



*Excerpts from*  
**Our Pages**  
**Of Life**



**FOR DISPLAY ONLY  
DO NOT REMOVE**







A picture attached to a memo board in my office at home is one of several old photographs. This one that I can see from my spot at the computer is of a serious faced young boy. He is wearing a long sleeved ruffled white shirt, dark shorts, black stockings, and high top shoes. One fist is curled, the other open, resting on his left knee. Both legs are supported by metal braces. He is seated above another boy, his older brother, an image cut in half because my copy has been cropped. The boy in the photograph, born in 1898, is Stanley Fox Davis, a Stanley I know now, through stories.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the life writing class of which Stanley has been a part. It also marks the closing of that decade, but more as the turning, an opening of a new chapter in our lives. This chapter of the class I have taught for the last ten years reads as its own fascinating story, besides the life of a 102-year-old gentleman. Take a look at a sampling of the roster I have counted as my list of friends through the years.

I have taught a man who wrestled alligators. Two men I know fell in love with the same young girl, Shirley—she had dimples and blonde ringlets then. One student's husband was a Pullman conductor who brought home a bag of homegrown popping corn—the best she'd ever tasted. My student never met the man who sold the popcorn on the train, but her husband recognized him almost forty years later on a television commercial for Orville Redenbacher's popcorn—the product of the traveling salesman.

Other students have met presidents and entertained ambassadors. My students have traveled the globe looking for love and war and peace. And they have found all three. Sometimes they have lost love or been betrayed.

Their treks have been taken by foot, horse and buggy, homemade roller coasters and Mardi Gras floats, trains and steamers and banana boats. They have driven long hauls, eighteen miles one way, in Model T's and Model A's, and cross country in Volkswagen bugs. They have been chased by roosters, bullies, and toddlers. They have talked to each other through discarded cans and copper wire. Now they talk through air waves and e-mail.

One student put a broken piano back together again—all by herself, with no directions. I have taught a lady who slugged a boy for kissing her (she outgrew hitting boys). I have taught a former Romper Room teacher. I have also taught a man who saw President Roosevelt, Teddy, not Franklin, walk on the White House lawn. Another student enjoyed a ticker tape parade in New York City—on the *first* first Armistice Day, a premature celebration of the end of World War I. I have taught a student who helped edit All The King's Men—as an undergraduate student of Robert Penn Warren.

War brides and war heroes have joined the life writing class to write their stories. So have Army nurses and Red Cross volunteers as have other men and women, individuals proud of their heritage—Acadian, French, British, African-American, Belgian, Italian, German, Native American, Danish, Slavic, Southern, Northern, Midwestern, and American—many cultures from around the world. These people are making my history by teaching me theirs.



In fact, all I can really admit to is that I am the student, not the teacher, in this class of elder wisdom. If I envision myself in any way as having a part to play in a scheme larger than my own imagination, it is through the desire to see generations joined as people, not as age stereotypes, and to use their stories as natural bridge builders.

I have always known that my students have had the greatest influence on my ideas about writing instruction. The main reason is that I am first and foremost a listener of my students' voices, first aloud and then on paper. By learning how to listen, I have learned how to read more carefully and how to write better. I have also learned, I believe, how to be a better person.

After tens of thousands of stories, my class roster boasts an incomparable list of hundreds of students, people who have committed themselves to a unique task: preserving their life experiences for future generations. To these students, I am indebted. Out of my students' commitment, my own commitment has become clearer: I want to participate in joining the generations through stories. You can, too, by listening to these stories and by telling your own. Keep writing for generations to come!

Joan Stear  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
Spring 2001

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 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*) Viva Periou, *on right*, and sister Velma;  
Lucien Martin; country dance hall of the 1930's, submitted by Lucien Martin;  
Ah Say, carrying Mary Langford's daughter, Donna, in "meh die";  
(*center*) Lois Meals Diehl (*on right*) with cousin Judy Baker and father at Grandpa Baker's;  
Doris Broussard Bentley and her brother, J.E.

---

©2001 LIFE & LETTERS • an intergenerational company



**This volume of life stories  
is lovingly dedicated to the men and women  
who have written the stories of their lifetime  
for lifetimes to come.**

**To each of my students, XXOOXXs.**





**LIFE WRITING CLASS**  
University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
Spring 2001 • Thursday Morning Session

*Seated, left to right:* Lois Diehl; Mary Ann Early; Betty Speyrer;  
Jane Ellen Carstens; Nina Ludington  
*Standing, left to right:* Viva Periou; Taylor Hopkins;  
Jack Crouchet; Mary Langford; Mavis Fruge;  
Doris Bentley; Joan Stear, *Instructor*; Lucien Martin  
(*Missing from photo:* Tom Eby)









## CONTENTS

<i>MAMA'S KITCHEN by Mavis Arnaud Fruge</i> . . . . .	1
<i>MY SUNDAY AFTERNOON TREASURE HUNT by Nina H. Ludington</i> . . . . .	3
<i>CHEZ BOULOOTE'S by Lucien T. Martin</i> . . . . .	5
<i>SALVAGE THAT BLANKET!! by Doris Bentley</i> . . . . .	8
<i>HAMILTON'S FINEST by Jane Ellen Carstens</i> . . . . .	11
<i>LIFE AT NO.6 by Mary Langford</i> . . . . .	13
<i>MY EARLIEST SCHOOL YEARS by Viva Periou</i> . . . . .	17
<i>A RED LETTER DAY by Betty Speyrer</i> . . . . .	19
<i>MUSEUMS by Tom Eby</i> . . . . .	21
<i>MR. PRESIDENT by Mary Ann Early</i> . . . . .	23
<i>LOBSTER TALES by Lois Diehl</i> . . . . .	24
<i>DEAD MAN BAPTIZED by Jack Crouchet</i> . . . . .	27
<i>I PROMISED MYSELF: I WOULD NEVER BE POOR by Taylor Hopkins</i> . . . . .	29



## MAMA'S KITCHEN

by

*Mavis Arnaud Fruge*

Even the early summer mornings are warm in south Louisiana, especially so without air conditioning. I hardly noticed the heat when I was little, but I was keenly aware of the aroma of rising bread dough that filled our warm country kitchen.

Mama had been up before daybreak making Daddy's coffee and her bread dough. By the time eight sleepy eyed girls made their way to the kitchen, the white globe of bread dough was inching its way over the edge of the large earthenware bowl. Her black cast iron skillet ready with hot oil, Mama would pinch off a small ball of bread dough, and with dexterity that only comes from much practice, she would pull and stretch until just the right thickness, then place the dough in the waiting skillet. As it cooked, the dough would sprout bubbles, and like puffy clouds, each one would take on a shape of its own. When the bottom was just the right golden hue, Mama would turn the dough over with a fork to get the other side to the same perfection. The aroma only increased the intensity of our hunger pangs. This fried bread dough we called beignets.

Next was to spread some home made fig preserves on that beignet, and with a glass of cold milk, there was a winning combination! Not all of the dough would get fried. With the dough that was left Mama made small dinner rolls. These were set aside to rise a second time and would be ready for baking near lunch time to be included in the noon meal.

It wasn't just bread that Mama made. There were biscuits made with buttermilk that would rise so tall while baking. I can close my eyes and drawing a long whiff, conjure up that butter flavor yet. As an adult, I once heard a comedian describe his mother's biscuits as "cat head biscuits." I remember thinking, "that sounds just like Mama's." She would skim the thick cream that settled at the top of large bowls of milk that our cows produced. The cream was placed in a quart jar and when about 3/4 full, one of us girls would shake the jar in the slow, steady rhythm we had been taught. In very little time, it would yield its golden ball of delicious butter. The resulting buttermilk was kept for various baking needs, nothing wasted. Now slather those hot biscuits with that fresh butter and you have a memory maker for sure.

When Richard and I first married, we lived in San Antonio. Frequently we would reminisce about the good food back home. At Richard's urging, I wrote Mama



requesting her biscuit recipe. She quickly responded. Being young and so eager to duplicate Mama's culinary skills, I went to work with the recipe.

The dough was sticky, uncooperative and refused to drop out of the biscuit cutter without a fight. And there were so many to cut! Mama's recipe called for eight cups of flour, enough biscuits for a very large family, but there were just two of us! We had dozens of rock hard biscuits that had refused to rise due to excess handling. Richard, who never fails to seize the moment, offered to paint the biscuits black and sell them for hockey pucks. I decided then that biscuits in tubes are more practical and much less humiliating.

Mama was very good at candy making, too. If some neighbor had a son away in the military, the mother would come to Mama to make the candy to be mailed off. She was always successful. When the nuns at Little Flower School had Sweets Sales, we would get on the school bus with grocery bags full of popcorn balls, or pralines, or fudge, something sinfully delicious for sure. Mama was the only mother I knew who made taffy.

Years later I explained the procedure to my own little girls. "Let's make some," my Lisa begged. The recipe was simple, half sugar cane syrup, half granulated sugar, boil until it spins a fine thread, at that point add a pinch of soda. As I did so the mixture erupted in a froth that rushed dangerously close to the top edge of the pan, then miraculously simmered down again. I determined it was done and poured it out on a buttered cookie sheet.

Mama could always guess perfectly when it was cool enough to handle. With buttered hands, she would fold all four sides of the thickened syrup inward to form a brick, and then all in one motion lift, pull, twist and with precision slap both ends in one hand and catch what had just been the middle in the other and repeat the process over and over. Like magic, the brown syrup would turn into taffy as golden as Rapunzel's hair. So here I go, I've buttered my hands, it's cool enough, I fold, lift, pull and SPLAT! The blob hits the floor. And for a moment of utter disbelief we stare with mouths open and eyes wide and then break into hysterical laughter. No, I don't make taffy either.

Mama is now 84 years old. She is still making bread, and I am her next door neighbor. I don't have to imagine those wonderful smells in Mama's kitchen. I can walk to her house. She'll say "Sit down, chère, I'll fry you some beignets." No need to decline. She tells me, "You don't have to be hungry to eat those. Besides, she will always add, "I made those just for you." How can a daughter refuse? So I'll eat and she'll talk, more than likely about my younger sisters who live away, that we might see but once or twice a year. She wonders if they remember. I assure her they do. No one could forget Mama's kitchen.



## MY SUNDAY AFTERNOON TREASURE HUNT

by

*Nina H. Ludington*

**M**y parents moved from a steel mill town in the northern panhandle of West Virginia to a farm when I was almost four years old. They told us the move was necessary so that we would have milk to drink and food to eat as the depression made it difficult for them to earn enough money to buy the groceries in town. Momma said that we could grow the vegetables and all the other food on our farm.

Sundays, the longest days, became longer because we had to attend Sunday School and Church Service in town, then we ate our traditional big Sunday dinner. Sometimes, Daddy would take Margie and me into the parlor. We would review the Presbyterian Catechism or we could read our school books. We were not permitted to play games because it was God's day of rest.

One crispy Autumn Sunday afternoon, my older brothers, Howard and Donald, got permission for my sister and I to go with them on a hike. Before we left the yard, Howard said "Donald let's get some shovels and hoes out of the tool house." Donald replied, "Okay." I was so happy that they were letting me go with them as I was two years younger than Margie and of course Howard and Donald were a lot older —probably eight years older than me.

