Life and Letters

Volume VIIIb

The final topic for this fall semester's **Life & Letters** course was entitled "This Is Your Elder Speaking." Almost unanimously the students agreed that this assignment posed the greatest challenge for them. "I'm not wise." "Surely you're not associating age with wisdom." Yes, you are. And yes, I am. Their defenses are justifiable; but so are mine. I speak as inexperience, the way of the young. I also speak as hope and expectation. Surely aging offers our lives a perspective unlike the paralyzing myopia by which youth is often limited. If it doesn't, then at least an earlier generation has the right to say "I've been there before. This is the way and this is where it has brought me." Don't our lives make the best stories (even the best "advice givers") we can offer, even though they might be (indeed they are!) imperfect pieces of history?

The real power of this endeavor in life history writing lies in listening. When we listen with the heart, we hear those broken bells ring again. We see the faint outline of a friend long gone. We taste the harvest even in winter. And we smell a rose out of its season. The power of these impressions is not a made up thing. It's passed on from generation to generation if we will incline our heart to the wisdom of the ages. When wisdom speaks we must listen with care. We pass these imperfect but wise stories on to you, with love.

-----Joan Stear
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana
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Front Cover (clockwise from upper righthand corner): Audrey Daniel; Velma Boutotte; Nelia Myrhaugen; Melvin Daniel; Virginia Lambert; Ruth Burns Oates; Melba Martin; (center) Frank and Ann Simmon

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Front row, l. to r.: Lelia Drake; Nelia Myrhaugen; Virginia Lambert; Velma Boutotte; Ann Simmon; Rosemary Sandoz. Back row, l. to r.: Lucien Martin; Betty Gerard; Lois Diehl; Melba Martin; Betty Shoemaker; Stanley Davis; Joan Stear; Frank Simmon. (Missing from photograph are Audrey Daniel, Melvin Daniel, and Ruth Oates.)

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TAMALE WEATHER

by

Ann Simmon

Long before winter's arrival, Mother would start hoarding corn shucks the way a squirrel hoards nuts. It was no-holds-barred, call-in-your-markers- time.

Daddy was a country doctor, and many of his bills were paid with wild game and produce from the field or garden. So naturally Mother would begin hectoring Daddy. "Alfred," she'd say, "next time Mr. So-and-so wants to pay his doctor bill with a mess of greens, ask for shucks instead."

George Hill was our handyman and managed to eat all his noon meals in our kitchen even if he hadn't worked that day. He also made and sold hot tamales from his house. Mother would say, "George Hill, I surely need some shucks." George would reply, "Now, Miss Ethel, you knows I need them shucks mo." And so the dialogue would go until a bargain was struck.

All the town's good cooks (especially the ladies of the Twentieth Century Literary Club) prized corn shucks highly and vied with each other in seeking out sources. Once our shucks were procured, sometimes triumphing over a determined rival, they were washed, boiled to sterilize, and then put away to await just the right time.

When the old-timers' "rheumatiz" began to act up, they knew a weather change was coming. And when the Dallas radio confirmed this by predicting a blue norther or snow, preparations got in high gear. Either Sister or I was dispatched to Mr. Speight's grocery for hamburger steak. Then back one of us would go again because no matter how often Mother went to the store, she always though of something she'd forgotten. She liked to coarse grind the meat with a metal grinder that screwed on the kitchen table. I was often the grinder and it was hard to turn that handle.

I don't remember all the ingredients, but I do recall Mother's insistence on using three different kinds of chili powder, one of which was Mexicana. I once had her tamale recipe, but like all Mother's recipes, the directions defeated me--size of a walnut, size of an egg, a nice size, cook until done, a generous lot of, a handful of....

The boiled white cornmeal had to be just the right consistency. We'd sit around the table and smear the meal on the shucks, put a dollop of the meat mixture in the center, and then roll everything up, folding under each end of the shuck. Mother would constantly admonish us, "Spread that meal thinly, girls, thinly." She would tie six tamales in a bundle, and we always made at least five of sic dozen. The bundles were put in a big pot ready to steam and place on the back porch. A lot of our refrigeration in the winter was done on the screened-in back porch.

Next day, the air outside the house would be crisp and invigorating. Inside the fire in the fireplace would crackle and pop and the whole house would be filled with the spicy aroma of chile and tamales. Crackers and coleslaw completed the menu. This tradition never deviated, and no gourmet meal ever tasted better.

Mother's hot tamales were in great demand, and she regularly took a dozen or so to friends and shut-ins. Once each winter Daddy asked the "Dallas doctors" and their

wives down for supper, as we called it. Matthews, Gault, and Taylor was the firm Daddy referred his patients to. The doctors always requested Mother's tamales and seemed to thoroughly enjoy the occasion.

Mother was an avid bridge player and she taught both her girls early on so that she would always have a fourth if needed. On snowy days she'd "get up" a table of bridge. We'd start about ten in the morning. Daddy would walk home from his office and eat in the kitchen with Laura Brown and George Hill. Mother would have her mini-luncheon on the sun porch. We'd watch the snow fall and eat tamales.

Today, it's a rare grocery that doesn't sell corn shucks hygienically packaged in plastic. Food processors have made chopping an easy task.

