of 1920, while employed at their terminal warehouse in Eastland, Texas, I was assigned to relieve the warehouseman at Fincher Warehouse who was going on vacation. The Fincher warehouse was so named because it was on the Fincher Ranch in the cattle country of West Texas. It was a small warehouse located strategically to supply casing (large pipe used in well drilling) and other drilling supplies to an active drilling program in that area.

It was regularly staffed by a warehouseman, a storekeeper, an office clerk, a yard foreman, and a Mexican labor crew. Living quarters consisted of two bunk houses, a combination kitchen and mess hall, and a bath house with hot water when it was practical to pipe it from a nearby drilling rig. Also, there were less luxurious living quarters for the Mexican laborers nearby.

Sometime after I arrived at Fincher warehouse, I noticed not far from the warehouse, an outcropping of sandstone rock a little higher than the land surrounding it.

The cowboys and ranch hands called it "Rattlesnake Hill." When I asked them why, they said, "Just wait until the first hot sunny day of Spring, and you'll know why we call it 'Rattlesnake Hill.'" About two weeks later, I was passing by and saw that it was entirely covered with rattlesnakes. Some were coiled, and some stretched out full length, sunning themselves after crawling out of the cracks and crevices where they had hibernated all winter.

For the next two or three weeks, it was unsafe to walk around the warehouse yard or anywhere near "Rattlesnake Hill" without wearing knee high boots to prevent being bitten by one of those unseen vipers. Snakes seldom strike above knee height. Also, at night, it was imprudent not to check your room and bed to make sure that none of these reptiles were visiting you.

After two or three weeks, the rattlesnake population returned to normal, only one or two seen occasionally. I suppose they had crawled or slithered away all over the state of Texas, looking for food or doing whatever rattlesnakes do to amuse themselves. However, the old timers assured me that the snakes would be back as they had for as long as they could remember to hibernate in the cracks and crevices of that rock pile they called "Rattlesnake Hill."

I was fortunate to have the opportunity of observing this phenomenon of nature, but I am glad I was not permanently assigned to work at Fincher warehouse.

SUNDAY MORNING RIDE ON JEFFERSON STREET

by

Bea Murphy

When I first came back to Lafayette, after living many years in Texas, on Sunday mornings I would drive downtown on Jefferson Street trying to remember the old Lafayette I had left.

The old Jefferson theater was gone, so was the beautiful old post office and the five and ten cent Woolworth store where I had worked on my first job, when I was sixteen, was no more. The café next door where one of the girls that worked with me would play "San Antonio Rose" on the juke box and sit and cry was also gone. It really made me sad.

Last Sunday morning as I was driving downtown on Jefferson Street I saw the beautiful cypress trees and azaleas, the beautiful brick sidewalks and the street with Fleur de Lis pattern and many of the store fronts have been redone. The revived Jefferson Street brought back happy memories.

I remember the time a USL boy stopped at the cosmetic counter at Woolworth's and sang "I met a million Dollar Baby at the Five and Ten Cent Store" to me.

Another time I was walking down Jefferson Street and three boys came up to me and sang "I Dream of Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair."

Old memories fade but are brought back by riding down Jefferson Street on Sunday mornings.

Daddy told my sister Jewell that he was a street singer on Jefferson Street when he was a young man. My Daddy was the greatest and had a beautiful voice. Lafayette is truly our town.

TIME MOVES ON
by
John Q. Lee

In my wildest dreams I could never have imagined that I would be teaching school at eighteen years of age! After reading the Wild West magazines, I knew that Texas was beckoning me to become a cowboy. Just have to put that plan on hold for now, 'cause the little schoolhouse in the Okefenokee Swamp needed me. In the schools I had attended from early childhood through high school graduation, strict discipline was a major factor, so from day one that was my goal with my students. The children and their families welcomed me with open arms and promised to stand behind me with their cooperation. As time went by there was resistance to certain rules, like no smoking on the school grounds for the bigger boys, permission to leave the classroom or school grounds, and eating only at regular lunch period. Could I get the kids to follow rules they were not used to? For most of them that took some getting used to.

The children were always vying for me to go home with them for the night. That was fun making choices each day and then letting the families know in advance. They all looked forward to my visit and made their special dishes. On one occasion when I went home with the three Cowart boys, ages 6,8,10, who lived close to Millpond Lake, I was a little apprehensive 'cause I had heard their father was a tough character, liking to sip the moonshine whiskey. When I arrived everyone was on their best behavior, and we enjoyed the most delicious fish dinner with those good ol' Georgia hushpuppies. After supper I went to my room located at the end of the L-shaped porch running the full length of the house. I hadn't been in there long before I heard a commotion in the front yard. Hearing loud voices I cracked the door to peek out, and there was Mr. Cowart and a man I knew, Willard Lang.