We walked down the steep graveled road past the sheep barn singing and pretending we were soldiers. When we came to the rail fence, Howard had to help me climb over into the corn field. As we walked toward the woods, I looked up to the sky and saw the big puffy white clouds against the blue sky. I felt all warm and fuzzy inside. We were getting real close to the woods, and I noticed all the bright colored leaves on the trees. Just then I saw Donald running ahead of us. He yelled, "I'm going to make sure it is safe." I'd never been in the woods before. As we approached the woods, I noticed the softness that the brown leaves made on the ground. Just then something jumped from behind a big oak tree, Margie and I screamed and screamed. Donald laughed and laughed as he knew he had scared us. He loved playing jokes on Margie and me.

Walking into the woods, we saw mounds of dirt that were about six feet long and about four feet high. They were covered with moss and some wild flowers and leaves. Howard and Don chose the biggest mound. Howard said, "Maybe the Big Indian Chief is buried here." Donald said, "or maybe the hidden Treasure that we heard about." We started digging vigorously. The boys used the shovels and Margie and I dug with the hoes. After awhile, I heard a strange sound going "Whoo! Whoo!"

I didn't want the others to think I was a scared baby, so I just edged my way around the mound to be next to my oldest brother, Howard. I hoped that they would not see how I was shaking as that warm fuzzy feeling I had coming to the woods sure had left me.

A little later, Donald said, "Hey, I hit something like metal, maybe it is the Big Chief's Casket or maybe the Treasure Chest." We all started to dig faster. Pretty soon there was lots of dirt at the side and a big hole where the mound had been. I stopped for a minute. The white puffy clouds were turning dark gray, and the woods was getting darker. Finally they came to the thing that Donald thought was metal and found a big flat rock. Margie and I discovered several flint stones shaped like arrows on the ground around the mounds. The boys said that the Indians used to hunt with bows and shoot the deer and other wild animals with the stones to provide their families with meat and furs to keep them warm.

Howard said, "Come on we can't give up just because that mound did not have anything." Then Donald suggested that he and Margie worked as a team and Howard and I work together. When we were on our fourth mound, a loud clap of thunder startled all of us. I know I must have jumped at least four feet. We immediately stopped digging and we headed for home.

When we were in the process of climbing the rail fence to get onto the gravel road, the clouds burst open simultaneously with another loud clap of thunder. We ran very fast the rest of way home.

I found the greatest treasure of all when Momma met us on the porch with a big hug, towels and some hot chocolate.





## CHEZ BOULOOTE'S

by  
*Lucien T. Martin*

In the spring of 1951 when I enrolled at SLI (now UL) in Lafayette, students were required to take an entrance exam. We sat in a large classroom with the rows of seats gradually elevated to the rear. I sat on the last row against the wall.

A beautiful tall blonde female student sat next to me. She completed the test long before the time allotted, while I struggled frantically to complete mine. When time was called, I had to turn in my test unfinished.

We handed in our test papers at the same time. I introduced myself and commented on how fast she had completed the test, adding that only a genius could have done it in such a short time. "I have to have a cup of coffee to calm my nerves. Care to join me?" I asked.

"Sure, Mr. Martin," she answered.

Her name was Marilyn. I told her that I was of Acadian descent. "Mr. Martin, I'm doing a study of the Acadians. May I interview you?" she asked.

"Of course. I'll try to help you, but please call me Lucien." I replied. "I've been to a lot of 'fais-do-do's' (dances). Maybe we could start there."

On Saturday we drove to Chez Bouloote's. Set among tall cypress trees with Spanish moss hanging from their branches, the dance hall was a beautiful sight to see at sunset. Inside, the view was not as spectacular. Two large exhaust fans at each end of the hall, located at the apex of the roof of the building, brought in the cool breeze through the screenless windows that were simply holes cut in the wall. There were lots of mosquitoes outside, but the ones inside didn't bother us. The moving air kept them away.

Marilyn and I had arrived early. There were just a few people in the dance hall. One member of the band was playing "On vas casser La Cuisine a Arthur" ("We'll break Arthur's kitchen"), a French folk song composed during the 1930's at Arthur Landry's home soiree celebration. Arthur lived close to the dance hall, and the day the song was written, was celebrating the engagement of his daughter Olive to Anthony "Kaiser" Mouton, one of my cousins who lived on the Bayou Teche. Guests filled every bit of space in the main house, so the dancers spread into the kitchen, rattling the dishes in the kitchen safe. Mr. Landry stopped the music and ordered everyone out of the kitchen, an add-on to the main house. The floor joists were not as solid as those in the rest of the house. He was afraid that the kitchen floor was going to cave in. A female singer called Sidonia sang to the accompaniment of an accordionist and

composed "On va casser la cuisine a Arthur," adding verse after verse. And now, twenty years later, people still remembered the song.

I introduced myself to one of the waiters and told him I was present when the song was composed at Arthur Landry's house in the 30's. When he came back with our drinks, he told us they were on the house. While Marilyn and I sat at our table, I talked about the dances back then, when Bouloote had her first opening dance. The roof was not completed and we could see the stars overhead as we danced.

When the waiter brought us two more cokes, I told him that Marilyn was doing a story on Acadian culture at the university. He pointed to a gentleman sitting alone at a table in the corner of the dance hall—Katatoo Pellerin—and said we should ask him to tell us about his life.

I had met Katatoo back in the thirties at my folk's house when he was peddling fruit trees in the Lafayette area. The waiter took me to his table, and introduced me to him. When I told him my father was Sidney Martin, he shook my hand very hard and asked me to sit with him. I asked if my friend could join us. He took one look at Marilyn and almost ran to her table. He grabbed her by the hand and brought her over. Marilyn had found a gold mine for her research.

Katatoo began by getting down on one knee and saying, "Your name has to be Mary. You're as beautiful as the Virgin Mary. Will you marry me? Mamma told me this morning that I had to get a wife, for she was getting too old to take care of me. Mary, if you marry me, you can have my Cadillac to go to church every Sunday morning."

"Mr. Pellerin, tell me something about yourself," said Marilyn. "What do you do first thing in the morning?"

"Every morning at sunrise, you know, I get up with the chickens, Mamma brings me a glass of hot water and a cup of coffee. I drink the glass of water first, then open my eyes and look at the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I say 'Good morning Mary' and recite one Hail Mary. I then take one sip of coffee and turn to Jesus on the cross and say 'Good morning Jesus' and recite the Our Father."

Katatoo continued to relate his daily routine. He often mentioned his Cadillac, which was his pride and joy. He also told of a trip to San Francisco, California where he saw a lot of "sheep." It soon became clear that he meant "ships" when he spoke of the harbor and bay.

After a while, Joseph, who was Katatoo's chauffeur and bodyguard, appeared at the door of the dance hall. He was huge—the largest man I had ever seen. An employee greeted him and pointed to a line painted on the dance floor. He made it clear that Joseph should follow the line to our table. The painted line was there for the purpose of moving heavy things across the dance floor. The route was over a larger joist that had pillars under it. Joseph was so heavy that the manager of the

dance hall thought he might break the other floor joists that were not reinforced with pillars.

Joseph's massive frame towered over everyone on the dance floor. As he walked toward our table, the accordionist stopped playing. Everyone turned their heads and stared. As Joseph waved his hand at the accordionist he said, "Play Jolie Blond for me."

Katattoo introduced him to us. There was probably no chair in the house to support Joseph, so Katattoo got up and they both talked to each other for a few minutes, apparently discussing something very important as they gestured frantically to each other. The accordionist started to play "Jolie Blonde" again as Joseph followed the painted line to the door. The crowd shouted "Good night Joseph," as he left the building.

Soon after Joseph left, the band members arrived and set up for the dance. The crowd filled the dance floor. Mothers sat on benches around the dance floor with their babies and small children. The young girls sat with their mothers. The boys milled around in the center of the dance hall and talked to each other during the break. When the band started playing, the boys asked the girls to dance.

We had to leave early because of Marilyn's curfew. She was having so much fun with Katattoo that she would like to have stayed longer.





## *SALVAGE THAT BLANKET!!*

*by  
Doris Bentley*

**A**s long as I can remember, we had quilts made from the wool of the sheep on my grandmother's farm. The wool had to be washed and dried, then corded. Cords were two rectangular wooden pieces, about four inches wide and eight inches long, lined with metal teeth. Bits of wool were placed between the two wooden pieces and "combed," or "corded," into four by eight pads. When enough wool was corded, the pads were placed between two pieces of fabric the size of a bed. All of the beds that I knew were double beds. Then the quilt was rolled around a wooden pole the width of quilt. The design of the quilt was drawn in pencil on the fabric. As the ladies quilted, using the tiniest of stitches, the stitched section was rolled onto another pole and the unstitched section unrolled for the ladies to work on.

I remember seeing ladies sitting around a wooden frame set on two sawhorses. They were quilting by hand, making the tiny stitches according to the design on the fabric. I can't remember where it was, or who the ladies were. But I can see the frame, the quilt, and the ladies in my mind's eye.

I also remember crawling into bed in the wintertime when the flannel sheets, the warm woolen blanket and wool-stuffed quilt covered us. When it was really cold, Mama would heat a black flat iron at the fireplace and wrap it in a piece of flannel and put it under the covers at the foot of the bed to warm our feet.

After I married and moved to Chapel Hill, Mama had two beautiful hand-stitched quilts made for us. One was maroon on one side and rose on the other side. The other was pink on one side and blue on the other side. Both quilts were made of recycled lamb's wool from my grandmother's farm.

Quilts were usually made of scraps after garments were made, or perhaps after the garment was no longer usable. Often the quilt covering was made from sacks that animal feed came in. The designs that the women created were very beautiful, as they have been preserved in museums even today. All quilts that I remember were made of cotton material. But the quilts Mama brought were fancy. They were made of satin. REALLY.

George was born in August 1946. We were living in New Iberia and had gas heaters to warm the house instead of the fireplaces of my childhood. But the nights were really cold in the wintertime because we dared not leave the gas heaters on. When winter set in, I wanted a warm quilt for young George, but I wanted one that I

could double and slip him into at night so that he would stay covered. I also wanted something that I could wash easily.

I took an old wool blanket of Mama's (it was almost in shreds) and made a quilt. I folded it over and tacked together the sides to form a pouch into which I tucked the baby in at night. As he grew older, he always managed to push himself out of the pouch, and I would find him in the corner of the crib without his covers.

When George outgrew the crib, I took the blanket, which had been folded over, opened it up, and used it as a filling for a full-size quilt for him. I found a piece of red material that had cars sketched in the three-inch squares of the material. I then found a piece of white material in Mama's sewing stash that had thin blue stripes. I put the red material on top of that old wool blanket and the white material on the bottom. Then I used the sewing machine to quilt--none of this hand-sewing for me! I stitched the quilt lengthwise and crosswise at twelve-inch intervals. Then I sewed white bias tape around the quilt. That quilt was used on his bed, in his playpen, and on the floor of our little house in Vet Village in Chapel Hill. The flooring was a single floor, and it was cold that first winter. The red quilt was just the thing in his playpen or on the floor. All of the children used the red quilt over the years.

When we moved to Lafayette in 1959, Richard and William, the two youngest children, had their own beds. By this time Mama had two wool blankets that had seen better days. I made two quilts out of those old blankets--one for Richard and one for William. This time, I shopped for material that was coordinated. The top of the quilts was a mosaic design of brown, tan, and yellow; the bottom of the quilt was a solid matching British tan (light brown.) The twins used their quilts until they left home. Then I gave William his quilt after he married Julie. Richard's quilt is still at the house because Carlo had the red afghan Edna made for him.

After Elizabeth, Suzanne's eldest, was born, I gave the red quilt with the car design to Suzanne to use on the floor. When Elizabeth got her own bed, I made her a blue and yellow quilt with an eyelet ruffle as the appropriate edging for a little girl. She used her quilt until she went to college and then brought it with her!

Suzanne's son, Richard, used the red quilt as a baby and a little boy. As he grew up, he used the quilt on his bed. Then he began wrapping himself in it to watch TV. By this time, the red quilt was Richard's quilt. Last year, 1999, Suzanne called me and said that the red quilt was beginning to shred. After fifty-five years, the material in the little red quilt had worn out. But Richard didn't want to throw away his quilt.

"Is it all right, Mom, if I get new material to cover the old red quilt?" Suzanne asked. "Richard likes soccer, and I thought I might find material with a soccer design to refurbish the quilt."

Imagine that she should ask! Now the old red car quilt is a royal blue soccer quilt which lies on Richard's bed.

By this time I thought it a great idea to make quilts for the grandchildren. Another wool blanket became threadbare. This time, I got pink checkered material for the top and solid pink material for the bottom and white ruffling for the trim. I think I even put a pink satin binding on it. That quilt went to Anne because William had just given Lara a beautiful bed covering that he brought from Japan when he returned from the Navy.

That was the last quilt I made because I turned my attention to the crocheted bedspread. We can't buy wool blankets anymore. Everyone has central heat in their houses and "comforters" and "throws" seem to have replaced the handmade quilts we used to have. So I guess none of you will enjoy the warmth and cuddle of a quilt made from an old wool blanket your great grandmother had.

How sad. . . .

P. S. If any of you have one of those quilts made from one of Grandmama's old wool blankets, here is important information. Don't send it to the cleaners. Don't put it in the washing machine in a regular cycle. But it can be washed in WARM water in the washing machine. DO NOT let it agitate!!! Fill the tub with warm water and your detergent. Use your hands or a plunger to GENTLY wash the quilt. Move the tub cycle to drain; then to rinse. DO NOT AGITATE! Use the plunger to rinse the quilt; then turn the tub cycle to drain. Repeat, rinsing twice, at least. Then turn the tub cycle to spin. Take the quilt out and hang it on the clothes line on a sunny, windy day, and it will be fluffy and smell delicious, ready to keep you nice and warm on the next cold day.



## HAMILTON'S FINEST

by

*Jane Ellen Carstens*

I have written several stories about F. M. Hamilton Laboratory School, where I was assistant librarian and where University students did their student teaching in the 40s and 50s. A large percentage of the student body was composed of children of the University faculty. In addition to these, children from surrounding neighborhoods were also students.

The student population seldom exceeded five hundred, and I got to know them very well. I have watched and/or kept in contact with some of the students through the years. A number of them who were very intelligent and/or highly creative have gone on to pursue diverse careers, which has brought them into the public eye locally and/or nationally. My next stories will deal with some of these students.

Claire deGravelle, the daughter of Virginia and Charles deGravelle of Lafayette, began as a student in the SLI Home Ec Department Nursery School and continued from kindergarten through eighth grade at Hamilton Laboratory School. Her sisters, Alix and Ann, and her brothers, Johnny and Charley, were also students there. I remember all of them, but Claire in particular. It was evident that she loved Hamilton. Little did anyone realize that the poem that she wrote at age five was a prediction of the writing of musical lyrics that she would produce in later years.

I was delighted to renew my contact with this young woman when she was a student at USL and took my course in children's literature in the 1960's. She also studied drama at USL, and performed in many of the musical productions, among them, "The King and I," and "Once Upon a Mattress."

While Claire and her sisters and brothers were at Hamilton, another family had several children there. They were the Cloningers. While in high school, Claire and Robert Cloninger, better known as "Spike," became sweethearts. They later married, lived in Lafayette for several years, and moved to Mobile, Alabama, in the 1970s, where they resided for twenty years. In 1992 they moved to Seminole, Alabama, and continue to live there. They have two sons and three grandchildren.

Realizing that Claire possessed the interest and the talent to write songs, Spike told her to take two years and dedicate herself to song writing. He turned a bedroom into an office, bought her a typewriter, and encouraged her to "get in there and write!!!"

She broke into the field of contemporary "Christian" music when it was about five years old. Since then, she has written over fifteen musicals, most of which are seasonal or patriotic in nature. Her first seasonal song, "I like to be a Kid at



Christmas,” was sung by Pat Boone on TV. She went on from there to receive four Dove Awards, the Grammy of Christian music. Other songs which she composed have been recorded by Amy Grant, Sandi Patty, B. J. Thomas, and Debbie Boone, to name a few. Her popular Christmas song, “The Gift Goes On,” was originally recorded by Sandi Patty and later performed by Carol Lawrence at the lighting of the national Christmas tree in Washington, DC.

Claire’s patriotic works were noticed by the Statue of Liberty Centennial Committee which commissioned her to write a second verse to the “Star Spangled Banner.” She says laughingly about this, “It’s really something to see your name alongside Francis Scott Key’s on the cassette.” This new version of the National anthem was showcased at a patriotic extravaganza at Disney World, as well as at the 1997 Presidential Inauguration Gala. Disney World has continued to include it in their patriotic presentations.

For several years Claire has traveled every six weeks or so to Nashville, where she meets with composers, musicians, singers, and other songwriters at Word Publishing Company. For two weekends out of the month she has led seminars for women throughout the U. S. including Bible study, group sessions, praise and invitation. She conducted such a weekend here at the First Baptist Church about a year ago, part of which I attended.

Beginning in 1998 Claire has produced several inspirational and motivational books. Among them are: The Kaleidoscope, which describes “God’s pattern in the bits and pieces of our lives.” In 1992 Postcards offered “messages of hope, courage and comfort from God” to the reader. Together with Karla Worley, in 1993, she wrote When the Glass Slipper Doesn’t Fit, and the Silver Spoon Is In Someone Else’s Mouth, offering practical and spiritual advice concerning a variety of personal problems. This book has recently been revised. Claire has now written a total of eleven books.

In 1991 the USL College of Education recognized Claire deGravelle Cloninger’s achievements by designating her as the “Outstanding Graduate” of the class of 1966. Along with many other persons, I have been deeply inspired by Claire’s spiritual gifts to so many people.



## LIFE AT NO.6

by

Mary Langford

Ah Say was invaluable to us as housekeeper, cook, and helper with the children, but she wasn't the only help that came to our door. One of the most interesting and delightful aspects of Hong Kong life in those days was the number of peddlers and craftsmen who walked the neighborhood streets offering various goods and services. They announced themselves and their wares by calling out in a loud voice as they walked along.

As my language ability improved, my ear could isolate their shouts from the sounds within our household, so that I could be ready at the front gate when they approached. When I heard "*My choy!*" I knew that the vegetable man was on his way with broccoli, baak choy, spinach, and Tiensen cabbage. "*Bow hi!*" was the call of the tall, dignified shoe repairman who would come to sit on a little stool in the shade of the stairway near our front door and repair the shoes I brought to him. Our children loved to gather around him to watch his patient and meticulous work. As his capable hands cut and stitched the leather, he talked to them in perfect Cantonese tones. Sometimes a knife sharpener came along, and there was a man who sold colorful feather dusters. One cry I always responded to was "*My fa!*" That told me the flower seller was on his way with a big basket of beauty. He brought gladiolas, chrysanthemums, roses, baby orchids, and pungent white ginger whose fragrance would fill the house. His prices were so reasonable that I kept fresh flowers on the dining table almost all the time.

There were tradesmen who also came to my Hampshire Road door, and others who provided regular services—such as the men who came every day to deliver the newspaper, collect garbage, and wash our car. Groceries were ordered by phone and delivered by bicycle. A bicycle also brought big metal cans of kerosene for the cylindrical space heaters that warded off the winter chill in the rooms of No.6. I looked forward to the biweekly visit of the Egg Lady who came from miles out in the New Territories on a heavy black bicycle, a small platform on the back stacked high with flats of fresh eggs. Her friendly face and ready smile were as welcome as the produce she brought each week with such effort and dependability.

Other visitors in our Hampshire Road home were not as happily received. The screenless windows provided entry for various annoying or frightening "varmints." I was not pleased to find that the large roaches I had learned to combat in New Orleans had Hong Kong cousins. Lizards ran in and out fairly freely, and I tried to take the positive view that they kept the mosquito population down. The "baby kangaroo"

seen earlier by John had many relatives who could be seen scurrying along the open drains outside and occasionally venturing in to see what our kitchen might have to offer. Scariest for me were the huge wood spiders. I would enter a room to find one on a wall—dark, hairy, and as large as an outspread hand—or, even worse, I would hear one rustling about behind books on a shelf. Those I had to call in reinforcements to deal with.

Like all the others in the area, our four-flat building was surrounded by a cement wall about a foot thick and eight feet high for protection and privacy. On either side at the front were a pair of large metal gates which were kept locked. Paved driveways on each side led from the gates to carports in the back where a concrete walkway connected the two and led to back entrances to the flats. There were small grassy areas front and back. Along each side of the building were narrow flower beds which held mainly shrubs, but the poinsettia plants there astonished us by growing to the height of small trees and blooming profusely.

Another great novelty for us was being able to walk on our roof. The top of the four-plex was completely flat and covered with concrete paving stones. A cement wall about four feet tall was built around the edge of the roof. On each of the back corners sat a large rectangular water reservoir, an especially vital fixture during the years of water rationing. The roof was also the place where, as an economy measure, we hung our clothes to dry. Kowloon Tong was very near the airport and right under the flight line for landing. Many times I would be at the rooftop clothesline and feel that with just a bit of a stretch, I could touch the underside of a huge plane as it flew over me.

Another surprising aspect of those first Hong Kong years was the weather. Having lived in New Orleans and Lafayette, we were no strangers to the heat and humidity which characterizes the long summer of south China. We were, however, unprepared for the cold of winter, however brief. None of the houses or public buildings had central heat or air-conditioning in those days. We learned to bundle up, as the Chinese did, in layers of clothes. Our central heat was a kerosene heater which we moved from bathroom to bedroom to dining room as needed. These adjustments were minor compared to the typhoons.

Every year from June through November was typhoon season, during which there would be several warnings, some near misses, and at least one direct hit on the Colony. The velocity of wind and volume of rain made us very grateful for the thick walls and sturdy construction of No.6 Hampshire. And we were very glad to be on the ground floor. “Typhoon” comes from the Cantonese words “*die fong*,” which means “great wind.” When the great winds came, they blew window glass, tree limbs, and shop signs randomly about. The deluge of water caused landslides which took shanties and luxury apartment buildings down the mountainsides with their



occupants in them. We always heeded the typhoon signals, hurried to the safety of home, coming to think of storm days as an unexpected gift of time. Don even used one of those times to build a packing crate playhouse on our front porch.