The men were shouting at each other, but when Willard saw me standing in the door, he said, "What are you doing here?" I explained I was teaching at the school since Mr. White had died. I don't know if he even heard me 'cause he turned back to Cowart and yelled, "I know you're poaching on our lake, and I've come here to let you know that you've got to stop and I mean NOW. You know it's against the law to take others out there netting fish to sell."

They were standing by the curbed well in the center of the yard and all of a sudden Cowart pulled out a hog sticking knife about 12 inches long and started

slashing at Willard. Round and round that well they went until finally Willard started running for his truck. Cowart was yelling, "I've fished that lake ever since I was a boy, and there ain't nobody going to stop me!" I thought sure Cowart was going to kill him, but Willard jumped that fence and when he grabbed his gun, he threatened, "Don't you come another step or I'll kill ya!" Cowart yelled, "Don't you come on this property again, and I'll fish when and where I please, and ain't nobody going to stop me!" I slipped back into my room thinking, *Oh, Lord, what am I doing here?!*

HOW WE, AS CHILDREN, ENTERTAINED OURSELVES

by

Versie L. Foti

Such places as Toys-R-Us, Children's Palace, Discovery Zone, and video parlors were not yet even a glimmer in the minds of inventors when I was growing up in the 1920's and 30's. Escape from boredom, after we finished our chores, of course, was entirely dependent upon the ingenuity of one or all of us–brothers, sisters, cousins, and neighbors. There is a familiar quotation: *Necessity is the mother of invention*, and we applied that principle to many things we made or games we played to fill the after-work hours and prevent the bickering and squabbling that often erupted when we were idle.

Parents usually insisted that children play outside when the weather was good. "Good" included even very hot days, because, without air conditioning, it was almost as hot inside as it was outside. With the admonition to "play under the trees" or "stay in the shade," kids were shooed from underfoot. Besides, if we remained too near Mama, there was sure to be unexpected chores to do.

During the summer months, we spent several hours every afternoon, except Sunday, swimming in the pool watered by the rice irrigation pump. Many of the neighbors' children joined us as we enjoyed the cold water on hot afternoons.

Most of the families in our community owned horses which were available for riding if they were not being used for farm work. The older children often gathered to ride on the back roads in the late afternoons. Some riders had saddles, some rode bareback, and some rode double if there weren't enough horses. Daring riders jumped cattle guards or ditches, others ran races, and some wore spurs and made their mounts buck, performing as though they were riding a wild horse.

We reserved hayrides for special occasions. On Hallowe'en we loaded a wagon with hay, hitched a pair of mules to it, and picked up children for the ride to the church or a private home where we had a party. Ghosts appeared along the back roads where we traveled and, of course, in the graveyard.

Christmas Eve was another occasion for a hayride. We sang Christmas songs as we rode to designated houses where the family usually served hot chocolate and cookies.

Daddy encouraged us to have our friends gather at our house to make gumbo or candy or popcorn balls on Saturday night. He was always there to supervise

the activities. We played cards or dominos and listened to records on the phonograph.

Sunday afternoon was a favorite time for the neighborhood kids to gather at our house. Since the rice pump didn't run on Sundays, we had to find other activities. We sometimes threw hay on the ground beneath the door of the hayloft. With a rope tied to a rafter in the hayloft, we took turns sliding or swinging on the rope, pretending to be trapeze performers. Sometimes we performed in a play or acted like puppets in the hayloft door.

Sticks and balls were prized possessions because we could think of many games to play using those two devices. We used small balls to play jacks using small stones if we had no jacks. When baseballs and bats were unavailable, as they usually were, we played baseball in the barn lot with a medium-size rubber ball and a stick. We also used a rubber ball to play a game similar to stick ball, using the stick to drive the ball into small holes.

We used larger balls to play volleyball, basketball, and a game similar to soccer with other improvised equipment.

Daddy kept several fifty-five gallon drums in the barn lot which we turned on their side to make cylinders on which we learned to walk with dexterity, developing balance and other skills.

Springtime signaled the collection of string, strips of wood, paper bags or wrapping paper and fabric to construct kites to be ready for the March winds. We met in the pasture after school or on the weekend to see who had the best kite that could fly the highest and stay in the air the longest. We made slingshots from tree forks, strips of rubber from old inner tubes and pieces of leather salvaged from old shoes. We also made "shooters" from cane reeds. The slingshots and shooters were used to shoot china balls in "kid wars." We played other games such as marbles, Mumblety Peg, and Pop-the-Whip. We climbed trees and raced in sacks and in wheelbarrows.