During our five plus years at No.6 Hampshire Road we shared the building with several other families. Above us at first lived an elderly, very reclusive English couple. They seemed unfriendly, but maybe they were just overwhelmed by the number and noise of all of us who occupied the other flats. At any rate, their main contribution to my memory bank is that during our first typhoon they would not accept Don's offer to clear out the drains on their porch, with the result that their flat flooded and most of that water drained through for days onto us below. There was no weeping when they moved out and an interesting couple with two children moved in. The Kerjans were from Estonia. (I had to consult the World Book.) Eric worked for Cathay Pacific Airlines; Juta was an artist. Their daughter Anneliis was a bit older than John, but their son Peet was just a fit with our James. They played well together, in spite of the fact that Peet rarely spoke, preferring to ride his trike 'round and 'round the house, making motor noises. Also, I soon learned that when I made sandwiches for the boys, Peet's had to be cucumber--no substitutes. The Kerjans were good neighbors, the only exception being the time when they allowed Anneliis to practice her roller skating just above our bedrooms in the very early morning.

Opposite us lived the Rheinking family with six children, all of whom seemed to prefer to play outdoors. Above them was a succession of families, one with five girls, one with two boys, and one with three children. We made our contribution, too. Our Donna was born in July of our first year at No.6. Paul was born in August two years later, and Devra made her appearance in January of our fifth year there. Don't forget Ah Say. She had one child when she came to us, and added three more to her brood during the Hampshire Road years. She brought them to work with her, carrying them in a *meh die* on her back when they were babies, and letting them join in play with the other children when they were older. There were times when there were fifteen to twenty little people making their presence known in various ways in the carports, on the driveways, in the grassy areas, on the roof, and on the back stairs. By February of 1964, the flat that had once seemed so spacious seemed to have grown considerably smaller.

February of that year brought another event that occurred in the Hampshire Road home. Both Don and I had managed to complete the requisite three years of language study--he at the Yale program at New Asia College, and I, using the Yale textbooks, with tutors in our dining room. Don was working full-time at the Baptist Hospital, seeing patients in the clinic and performing surgery three or four days a week. He worked from early till late, came home for supper and a little time with the family, and then returned to the hospital for late rounds. He moved swiftly from



person to person and from task to task. In the midst of that intense schedule, he began to have flu-like symptoms, which he ignored, until he was unable to walk upstairs. Only then did he consult his co-worker and friend, Lewis Smith, who immediately admitted him to hospital and called me to bring his things from home. By that night, paralysis was already creeping up the left side of Don's body. Lewis suspected that the diagnosis was Gillian-Barre syndrome—a rare and often fatal illness which affects the nerves and causes ascending paralysis in arms and legs and finally in internal organs. He didn't tell me about his suspicions right away.

I went to the hospital, assured Don that I would take care of everything at home and that all would be well. Even as I tried to encourage him, I was thinking to myself, *Here you are, with something terribly wrong. Our families are on the other side of the world. Our fifth child is only five weeks old, and the four others are under ten. How can I possibly take care of you and them and myself?* I kissed him goodnight, promised to be back in the morning, and went home to the waiting children. Somehow I managed to give them their supper and get them to bed. I recall having a strange calmness, which must have reassured them, even though I couldn't answer all their questions. When the last one was tucked in, I fell exhausted onto my own bed. Then I began to ask God the questions which had whirled around in my mind earlier: *What is happening to Don? What will happen to us? How can I take care of all this?* My thoughts were not very organized or coherent, and I was so exhausted that I couldn't stay awake to pray properly. I would doze and then wake up feeling groggily guilty. But through the haze of my tiredness and confusion, I received a very clear message—not a verbal one—but very clear and very simple. **“EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT. EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT.”** I didn't know what that meant. *Would Don die or be an invalid and somehow we would manage? Would he recover?* I didn't know, but I was no longer afraid. I went to sleep and slept peacefully.

The next day I had great calmness and unusual energy. After some days, the suspected diagnosis was confirmed. My calm persisted. Don's condition grew worse. The message didn't change: **“EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT.”** The paralysis began to affect internal organs. And then, inexplicably, it began to back away, as if obeying an inaudible command that said, **“THIS FAR, AND NO FURTHER.”** Don was in the hospital for weeks before he was able to come back home to Hampshire Road. All that time I had strength and energy that were beyond my own. Don was weak and had to use a cane, but recovery was predicted. We turned ourselves to the huge task of preparing for our first home leave. We had been away for five and a half years. The time had been full to the brim with unforgettable lessons and experiences. And most of them had taken place at No.6 Hampshire Road.



## MY EARLIEST SCHOOL YEARS

by  
Viva Periou

From 1927 until 1932 I lived in Port Arthur, Texas, with my mother Lily, my father, Septime, and my sister, Velma Broussard. Our address was 321 Ninth Street. My father worked for the Gulf Oil Refinery until the Depression. I remember going to a Catholic school there in order to make my First Communion. I do not remember anything about school except my prayers and wanting to be a Sister, just like my teacher. Revealing my secret desire to become a Sister ended my days at the Catholic school. Do you think the family did not want me to choose this vocation?

In 1933, after we moved to Breaux Bridge to live with my Vieux Mom Hardy because she could not live alone, my father was hired for the building of the Breaux Bridge Sugar Refinery. He worked for many years, then retired from there.

My new lifestyle in Breaux Bridge began with enrollment in the fifth grade at school in Breaux Bridge, which was also in the Breaux Bridge High School Building. I also registered for the religion class for First Communion, even though I had made my Communion at age seven in Texas. But in Breaux Bridge, a child had to be ten years old and then join the Confirmation class. So there I was, twelve years old, taking my First Communion class with ten-year-olds. Besides all my other confusions, a new school and new students, I brought my sister to enroll in the classes. One dear nun asked me "What is your little sister's name?" When I replied "Her name is Sister," the nun asked my sister, "What is your name, little one?" "My name is Sister," she answered. Well, the confused nun suggested that I ask mom what was sister's name. Can you imagine our surprise? Sister had another name! *Velma*. Now I wonder if this is the reason that I ask so many questions when I meet someone new.

My favorite teacher was my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Laurent Broussard. She was married to my Grandma's (Hortense) Tante June's youngest brother. He was also the only dentist in Breaux Bridge. Mrs. Broussard could not speak French nor understand French, so she and I were in the same boat. She was so kind to us. She taught geography and she would bring her National Geographic Magazine to school to teach us about the history and culture of these countries. (She would have made a very good travel agent and tour guide today.) Those National Geographic pictures were the beginning of my dreams of one day to be able to see all those countries and regions in Europe, Canada, United States, Hawaii, South America, and the islands in the Gulf of Mexico. Mrs. Broussard opened up a whole new world to me, and I often thank her in my heart for instilling in me the desire to see all this beauty. Today I

still get the National Geographic and share these with my children and grandchildren.

My first month in school was spent getting to know my classmates. There was a tall, big, impolite girl named Marie Coles, who would mock my *Port Arthur Accent*. Well, I had had enough of this, so one day during recess when she started mocking me again, I carefully took my wrist watch off and began beating her up at recess. A crowd began to gather around and cheer. Just as quickly there was silence. Guess what? Mr. Arthur Cormier, principal of the Breaux Bridge High School, was at the window on the second floor of the school calling, "Girls! Girls! Come to the office *now*." Marie and I walked to the office, and I warned her that I would do all the talking or we would meet again out of school (she knew I would beat her again).

Mr. Cormier was a southern gentleman from the Old School. He was dressed in a black suit and white shirt and a blue tie. He was well respected in the schools, as well as all of Breaux Bridge. He began his sermon saying "Never, never in the history of the school" had girls fought on the grounds of his school. He promised he would not tell our parents because they would be embarrassed. I was very happy to hear this promise because the rest of the story would be worse at home.

Of course, the whole school heard about the fight about my *Port Arthur Accent*, and I never had any problems with anyone teasing me about my way of talking. No one in school knew anything about me nor had I ever met any of these students in my life. They did not know that I grew up with my cousins who were my age and a year older. I was the only girl, and I was part of the gang that played football, boxing, swimming and riding our bicycles in the city. Now when I look back at these events in my life I think, "This is what we can expect of gangs from the city." I must have lost my *Port Arthur Accent*, or maybe I became known on the block because I was never teased again.



## A RED LETTER DAY

by  
Betty Speyrer

One of the assignments for the "Life and Letters" class was "Red Letter Day." When Joan told me what "Red Letter Day" meant, I could not imagine what I would write about.

When one has been married over 50 years, has had one husband, six children, six grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, there have been many Red Letter Days. I had to pick one, but which one? My son, Mark, and I were sitting quietly in front of the television, but my mind was not on what we were watching. I had to decide what event in my life stood out as a "Red Letter Day." It could possibly be my wedding day or the birth of my first baby, a girl. The day my first son was born was very exciting. How about the day my fifth baby was born--a girl, after having had three boys? It could be the day my last baby was born. I was forty and knew I was too old to give birth again. What about all the graduations, the weddings, the new grandchildren, the day I became a great grandmother?

All of a sudden, it came to me, and I shouted out loud. "The day I learned to drive a car!" Mark looked up and said, "Mom, are you losing it?"

The day I drove my very own car was a "Red Letter Day" indeed. I was 35 years old. I had never really felt deprived by not having a car to drive. After all, what are legs for if not for walking! On the farm we walked everywhere. After moving to the city, it did not occur to me to spend a dime on the streetcar or the bus. When I lived in Washington, D.C., I walked the twenty blocks to and from work, in sun and rain, in snow and sleet--just like the mailman. During the war, even if one had a car, one could not go very far as gasoline was rationed. During the ten years we lived in Metairie, we were a block from the bus stop, a block from a grocery store, and two blocks from a church and school. I had no need for a car. During those years, Tony, my husband, had a company car which we could use for limited personal traveling. However, I was not allowed to drive it, even if I had known how.

One day, I saw an advertisement in the local paper which stated that an oil company was giving a two-week course in driving education. I decided that here was my chance to learn to drive. It just happened that Mother had come for a month-long visit. Perfect timing! She could baby-sit while I learned to drive. The first week was classroom instruction, but by the second week, I was actually driving. What fun! When the week was nearly over, Tony surprised me with a beautiful green car. It was a second-hand 1955 DeSoto. I'll never forget the first day I decided to get in that car and go grocery shopping. I took my son, Fred, with me for moral support. He was



just five years old, but the only one of my then four children who was brave enough to ride with me. The energy I used planning my strategy could have won a war. I drove six blocks out of my way to cross a main thoroughfare with the light. When we arrived at the grocery store, I parked in a remote spot so I could not possibly be blocked by another car. Fred and I bought our groceries and somehow got safely home. The three little non-believers we left at home met us in the yard, examined my beautiful car, and were very surprised to see that we had gotten home without a scratch. That was over forty years ago and, since then, I have owned many cars. I'm proud to say that I have never been involved in an accident nor have I been issued a traffic ticket.

P.S. That was then and this is now. A couple of weeks ago, I was ticketed for "improper backing." End of story!



## MUSEUMS

by  
Tom Eby

It wasn't my first trip to Chicago but it was the most exciting. My first trip to Chicago had been confined to the immediate area around Union Station. The size of the station was awesome. The swarming people and the number of trains coming and going was unreal. I walked outside the station and looked at the coal dust and ash covered black buildings and the garbage floating in the Chicago River and thought I had never seen a dirtier town.

It was 1946. I was a senior in high school on a field trip with my class to Chicago to see the Aquarium, the Field Museum, and the Museum of Science and Industry. At the Aquarium I saw the greatest collection of water life, including sharks and octopus, very impressive. Next we went to The Field Museum another collection, artifacts, relics and art. To this teenager, though the static collections however great were quite boring. Last we came to The Museum of Science and Industry. It was indeed another imposing marble columned institutional looking edifice. On the inside however, there were hands on interactive exhibits, which demonstrated various principles of physics. Exciting action vibrated through the building. There was a life size model of a coal mine in which you could go down in an elevator, ride in a coal car and see life size coal mining equipment. Although some of the planes in the museum were old they had some fairly up to date ones with model cockpits you could examine. I recall seeing the first fully assembled brontosaurus skeleton and standing in its giant shadow.

The most remarkable exhibit was the telephone exhibit, which undoubtedly was American Telephone & Telegraph Company's exhibit. For this exhibit we walked up a flight of stairs and entered a small auditorium arranged theater style. We were instructed to use the earphones in front of each seat as the light dimmed. Then there was total darkness. I assumed the show would start soon after the lights were out but there were apparently some latecomers pushing through the aisle behind me with popcorn and drinks in hand. They spilled both the popcorn and the drinks. I didn't feel it but it sounded as if the snacks and drinks came down my neck. Then a curtain opened on a glass-enclosed stage and the sequence of drinks and popcorn was duplicated on a dummy, which had microphones in each ear. They continued to demonstrate on the dummy how you could determine distance and direction with sound from two microphones. It was my first experience with what they then called binaural sound. Now we call it stereo. I was wiped out by the experience and totally sold on museums from that day forward. I still enjoy those exhibits that demonstrate

how things work or how they were built, or how it was done, how it is different. Since that high school trip I have seen a number of other museums but will never forget The Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

I went back to Chicago in the 1980's when my son Jeff was working on his MBA and Zart, my daughter-in-law, was working on her doctorate at Northwestern. I marveled at how the buildings were pristine white. They had been cleaned up. Even the Chicago River was clear. The Museum of Science and Industry had been updated and enlarged and was better than ever, well almost, they did not have a stereo exhibit.



*MR. PRESIDENT*

*by*

*Mary Ann Early*

Saturday, January 20, 2001, I found myself glued to the television watching the Inauguration activities. As I watched the ceremony, I asked myself, “When did I become conscious of political campaigns and elections?”

I was 15 years old and it was the 1932 general election and in the depths of the Great Depression. President Herbert Hoover and Charles Curtis were running against Franklin D. Roosevelt and John Nance Garner. The blame for the economic crisis and high unemployment was attributed to President Hoover’s lack of effective leadership, Roosevelt won by an overwhelming majority.

My Dad was a long-standing Republican and an admirer of Herbert Hoover. I kidded him when his car was stolen while attending a Republican gathering.

One day between Hoover’s defeat and the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dad announced, “Herbert Hoover will be coming through on the train and stop over a few minutes and appear on the deck of the observation car. We will be going to see Hoover and his wife at the short stop.” I was delighted since I had never seen a real live President of the United States. (Remember in those days there was no television.)

We arrived at the train station and assumed a place near the track. In the distance I heard the “toot-toot” of the approaching train. My heart began to race and I felt the flow of adrenaline throughout my body. Then the train came to a halt. President Hoover and his wife came out at the rear of the train. I recall President Hoover looking very tired, his face wrinkled, and his mouth drooped at the corner. Even his wave lacked luster. Mrs. Hoover looked lovely in her sky blue dress accenting her snowy white hair, wearing a strand of long white beads around her neck. I thought she had a beautiful smile as she waved to the crowd. President Hoover made no speeches, and very soon I heard the “toot” of the whistle, and the train began moving. Soon it was out of sight. At that moment I felt a mixture of emotions—a thrill of seeing a President of the United States and sadness for a man who had experienced defeat.

This past Saturday, I thought of Al Gore with his forced smile as he strode beside Dick Cheney toward the podium—then again as Al Gore and his wife walked to their departing limousine. As President Bush addressed Al Gore, “You fought a spirited campaign and conceded with grace.”

It’s exhilarating to win, but it takes strength of character to accept a loss with dignity and grace.





## LOBSTER TALES

by  
*Lois Diehl*

In my garage I recently found a treasure from the past that I had not seen since we lived in Morgan City. I always suspected the movers had taken a liking to it and it was gone forever. I originally found my treasure in Jankara Market in Lagos. The Nigerians used a lot of enamelware to cook with, so a large section of the market contained a colorful display of pots, pans, and trays of every size and variety. My treasure was a large three foot high white enamel pot decorated with red flowers and bright green leaves. It was about 18 inches in diameter across the top and curved outward around the middle and then tapered in again at the base. I planned to use it as a decorative porch flower pot when I returned to the States. Seeing this pot again brought back fond memories of a food 'to die for' introduced to me by Aunt Tat Tat when I was a teen--lobster with melted butter dripping from each succulent bite.

My tastes of lobster were far and few between after that initial taste. I do remember a lobster binge after my first semester at Marietta College. Stanley Setlock, a junior high boyfriend, returned to Holly for a Christmas visit. During the two weeks of his visit, he treated me to dinner just about every other night at Santana's Restaurant in Harrisburg. And every evening we had the boiled lobster dinner complete with bright red bibs to catch the melted butter. I never saw Stanley again. He probably went bankrupt after all those lobsters.

I did not encounter many lobsters until our move to Lagos. The first summer we had leave in 1972, the children and I flew to the States ahead of Conrad. I met him later that summer at JFK Airport in New York, and in a rental car we headed north for Boston. Conrad had his first taste of lobster when we visited Cape Cod the summer of 1965 after I finished my studies at Colgate University. But this time we found a delightful restaurant called Colonel Page's Hilton Inn north of Boston. We sated ourselves, myself with a large broiled tail and Conrad with the large red creature sitting on its tail in the center of the platter looking at him. During the next several summers after attending the British Open, we booked our flight to the States through Logan Airport just so we could spend some time in Boston dining on lobster at Colonel Page's.

Lobsters were not found in the Atlantic coast of Nigeria, but further south along the West Coast of Africa near Gabon and Cabinda, spiny lobsters were plentiful. One evening after Conrad and I had gone to bed, we heard the continual ringing of the front doorbell. James, our night watch, never opened the gate for

anyone he had not seen in our compound previously. So thinking something urgent needed his attention, Conrad got up grumbling, went downstairs, and answered the door. Then I heard, "Lois, you've got to come down and see this."

I heard voices and the sound of something being pushed across the verandah floor through the dining room into the kitchen. "Who's at the door at this hour?" It had to be Terry Ray, but I thought to myself, "He's out of the country." Terry's driver was leaving when I sleepily stumbled into the kitchen. I heard him say on his way out, "Remember, Master Terry said to cook them right away. They've been in transport all afternoon and evening." Still not awake, I said, "Conrad, what's he mumbling about?" Then I saw two very large blue and white ice chests sitting on my kitchen floor. I woke up when the lid of one popped up and a big claw came wriggling out from beneath the lid. "What did Terry send over now? My God, it's alive!" Conrad replied, "Terry just returned in the King Air from Port Gentil in Gabon. He knows we enjoy the infrequent lobster thermidor we order at Antoine's. So he brought us some fresh lobster from Gabon." "At midnight on a week night? Is he crazy or does he think we are?" I realized it was a very generous gesture, but at that time I would have preferred the usual bottle of Dom Perignon. I wouldn't have had to deal with it at that very moment. I looked at Conrad, "What are we going to do with two ice chests full of very live lobsters at this hour?" Conrad simply said, "Well, we'll just share them with our friends. I'm sure some of them would love to have some lobsters." He couldn't have been more wrong. After several calls and responses of, "Are you nuts? Do you know what time it is?" Conrad decided we would just have to cook all of them ourselves that night.

We decided we would parboil them and freeze only the tails for grilling at the beach. I looked at the small gas burners on my kitchen stove and shook my head. It was going to take all night because the largest pot I had would hold at most only two lobsters. Then Conrad spotted my large enamel pot with lid sitting in the dining room corner under the stairs. "No," I protested, "not my decorative pot." But, Conrad insisted and on the stove over two burners it went. We finished putting water in it with smaller kitchen pots. We watched and waited for the water to boil. Sometime after forever, it was time for the lobsters. It seemed as if they were aware of their demise and wriggled and threatened with their claws. But one by one into the pot they went. One very large lobster pushed the lid off the pot and plopped out onto the floor and tried to scurry away. But back into the pot he went. It was a very long night, but worth the effort. Those tails were grilled on the beach several weekends and every bite was enjoyed without bibs.

When Greg visited several Boston colleges during his junior year at high school in 1986, I took him to Colonel Page's for lobster. The restaurant had not changed much since I last saw it. Then when Greg attended Landmark School that summer, he

took me to some of the places where he found good lobster when I visited him. We went to places that served real Maine sized lobsters, not those chicken lobsters served to the tourists. I was never able to travel to Maine to have lobster trapped in the beds off the island Terry bought after he left Nigeria. I'm sure they were jumbo size. Since my first bite, I've had lobster all around the world, but none tasted as good as those boiled in my decorated enamel pot and grilled on the beach.



## DEAD MAN BAPTIZED

by  
*Jack Crouchet*

A long bicycle ride, combined with a walk in the woods on a beautiful autumn day, was one of the great pleasures of my youth during the Great Depression. On such a day, Charlie and King Aillet and I left on a trip with the first stop scheduled at Mr. Bergeron's gasoline and grocery store, on a gravel road, about four miles from home towards Abbeville. Mr. Bergeron's business was the bottom half of a large frame building. He, his wife Louise and their son T-Teece lived in the upper half of the building. Legend held that the Yankees on the way to Texas during the civil war used the building as a storage depot, and it certainly looked old and big enough to have served such a purpose. Two ancient Texaco pumps, from which T-Teece pumped gas, appeared to stand guard over the entire structure. Mrs. Bergeron tended the store while her husband did mechanical work.

After our arrival at the first part of our destination, Mr. Bergeron gave us permission to park our bicycles near the front of his store while we ventured into the woods. T-Teece, who was a schoolmate about our age, begged to accompany us but his father refused apologetically because of his need to service cars stopping for gas. Charlie, King, and I each had a nickel to spend but agreed to save them until our return from the hike when we would be much hungrier.

We left the store, walking along a path under large oak and pine trees, without a care in the world, observing nature in all its glory. Birds flying about and small animals running between trees, sometimes crossing our path, kept us entertained. We whistled, making casual, unimportant comments rather than engage in serious conversation. About a mile into the woods, we separated to contemplate our thoughts and observations in private, but remained close enough to hear each other's footsteps crushing leaves. The silence was suddenly broken when Charlie cried out, almost in panic: "Jack, King, come here! I found a dead man!"