There were some cold or rainy days when we had to stay inside. On those days we read or played cards, dominos, checkers, Chinese checkers, or jacks, or cut out paper dolls from the Sears Roebuck catalog. Sometimes, we roasted potatoes or marshmallows or popped corn in the fireplace.

We never seemed to lack the ability to entertain ourselves. We were often motivated by the threat, "Find something to do unless you want me to find something." We knew that Daddy could always find work for us if we didn't want to play.

We never felt deprived because we didn't have built-in entertainment. Memories of the fun times of my childhood flood my soul when I think of those long ago days.

THE MAIL MUST BE DELIVERED

by

Betty Shoemaker

At nineteen years of age my cousin Bill returned home from World War II, a wounded, decorated soldier. Being shot in the head during the Battle of the Bulge, Bill would ultimately lose his hearing. The War Department offered Bill total disability. Having no idea of the medical problems he would face in the future, Bill said "No thanks, I just want to work." In the small town of Ida, job opportunities for the hearing impaired were very scarce. Bill applied for a job as a rural mail carrier, a job he held for forty-seven years.

One morning in North Louisiana, Bill and his wife, Udean, woke to a chilling temperature of seven degrees. The roads and highways were covered with thick layers of ice and driving conditions would be very dangerous. Bill, a rural mail carrier, and Udean, post mistress, made a good team. In bad weather, the main post office in Shreveport left it up to each driver to chance mail delivery.

Bill looked at Udean and said, "I must get this mail delivered. The Social Security checks are in the mail, and it will make a difference whether some people will have food or medication for the weekend." Udean told Bill, "If you want to try, I will help." Two kinder, more loving and caring Christians, I have never known.

It was impossible for the car to leave the ruts to reach the mail boxes, but Bill was afraid someone would slip on the ice and break a hip or slip onto the highway and be struck by a car while trying to get their mail. Bill drove the car and kept it warm, staying in the ruts while Udean hand- delivered each occupant's mail to the door of each home. This mail route was fifty miles long causing Bill to drive over one hundred miles of icy roads and highways.

Before retiring at age seventy-two, Bill was awarded a plaque by the United States Postal Department for driving over one million accident-free miles in the line of duty. So you see, Bill and Udean Wynn are very special.

SCHOOL DAYS, WILD BUS RIDES, AND BOB

by

Woodson Hopkins

The "little red school house" had faded into history by the time I started a long, and sometimes arduous, journey toward a formal education. The year was 1935. FDR was president. The great East Texas oil boom was in full swing when our family left Houston and moved to Refugio County on the strength of promising seismic data conducted on the Tom O'Connor ranch fourteen miles east of town. "Enough oil to last a hundred years," H.R. Cullen predicted when he sent Dad and others to drill for it.

It was in Refugio that I entered the second grade. All grades, first through high school, were contained in one sprawling, U-shaped brick building. I do not remember much about those early school days ,but I do recall vividly one wild bus ride with the Principal, Bob Renfro. Bob always seemed in a hurry to return to the bus barn, perhaps to finish the heavy work load that he maintained. Besides being the school principal, Bob was the band leader, special events director, and typing teacher. As a practical matter, Bob did not have time to dally around with thirty-five mile bus jaunts, dodging jack rabbits, chaparral and wet paper missiles aimed at the girls up front by the boys in the back.

The job of bus driver paid extra, and Bob relished the extra money from the school district. After all, there was a depression going on, and Bob, like most others, tried hard to make ends meet. Once every year he put together some sort of musical extravaganza in which the entire seventh grade participated. Bob decided to present an adaptation of the 1929 movie, *Desert Song,* written and scored by Siegmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein. The lead was given to Gene Bryant, a tall skinny kid with a voice like Alfalfa. On the night of the big performance, Gene showed up with a sore throat and a bad case of stage fright. Bob, ever the master improviser, grabbed a microphone and held it next to the hand crank Victrola and motioned Gene to mouth the lyric on his cue. Things moved along rather nicely until the phonograph needle stuck in a groove. Bob signaled Gene to continue and with a wave of his arms directed the chorus to increase volume drowning out Gene's feeble attempts to be heard.

The next day Bob went around town soliciting comments on the previous evening's The proprietor of the dry goods store was elated, not over the

performance, but because he had registered record sales of bed sheets to the erstwhile Arabs in the chorus.

In the spring Bob wrote a patriotic musical using several World War I songs. Mrs. Joplin's elocution class had helped Gene's confidence before an audience. When the house lights dimmed ,and the curtains parted, Gene sang:

...through the war's great curse stands the Red Cross nurse, she's the rose of no man's land....

During a rousing finale, the steel helmet Gene wore fell from his head and rolled across the stage into the orchestra pit with a loud clang–all to the amusement of the audience. Gene's face turned beet red while Bob buried his face in his hands. Afterwards Gene complained to Mr .Renfro that someone had sneaked behind the back drop and swatted the helmet off his head. Furthermore he thought he knew who had caused the interruption.