King and I went closer to Charlie, who was standing near a railroad track by the body of a man whose leg had been severed and was obviously dead. He was dressed in a plaid shirt, dirty jacket and weathered trousers. He wore an old crushed wool hat. Dried blood covered his body from the waist to his remaining foot, as well as a small part of the nearby track. Charlie was shaking his head, wondering how his hat could have remained in place after such a tragedy.

Too stunned to have a discussion or make a decision, we stood for a few moments in silence contemplating a course of action. King broke the silence when he



suddenly said: "Let's baptize him! Brother Clement once told us that we do not know when the soul leaves the body. Maybe this man still has a soul!"

We remarkably demonstrated the influence of our teachers that day. Except for a few foolish imitations of their individual mannerisms, we paid them great respect. We took seriously their admonition to spread the faith whenever there was an opportunity to do so. The three of us discussed the matter as seriously and philosophically as any normal twelve and thirteen -year-old boys could. We concluded that King's suggestion was valid and decided to do what was right. We knew exactly how to proceed.

"Who is going to do it?" Charlie said wistfully.

I hesitated, but King volunteered to perform the ceremony. I said I'd furnish water from my canteen to pour on the head of the deceased. We all agreed that the man's hat had to be removed. King knelt beside the body, removed its hat and remarked: "He doesn't smell so good!"

"That doesn't matter," Charlie replied. "We have to make little sacrifices and ignore the smell. We just don't know. Maybe this is our chance to save a man's soul!"

Charlie knelt down beside King and the deceased, and I poured water over the dead man's head as King performed the ceremony. Solemnly and without a trace of hesitation, he pronounced: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Charlie and I responded: "Amen!" After that most important rite was performed, we said the Lord's Prayer and stood around the body for a few minutes. Charlie suggested that I remain with the body, but I demurred since the man wasn't going anywhere (at least, his body wasn't.) If some person or persons should come upon the corpse, there would be less for us to worry about. We had done what we could.

When we returned to Mr. Bergeron's store and told him of our adventure, he gave us each a bottle of pop (a bonus because we could then save our nickels) and called the authorities. Within minutes, the sheriff arrived with two assistants. He asked us to escort them to the dead man, a chore we proudly performed. Shortly after arriving at the site of our discovery, the sheriff said: "OK, boys, you have done well. I'll take care of the matter from now on!" He gave us each a silver dollar, which was as much money as I had ever received from one person. T-Teece, in whose presence all of this took place, insisted on holding each of the coins, even biting on them as if to perform an assayer's function. I think he was jealous.

After telling our parents of the experience, they expressed great pride in our accomplishment. The story spread immediately to our teachers and fellow students at school. For a few days afterwards, we were little heroes who were begged to repeat the story of our adventure many times.



## *I PROMISED MYSELF: I WILL NEVER BE POOR*

*by*  
*Taylor Hopkins*

I was born in 1920, just the right time to experience The Great Depression of the late 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's until the beginning of World War II. My folks had their own home, car paid for, a good business or a job, but no memberships in the Boston Club, Rex, Comus, or the Orleans Club St. Charles Avenue strata. But, not too shabby, you know. My dad had a weekend camp at Little Woods on Lake Pontchartrain.

Then in the late 1920's things began to turn less rosy, and something very bad happened on Wall Street. That's in New York City where rich people invested money *in stocks and bonds*, whatever those are. Papa said these people were playing the stock market. I never did take the time to study this or find out what it meant. I did see the headlines of the New Orleans Times Picayune that the stock market crashed and thousands of people lost plenty of their savings and some went broke.

I never did hear my folks say that they lost money in the stock market, but I know something happened to us that was not good. My dad and mother had to refinance our home because he couldn't pay the mortgage, and Papa had trouble collecting money from his renters. And then Dad had to sell his weekend camp at Little Woods. And as for me, I suffered the ignominy of having to go to school in short pants because there no money to buy new knickerbockers for the tallest guy in the class.

Sometime during these years I made a promise to myself that I would never be poor. I never did make a promise that I would be rich, just not poor. I prepared myself for this by making the necessary commitments, physical, emotional, moral, and financial, to achieve my goal. And along the way I began to find out that most of my tasks became easier if I enlisted the help, advice, and guidance of people. I also discovered that if people trusted you, respected you and admired you, you had an unlimited asset source for your success story. I have attempted to hone my people skills and to articulate this to my friends, and my success for never being poor has been achieved because of them.

Now in the twilight of my life, with my stack of yesterdays well over my head, and my stack of tomorrows about ankle deep, I have received a handsome bonus: *I am now also rich*. Someone once said, *Rich is the man who has a friend*. Well, today I am a millionaire.





*The following pieces are the results of our final assignment, which I delivered with more enthusiasm than clear direction. Some students grumbled, some trembled, some conspired and rebelled, but all wrote as the writers they are, looking back on their experiences this year. The poems are about the intimate circle of friends these once upon a time strangers may have been. Let the inside references make you part of the world of this class act of life writers.*





In just a few weeks we have shared so very much  
From Taylor's too short knickers to Doris' faded old quilts and such.

Tom Eby had us in many a vehicular accident,  
While Mary Ann Early traveled by train to see a national president.

Jack and Popcorn shared relationships with other races,  
So did Mary Langford, but she traveled to foreign places.

We traveled too with Lois. (She fed us frozen chicken and lobster tales.)  
Viva shared her Cajun stories, all of them wonderful without fail.

With Lucien we shared a ride all the way up to Pike's Peak.  
Later he brought us down to cock fights we really didn't want to see.

We shared Jane Ellen's book reviews and now confess at times do lack  
Conscious application, just like Enaj Nelle Snetsrac .

With Nina we shared those fun games in the snow  
And met some famous singers from a country music show.

We shared Betty's homemade dresses that were to take her far.  
At first their meager belongings would all fit in the trunk of their car.

Yes, we have all shared Mary Anne Early's presidential train  
I will long remember her snow white curls and colorful cane.

We have all shared the pretty lady who rules at the head of the class.  
Her kind comments encourage her students to write about the past.

With runaway tendrils framing her pretty face...  
We'll miss this willowy teacher who moves with style and grace.

For we are Joan's cadre of writers, cajoling words from thought to pen.  
It has been such a pleasant experience, I hope we can share again.

- I HAVE LIVED on an Iowa farm with Betty, followed her to Washington, D.C., during World War II where she met her husband Tony and moved to Louisiana with him when the War ended.
- I HAVE LIVED with Doris as she lovingly told of her mother's accomplishments in Loreauville and New Iberia, listened to her father's advice on raising her first born, and returned with her and her children to Lafayette from North Carolina after her husband George's accident.
- I HAVE LIVED with Jane Ellen a.k.a. Enaj Nelle Snetsrac when she told us about her love of books and authors and I traveled along side her as she explored Europe.
- I HAVE LIVED in each home Mary described, from New Orleans to Hong Kong to Lafayette, felt each wave as she traveled across the Pacific by ship, and struggled with her as she learned a very difficult new language—Chinese.
- I HAVE LIVED with Mavis in mother's kitchen surrounded by the tantalizing aroma of baking and the melodic sound of French. I have also held in my hands the special holiday cup and heard it shatter when it fell to the floor .
- I HAVE LIVED with Nina in the coal mining mountains of Pennsylvania and West Virginia where she was raised. I moved with her from a steel town to the farm during the Depression.
- I HAVE LIVED with Jack at the seminary when he heard of the bombing of Pearl Harbor followed by his dismissal, enlistment in the army, and boot camp in Cheyenne. He introduced me to Popcorn, a friend who he could never locate after returning home from the War.
- I HAVE LIVED with Tom in his family summer home on Lake Hamilton in Arkansas and his cottage at Toledo Bend. Tom was ever tweaking my memory with his historical facts and names, products, and sounds from my younger days.
- I HAVE LIVED with Mary Anne and her nursing stories from WWII and on through her experiences as an instructor .
- I HAVE LIVED with Taylor as he gave incorrect answers to an inattentive classmate in religion class, and I was with him years later in Rome as he entered an insurance company gathering regally clothed in a white toga, sandals, and curls topped with olive wreath.
- I HAVE LIVED with Viva when she received her two signed certificates honoring her accomplishment as the first woman to win an election as Alderman of Parks, LA. I swam with her in Bayou Teche the very sunny afternoon of her high school graduation. I heard her mother's angry voice calling her and felt the pain of a flaming sunburn from an earlier application of bleaching cream.

I HAVE LIVED with Lucien as he researched Cajun Culture at a Fais-do-do in Parks, watched as he helped his daughter save a badly injured runaway from a cockfight, and flew with him across the Atlantic as he returned Ike's airplane to the States after WWII. And I was on the roof with him as he whispered down the chimney, "Tonight's the night I take your soul," in response to his Nonc's bedtime prayer.

I HAVE LIVED with Joan each week as she attentively listened to each of my stories and then gently corrected them keeping the integrity of my style. Instead of finding writing a chore, I made a discovery—I actually enjoy writing. She encouraged me to become a raconteur of my life stories for my children and grandchildren. With her guidance and encouragement I am able to pass on a part of myself to those who come after me.

WE ARE ALL LIFE WRITERS who have shared each other's life experiences on Thursday mornings.



Doris is from New Iberia,  
But lives in Lafayette.  
Her stories reflect her family life,  
An interesting one—you bet!

Jack entered the class this year,  
And although we'd never met,  
The names "Aillet" and "Crouchet"  
Bring memories I can't forget.

Her life has been so interesting.  
I love to hear Lois retell  
The things that she has experienced.  
If she wrote a book, it would sell!

Tom's calm and quiet manner  
Does not take away from his tales.  
They manage to hold our attention.  
In this, he never fails.

Mary's life has not been dull.  
Her travels 'round the world  
Have captured our attention  
As each event unfurled.

Memories of days gone by  
Return and make me think  
When Mary Anne describes her life,  
A tear I sometimes blink.

Her smile adds so much to the story  
That Mavis reads in class.  
Will we listen? She need not worry,  
For she has reached "top brass."

Neena or Nina, I'm not sure which  
The pronunciation should be.  
It makes no difference. It is her stories  
That fascinate you and me.

Lucien is a photographer  
Who photographs us twice a year.  
His stories require no pictures,  
So vividly do they appear.

Betty has shown by her stories  
That she has accepted the life  
In Lafayette versus Iowa,  
When she became Tony's wife.

I heard the name "Taylor Hopkins"  
Many years ago.  
I've learned quite a bit about him,  
And I'm sure there is more to know.

Viva is suitably named.  
Her manner and style reflect  
The joy she has found in life.  
We never know what to expect!

Joan has inspired and encouraged us.  
She obviously loves her role  
There is no one who can replace her.  
She's indeed a unique soul.

Although this class has been a challenge  
For some of us, I know,  
We are all fellow writers,  
Who have loved to come and go.

I am part of the Thursday morning Life Writing Class.

There is Joan, the bright and shining star. She nudges my memories and nurtures each endeavor with an encouraging remark.

I envision a fantastic Roman holiday with Taylor, long after he overcame his short pant days.

It was a trip with Tom and Judy to Seattle and its museum and not a crash, bang, tinkle, tinkle.

Jane Ellen helped increase appreciation of children's books and the beautiful illustrations through her friendships with the authors and illustrators.

I was touched by Jack's relationship with Popcorn, and there was Tennessee William's brother .

Lucien made Acadiana history come alive in his detailed description of the cotton gin, grit mill and his experiences at a cock fight.

Lois's comfortable family car was not for sandy Kuwait, but a "Bug" was just right. Lois described vividly the many places explored by she and Kevin—Europe, United States.

A soft-spoken Iowan girl went to Washington D.C., to work, to fall in love, to marry and eventually move to Louisiana. I'll never forget the picnic held on a forbidden site, and the angry landowner joining and having a wonderful time. Betty, I'm glad you never had to do the things you listed.

Her dry wit and keen sense of humor brings smiles to my face. Doris eloquently and interestingly read the family towel routine in the Bentley house to the more serious, sad plight of the African-American student in higher education.

Mavis, fluent in French, in a warm caring person demonstrates their characteristics in her story about Marie Louise and again as she vividly describes the art of her mother's cooking.

From the small apartment, just after their marriage, to New Orleans to Lafayette and to Hong Kong, Mary and Don made a house a home for the family. Life became alive in the Far East with description, pictures, and the Chinese language.

Nina, the Virginian native, who recently came to Acadiana, told the story of school days in a country school and the reunions of classmates and families over the years. I'm glad you didn't have to do those things on your list.

The vivacious, high-spirited, risk-taker, with a flare of French, Viva and her stories.  
The sneaky swim in the bayou to a Go-Go dancer reflects her adventurous spirit. By the way, read the directions on the bleach cream jar before use.

To each of you, Joan, Taylor, Tom, Jo Ellen, Jack, Betty, Lucius, Lois, Mavis, Mary, Nina, and Viva, I thank you for sharing your memories. It's been a privilege to know each of you and be a part of the family group.



Do you think that you could compose romantic lyrics for any of today's hardrock no melody musical creations, even with Dinah Shore and Bing Crosby doing the vocals? A tough assignment for all of you talented stars. So, too, was Joan's assignment.

To write an overview of my impression of this class and the individuals is something that I can do with enthusiasm. But, I can't get all the kudos assembled with all the flourishes that are required in the five or six minutes that I am allowed.

I will hasten to say that the common threads in the carpet are that all the writings are influenced by a sense of high personal esteem, talent, and love of family, friends and self. You can't love someone else until you first love yourself. And all of you do. Your writings reflect this.

This course was designed to encourage us to put into writing our past experiences, and it did. A sorta Marcel Proust "Remembrances of Things Past," as it was.

I regret that I did not take notes on your writings, and if there is another time, I will. A few that I remember were Lois' Arabian Nights adventure, Viva's hiding the toys. Jane Ellen, the poet laureate of Acadiana. And Lucien's exquisite description of machines, and Jack's "Anna Belle and Popcorn," and Nina's sheep farm.

Mary Anne, Doris, Mavis, and Betty contributed their interesting recollections of yesteryear that were great. Mary's vivid description of the dwarf marsupials and the bugs caused me great concern that I was unable to ship her a case of rat poison and Off. When Joan expressed her appreciation for the class and announced her change in venue, I could have been a hero if only I had had a starched white hanky, but Joan had to settle for a paper towel to wipe away the tear or two.

And Tom, with his wonderful, in depth, description of three automobile wrecks, got our attention. It also got the attention of Harvard University, which offered Tom a job at the university if he would teach a course in Driver Education, and they would appoint Sen. Ted Kennedy as his assistant.

Well, enough of that. Thanks to all of you for sharing your talent with me. and to you, Doris, for inviting me to join the class. You have all done such a great job, why don't you take the rest of the day off? Have all the fun you can handle, and make someone happy today.

Every Thursday morning I have arrived in our classroom and greeted my fellow travelers who bring coffee, cookies and King Cakes. We are fellow travelers, for each of us has prepared an excursion into the past. Each of these talented story tellers tells their personal story, enabling the others to vicariously hop on a magic carpet and ride into other times, other places, and experience friends, pets, tasty treats, old country homes as well as exotic foreign places.

Originally from Parks, New Iberia, Arnaudville, Lafayette, Shreveport, New Orleans, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Iowa, West Virginia and Arkansas we have traveled and lived in many places. The magic carpet has taken us to most of the continents, major cities and to many of the backroads. Our travels included New Brunswick, Hong Kong, Rome, Palm Springs, Tacoma, looking out the window at Mt. Rainier, Chapel Hill, Cypress Island, Cheyenne, Gettysburg, Washington, D.C., New York. We have seen the magnificent cathedrals and mountains of Europe as well as the church wedding in an isolated village in Guatemala. We dined on Lobster at Santana's in Boston, Colonel Cage's at Cape Cod, and on a beach in the Middle East. The toga party in Rome was awesome. Imagine the entrance of a horse drawn chariot at the banquet. In Kansas we took our first ride down the road in the gasoline buggy, coming to a ditch where Dad said, "Whoa !" but the buggy did not stop. We have lost pets such as Shadow and friends such as "Popcorn" and loved ones such as Dad.

The cockfight was, of course, here in Cajun country. The fishing trip landed a 400-pound grouper. We saw a picture to prove it. We learned that the Star Spangled Banner has a second verse and a local talent wrote it.

In Life Writing we have traveled into our past together and knowing each other's past, have become more like old friends than relatively short time acquaintances. Captain of this time machine, Joan Stear, has been our patient tour guide, who not only listens, but also teaches us to listen. She also spends hours reading and analyzing our papers, making constructive suggestions on our choices of words, phrases and sentence structure. No wonder her dedication is appreciated so much by all of us. No wonder we will miss her so much. Our travels together have been wonderful, and now with Joan's guidance they are no longer lost in time.

I'm from Iowa where the tall corn grows.  
Lived in Lafayette long enough to be a Cajun, everyone knows.  
This semester, I've made five new friends.  
I hope it continues with this trend.  
Poetry is too complicated for me to compose  
So the rest of the story will be in prose.

I enjoy the stories Doris tells about the quilts and show and tell.  
I particularly enjoyed getting to know Jane Ellen's friend, who wrote the beautiful  
children's books.  
Jack's stories about his friend "Popcorn" were happy and, yet, sad.  
I enjoyed Lois' adventures wherever she lived.  
Tom's stories of the wrecked cars came at a good time for me. Having just gotten a  
ticket for "Improper Backing," I think my little fender bender seems small.  
When Taylor said we were all his friends, I had a warm feeling of togetherness.  
Mary's stories of the houses she lived in was so interesting. I loved to hear about her  
experiences in China.  
Mary Anne's experience in learning how to drive was hilarious.  
Mavis, I can smell your mother's goodies from here. You make it so real.  
Nina, it is good to know someone from West Virginia. It seems as far away as Iowa.  
Lucien, I can't say I enjoyed the stories of the rooster fights, but I did enjoy the stories  
of the illegal still.  
And Viva, last but not least, definitely not least. I thought the story of your first plane  
ride from the Bayou Teche after all your experiences was the funniest.  
Dear Joan, we will miss you. But who will fill your shoes? Maybe he or she will bring  
his or her own shoes.  
Together we stand, divided we fall.  
We are fellow literary geniuses.

I smiled when Doris wrapped her family in blankets made of creativity and love.  
I rode with Tom from wreck to wreck, guarded by an angel from above.  
I watched Mavis serve and come to know an unusual black friend.  
I boiled lobsters with Lois thru an African night without end.  
I met through Jane Ellen gifted artists and authors.  
I traveled with Mary Anne for her last visit with her father.  
I went to Washington with Betty to visit her early homes.  
I was an unseen guest with Taylor at a lavish bash in Rome.  
I joined Nina in her kitchen as she chatted with June Carter.  
I wondered with Viva at a little white-clad "sleeping" daughter.  
I went with Lucien to a cockfight where the birds fought beak and claw.  
I shared Jack's excitement at first love, his shyness and his awe.

Steered by Miss Stear, we've traveled through memories, time and space.  
Encouraged by Joan, we've looked life, death, and adventure in the face.

We're a great group of raconteurs, with wonderful tales in store.  
We must tell the world how great we are, 'cause *notre vouteur est mort*.



I am a part of a memoir-writing class. We share our writings... .

There's Taylor Hopkins, with his humorous and philosophical stories of his life in New

Orleans and the friends he's made in the insurance business. I am glad I recruited him because he adds a lot to the enjoyment of the class.

There's Janey Carstens, who writes amusing poems about vegetables and family stories, including the dog named Huey in her hometown of New Iberia.

There's Mary Langford, who has chosen to write her stories focusing on the houses she has lived in from New Orleans to Hong Kong. What a neat idea! I think she's on her way to Lafayette, Louisiana.

There are four newcomers to our group:

Viva Periou from the metropolis of Parks, Louisiana, whose stories show the Cajun humor of her personality: "The Little Girl That Was Lost" ...she died. The little Sister, whose name was "Sister".... What truly is her name? Viva is another of my recruits and she's a leader in the Parks community.

Mavis Fruge', lives in Arnaudville, a charming town/village. She writes about her Cajun heritage and puts the cooking skills she learned from her mother into practice by bringing delicious cookies for us to enjoy at coffee break.

Nina Ludington hails from Pennsylvania. Her stories of farm life in her youth, are similar to those of our Cajun people. I want to hear more of her stories.

Jack Crouchet, a native of Lafayette, has some doozies to tell. He could add to Jim Bradshaw's repertoire of life in Lafayette as a kid. They are historical and nostalgic. His next project will be, "The Search for Popcorn." I know he has more to tell.

There's Tom Eby, our sophisticated hillbilly from Little Rock, Arkansas, and a geologist with a keen sense of humor. His stories run the gamut of his life's experiences— from soda jerk to auto mechanic, geologist, cookbook publisher, photographer, computer expert, etc., etc, etc. All of his stories capture his remarkable sense of humor.

There's Mary Ann Early, the World War II nurse from Kansas. She enriched our knowledge of the Pacific Theatre. I wish Jake Valentine were here to compare notes with her! She has more to tell about her career as an educator .

There's Betty Speyrer, transplanted from a farm in Iowa. She met her Cajun husband in Washington, D.C., while doing her bit for the War Effort. He took that

midwesterner and made a Cajun out of her. Then she kept the little tiger, Bishop Schexnayder, in line.

There's Lois Diehl. Would you believe she is a mathematician? Pennsylvania born, Lois told of unbelievable experiences in Africa and her world travels with all aspects of human emotions: tragedy, comedy, and sometimes, "Believe It Or Not!"

There's Lucien Martin, veteran of Life Writings. Has he got stories to tell! Native of Lafayette, his home-town stories are classic. As photographer, he has recorded all of Joan's classes. As a French-speaking aviator in France in World War II, Lucien could con the natives out of anything he needed. (A skill I am sure he picked up as a Cajun boy in Lafayette.) Computer buff, French poet, writer—— what diverse talent! No wonder Melba went to the Badlands with him.

AND THEN THERE IS JOAN, our mentor! She sits and smiles and points the way with a pencil. Always encouraging...inspiring.... What will we do without her? These classes are her passion, and that passion spills onto us. Although I have actually completed my biographies, I don't want to leave this group!