It was a silent driver that climbed behind the wheel of the bus on the afternoon following the helmet incident. The boys in the rear seats did not notice when Bob approached that improperly installed cattle guard that separated the A and B leases. As he did, he bore down on the accelerator, his eyes sparked with vengeance, and the speedometer registered "fifty per." When the bus hit the cattle guard, all the boisterous boys in the back were suddenly catapulted forward to the front where they landed draped over unyielding metal seats. Their moans and cries were heard all the way to the oil camp. In the large rear view mirror they saw Bob's smiling face and heard a subdued cry of touché from the driver's seat.

FRENCH IMMERSION TO NOVA SCOTIA BY WAY OF VENEZUELA

by

Olympe Butcher

I belong to a group called *grandparents raising grandchildren.*

This summer I gave my favorite grandchild, Brian Butcher, a long rope...long enough to go around the world. I helped elongate that rope making sure that its elasticity would take him back home but not by hitchhiking. ... It worked!

One day last April, Brian, who lives with me, had arrived from his sophomore engineering classes waving a paper at me and shouting, "Look, Grandma, I got it! Mon billet!" It was his plane ticket to Nova Scotia. His plans for many years past were becoming a reality....to be immersed in the five week French program at the University of Quebec. (He would not be able to speak any English.)

As I looked at his billet, I said, "But this ticket says to Caracas, Venezuela. I thought you wanted to do French this summer, not Spanish."

To help me understand why his route to Venezuela en route to Canada was necessary, he explained, "But, Grandma, Joe and I were great friends at the Marine Military Academy. After graduation, he planned to teach English in Caracas. He will not be there much longer, and this is a great opportunity for me to visit Venezuela. And Joe is waiting for me before he returns to Atlanta to go back to college."

Their plans must have been in the making for a long time. Only now was I aware of this extra trip to South America. When Brian attended the public schools in Lafayette Parish, his fourth grade French teacher, Mary Alice Drake, had told him, "You can travel the world over speaking French," and to my French-speaking grandson, this opportunity by way of South America could not be passed up.

"Grandma," he said, "On the way back from Caracas, I'll call you from Houston on my way to Calgary, Canada. I promise." *(Ah, oui je comprendre bien. Un petit peu de betisse au long de la route.)*

"And in Calgary, I'll visit with my friends Desi and Christa and their baby Sebastian. I may even visit my cousins, Cathy, Scott, Shirly and Cal Cavendish."

" But wait, Brian, this plane ticket stops there. How will you get form Alberta on the West to Nova Scotia on the Eastern side of Canada?"

"Grandma...!"

"No, I'm not listening! Drive me to Acadian Travel right now. I'll discuss this with your friend, Mr. James Cross."

Before these plans, Brian had already been accepted to the University of Quebec. ..much to the disapproval of Barry Ancelet who wanted him to attend the University of St. Anne like all the other French students. To please Barry, Brian's wish to go to Quebec University was dropped, and he applied by phone to the University of St. Anne and was accepted by Dr. & Mrs. Jean Claude Comeau, the deans of the university in French immersion.

Our visit to Mr .Cross and the travel agency proved to be very calming. "What Brian needs is a beautiful train ride across Canada, an impressive experience from Calgary to Halifax, where all the St Anne students meet before crossing over into Nova Scotia."

I could not let him walk! I wanted Brian there on time, so we arranged for that train ride ticket to be mailed to him in Calgary. Finally, he was getting to Nova Scotia!

My next question was, " How will you come home after five weeks of speaking French? Maybe you won't be able to talk your way down."

"Grandma! I'll hitch hike!"

Viv (his mom) and I returned to Mr .Cross and made sure that a return ticket by way of Boston to Atlanta (again to visit Joe and his family) then to Lafayette was safely in his hands when he arrived at St. Anne in Nova Scotia.

Tout etait bien! Brian is now home. He made many friends at the school (after having visited with cousins) and in Banff and Lake Louise in Calgary.

I am proud that he made it through St. Anne because he told me that five or six students had been sent home for speaking English.

It was a long journey, but Brian is proud now to display his framed University of Saint Anne certificate:

Pointe de l'Eglise, Nouvelle Ecosse, Canada
A suivi et reussi un stage d'immersion totale en Francais
du 2 juillet au aout 512000 et a attient le niveau
Debutant I
Signee par le Directeur,
Ecoles de immersion

"Grandma, I'd like to go back next year!"

His new job might just help to get him there–maybe without too many detours. Who know?! !

P.S. Grandma earned an invitation from both Dr. and Mrs. Comeau to join Brian next year at the university!