WE ARE ALL A PART OF A PERSONAL HISTORY PROJECT BEGUN BY  
JOAN STEAR —1990-2001!!!!

Doris turned towels and blankets into family heritage,  
And I applauded her creativity.  
Jane Ellen introduced authors and artists who are her friends,  
And I came to know them too.  
Jack described the excitement and secrecy of his first love,  
And I felt his shyness and his awe.  
Lois boiled gift lobsters at midnight in a big, bright African pot,  
And I joined the laughter and the work.  
Tom careened carefreely from one car wreck to another,  
And I went along for the ride.  
Mary Anne went for a last, quiet visit with her father.  
And I shared their bittersweet farewell.  
Mavis chose to serve and to know a fascinating black lady,  
And I glimpsed briefly that special friendship.  
Nina offered help and kindness to an unwell singer,  
And I sat in her kitchen with June Carter.  
Lucien met Msr. LeCoque at his first cockfight,  
And I smelled and heard it all.  
Viva questioned the mystery of the little girl lost, and then "asleep" in white,  
And I knew a child's view of death.  
Betty returned to the homes of her early years with Tony,  
And I visited them with her.  
Taylor, toga-attired, attended a lavish party in Rome,  
And I went along as an unseen guest.

We are children exploring love and death.  
We are adventurers at home and abroad.  
We are fearless and afraid.  
We can laugh in very unlikely circumstances.  
We are kind and frugal.  
Our memories paint the past in lovely hues.  
Most of all, we remember, invest in, and care about relationships.  
We are people worth knowing.

- Taylor—the tallest boy in school with pants ready for high water, now tallest man in class, but the length of your pants is just right...working at the New Orleans Dock, finding out how New Orleans got cobblestone streets.
- Jack—quiet, soft spoken, but can tell the saddest story of his childhood friend, Popcorn, never knowing his real name. Maybe I could help locate him! Better yet, you could ask the monks at Saint Ben to pray for him.
- Mary—and her husband with their children in China doing missionary work. How courageous, going to a foreign country, to a new culture and language! My dream for me and my family when I was younger. I don't think we would have survived.
- Mavis—I could travel with you without having to worry about being on time and at the scheduled place that day. A copy of your notes to relive the visits is all I would need. Then I could visit with your mom to taste her good cooking.
- Doris—Thanks for guiding me to this class to write *les histoire de ma grandmère*. Us Broussards love to keep the favorite towels, blankets, and toys of our kids to show them and bring back memories of their childhood.
- Lucien—Thanks for reminding me of the grit mill, fighting roosters, *la balle de maison*, moon shine stills, *paque les oeufs*,...the lovely class picture. *Merci, mon ami*.
- Lois—I would feel very safe going to Africa or any foreign country with you. Never worry because any impossible thing can be done with her “make do,” big pots to boil the lobsters.
- Mary Ann—Your complete independence no what handicap.... Your fond memories of your nursing career...as a teacher at the Universities,...now retired on the river.
- Betty—Your happy days in Washington, D.C., and meeting a Cajun, then marriage and moving to larger apartments...then the war...now a Cajun who will speak French soon...Right?!
- Jane Ellen—How you loved your vocation! A librarian...to know so many important authors...even the autographed books. You would be the one I would look for when I work on my genealogy.
- Nina—Your going with your brothers to dig the Indian mounds...the class reunions...good way to keep up with who is still alive!
- Tom—Your car wreck, not one but two, three?! Travels to museums, my geologist friend.
- Joan—So young, vivacious and caring. To be so polite to old people.... Her parents and grandparents did a good job! Thanks!



Here I sit at my computer  
getting myself into a Blitherin'-Dither.  
Trying to put names and faces  
to all the adventures and places  
that my fellow writeers  
illustrated in words that were their own.

Now, let me reflect,  
Tom persisted in wrecking his car,  
while Taylor, wearing a toga,  
attempted to sell him insurance.  
There sat Viva with her precious doll  
beside Doris with her kids' towels.

I can't forget Mary's experiences going to China  
and Lois's mysterious lobsters appearing in the night.  
And how about Mary Ann describing her memory of seeing  
President Hoover on the back of the train?  
Mavis's eloquent description of  
Grandma's kitchen and coffee cups....

Betty shared her World War II experiences in Washington, D.C.  
Lucien took me to the famous cock fights,  
While Jack told the unforgettable story  
of his friend Popcorn.  
And Jane Ellen introduced her friend,  
a popular author of children's books.

AND NOW,  
The magic of our fearless leader, Joan,  
made it all possible.  
She calmly motivated and encouraged  
all to write our precious memories  
that we will pass on to our loved ones.

Thank You ALL for the opportunity and privilege  
of learning a little more of the Cajun Culture and History.

You're as beautiful as Joan Of Arc. Your name must be Joan.

I Love, Love, Love you. As much as pigs love the mud.

I Love, Love, Love you. More than fifty cents!

I Love, Love, Love you. I want to ask you something.

I Love, Love, Love you. Do you want to marry me?

I Love, Love, Love you. It's best that you don't answer.

I Love, Love, Love you. Because if you say no.

I Love, Love, Love you. It will break my heart.

I Love, Love, Love you. Into a million pieces.

I Love, L o v e, L o v e you.

When my turn comes, I plan on defying the medical profession and social services,  
maybe even the IRS.

The names and dates of my history will change from year to year,  
And all the information about myself will be correct.  
White coat whippersnappers will interview me at each appointment,  
And I will tell them the truth.

Yes, I am Joan, but I am also Doris and Jane Ellen, Jack and Lois, Mary Ann and  
sometimes just Mary, Tom, Mavis, and Taylor, then Nina, Lucien, Viva, and Betty.

When my turn comes and they ask silly questions like "In what year were you born?"  
(thinking I won't remember when they ask or that at my age I wouldn't like to tell),  
Depending on their patience, I might tell them I was born in 1930  
In Arkansas and Iowa and West Virginia and Pennsylvania,  
And it will be true, even though the year they ask is 2050.  
I will have been born in a hospital in Louisiana, my birth certificate will say,  
But I will insist that it was Loreauville or Lafayette or Breaux Bridge or Arnaudville,  
Somewhere in North Louisiana and New Orleans,  
Not the town of New Iberia they read on their papers.

I will laugh and tell them,  
"That is not the kind of history that has made me who I am."

I am Doris and Jane Ellen, Jack and Lois, Mary Ann and sometimes just Mary, Tom,  
Mavis, and Taylor, then Nina, Lucien, Viva, and Betty.

I will tell them I was born in a wonderful small town with a main street, that we lived  
across from the cathedral, St. John's.  
(We were Baptist and Episcopalian and Church of Christ and Presbyterian and  
Lutheran.  
We always believed—and sometimes we didn't.  
Our family of seven sat on the front two middle pews  
in the First United Methodist Church in New Iberia, Louisiana.  
I would stare in awe at the pages in the Bible while the preacher preached his sermon.  
I thought the words in red were the words of the devil.  
There were pages and pages of words I was afraid to read.  
I sang "Jesus Loves Me" a lot.)

When my turn comes, I won't lie.  
I will tell people that my family lived on a farm with roosters,  
that we moved to the farm so the Depression wouldn't keep us from eating.  
My neighbors raised their roosters to fight.  
I kept mine for a pet, then Daddy killed him.  
I didn't eat gumbo that night.

My son taught me how to drive a riding mower.  
I climbed trees and I talked to them. Did they talk back? I don't remember.  
(I do remember playing army with David Rainey  
under houses and under the broad oak tree in his backyard.)

My brothers and sisters and cousins and friends  
and I  
would walk for miles along a dusty road into town for a movie.  
Sometimes the snow would be two feet deep.  
I paid fifteen cents to see the premieres of  
"It's A Wonderful Life" and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves"  
and twenty cents to see "Wuthering Heights."  
(Mom and Dad took Freda, Susan, and me to see Julie Andrews in "The Sound of  
Music," my first movie at the Evangeline Theater. I don't remember how many  
dollar bills Daddy gave the lady in the box.)

I loved the serials from Friday afternoon to Friday afternoon,  
Hopalong Cassidy and all of his cowboy friends.  
I thrilled at the sight of Elvis on TV, or was it the Beatles on Ed Sullivan?  
(I clearly remember the Fifth Dimension when they sang "Aquarius" on his show.)  
But the new rock and roll could never reach the heights  
of the classical composers I often played on the piano.  
Nor could they compete with Glen Miller and his orchestra.  
"What a variety of music I have loved," I will muse.  
(One of my first record albums bought with my very own money  
played John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High."  
(I've lived in Colorado, too, I'll mention.)

When they ask (and even when they don't),  
I will tell them I played bouree with the old Cajun uncles  
and drank high tea with my aunts.  
(those same aunts would tease Grandmère when they tossed her chipped china cup  
back and forth to each other in her high ceiling kitchen).



(They might think that one of my aunts was a bad influence.  
She let me stay up after ten o'clock to watch Perry Mason reruns.  
The big old white two story house on Marmande Street in Houma,  
Grandma's house near the canal and the boat whistles,  
was pitch black except for the glare of the small television set in the living room.)  
Our New Orleans Garden District home was furnished  
with plush Victorian upholstery  
and the Acadian farmhouse with cowhide chairs.  
Our ordinary American home was decorated American contemporary—1940's.  
(I remember the Ethan Allen Ranch Oak bedroom sets Mom and Dad bought in the  
1970's when we moved from 616 Dodson to Ernest Street into a bigger house for the  
same size family of five girls.)

As a teenager I worked as a soda jerk, then I grew up.  
Friends went to war.  
During World War II I flew the airplane that flew General Eisenhower.  
(I would remember his death decades later when I stood as a school girl in the school  
yard at Dodson Elementary watching a flag flown half mast. I was young then.)  
I also worked in Washington, D.C., an exciting place to be in the forties.  
During the Korean War more friends were killed.  
Years later I became afraid for my own children during the Vietnam Era.

I have been a professor in library science and in business administration.  
I have several degrees.  
But then I chose not to attend college.  
"Money, marriage, you know how life takes those turns," I will say.  
I have been a geologist, an insurance agent, an alderman (even though I was female),  
Almost a priest, wife many times over, a devoted husband, father of twins.  
I had many children.  
Some of them I have lost.  
Then I will remember that I have raised eternal souls and saved towels and salvaged  
blankets (Our souls need comfort.)

I will tell the white coat smiling people that I have lived a good life, but it's not over.

I will have lost my passport, but I will remind them I lived in far away places  
like Hong Kong and Puerto Rico and Africa.  
I sailed over the Pacific and flew back in a military plane. Both times I got sick.

(I had to travel over in a military plane in 1964)  
"What's your story?" I'll ask, trying to be polite in the face of their impertinence.

“Really?”

(And I will be surprised.)

“That’s mine, too!

I had friends like you before,

A long, long time ago.

We would laugh.

We would listen.

We dined on homemade goodies.

We cried sometimes,

Doris and Jane Ellen, Jack and Lois, Mary Ann and always Mary, Tom, Mavis, and

Taylor, then Nina, Lucien, Viva, and Betty.

I will remind my listeners that I am Joan and they were all my friends.

Their history is mine.

They told me when my turn comes it might be like this.