Every year with the first cold snap, I remember the smell and taste of Mother's tamales. Even if I could, I wouldn't try to make those tamales. I'd rather have my memories, and reality doesn't ever measure up to memory, does it?

GROWING UP

by

Stanley F. Davis

It would be difficult for me to write about my growing up years without including my brother, Henry, because our lives were so entwined. Henry was two years younger than me, but nearly as large. As little boys and until I finished grade school, we were always together. If Papa or Mama wanted to find either of us, they always asked, "Where are the boys." Our neighbors and family friends always referred to us as the Davis boys.

After I entered high school, I discovered girls. They soon became my primary interest: Nell, Nan, Pauline, and Oma, that little blonde girl with curls. She had been in all of my classes since kindergarten, but I had hardly noticed her until my second year in high school. Oma and I became almost as inseparable as Henry and I had been.

Henry had not reached that age. He continued to play with a yoke of young oxen we had trained. He rode his "saddle broke" bull everywhere, played scrub--a form of baseball--and shinney, which is like soccer, only rougher. During that period our closeness waned. When I went off to college, it even ended temporarily.

When World War I was declared, I returned home from college. I intended to enlist in the armed forces, but was classified 4-F, physically unfit for military duty, and refused enlistment in every branch of the service. Henry was still in high school and too young to join the army. During the war years he and I teamed up like old times to farm Papa's farm. Also, during the winter months I taught school.

When the war ended I was in Kansas City, Kansas, working daytime in a bank and at night as a soda jerk in a drug store. My older brother, Karl, a lieutenant in the army, told me he wanted to farm when he got out of the army, but would be discharged too late to start a crop that year. To help him out I returned home, and Henry and I planted his crop and continued to work with him through the summer until the crop was "layed-by."

Not farming, not teaching, not banking, nor bartending were what I wanted to follow. So I decided to try the oilfield and headed for Ranger, Texas, which was booming in 19--. With the assistance of Uncle Charley Kinkaid, a tool pusher and long time oilfield hand, I had no trouble getting a job with the Gulf Oil Company (now Chevron) at Eastland, Texas. That job was a helper on a wagon hauling express and local freight from the railroad depot to the warehouse. After two weeks I told my boss I did not like the job and that I was quitting. He offered me a job in the warehouse, which I accepted. That job was cleaning used, oil soaked, dirty pipe fittings with a wire thread brush and a tub of gasoline. Not long afterward I finagled myself into an office job, with a raise in pay from $135.00 to $150.00 per month.

After Henry finished high school he started college at the University of Arkansas, but became ill and dropped out. When he recovered, he came to Eastland and went to work in a labor gang for the same company in which I worked. A few months later, Mr. Lampman, the warehouse foreman, decided to replace the white laborers with blacks who had worked for him at Cross Lake, near Shreveport, Louisiana. Henry was angry and asked me to go with him to talk to Mr. Lampman. He told the foreman, "It is not right nor

fair to lay off white men and replace them with blacks. I may be out of line, but I intend to take up my dismissal with Mr. Youngblood, your superior in Fort Worth." Two days later Henry and Doris Moore, another white employee who had protested dismissal, were given jobs in the warehouse at an increase in pay.

A few months later I accepted a job with the company as field clerk on a wildcat operation in Colombia, South America. Once again, Henry and I were separated.

Two years later I was transferred to Maracaibo, Venezuela. Soon after arriving at Maracaibo I learned that Henry was being considered for a job in the warehouse. Asked for an evaluation of his qualifications, I recommended him without hesitation. However, I had mixed feelings about his wanting to follow in my foot steps in the tropics. Could he cope, or would he become an alcoholic and end up a tropical tramp, as I had seen many fine young men do? My anxiety was baseless. Henry neither abused alcohol nor became a womanizer. We roomed in the same bunkhouse, ate at the same table, drank beer at Onesimo's Cantina, and occasionally visited native girls. The Davis boys were together again.

All too soon I was transferred back to Colombia. There I fell in love with and married a beautiful Colombian girl. Two years later I accepted employment in Venezuela, with Standard Oil Company of Venezuela, which later became Creole Petroleum Company. My wife, Livia Blanca, and I lived in Altagracia, just across the lake from Maracaibo where Henry still worked. My wife Livia gave birth to our first baby, born at the Gulf Oil Company hospital. That evening when I went to see the baby I found Henry at the tennis courts watching a tennis match. He told me, "I have already checked out your baby. She has two arms, two legs, five fingers on each hand, five toes on each foot, and she can cry." I went on to the hospital and found that my little daughter, Wilma, and her mother were doing fine.

The same day my baby was born the wife of one of Henry's co-workers gave birth to a baby boy. The father got drunk that night, dropped a lighted cigarette on the bed, and the company house in which they were living burned to the ground. When Mr. Hegbom, their department head, solicited funds to replace their clothing and personal effects, Henry refused to contribute. He

said, "Any man that would get drunk and burn his house down the day his first baby was born does not deserve help of any kind."

Years later after Henry and I retired from work in the tropics, we formed a partnership and opened NAPA stores in Abbeville, Kaplan, Crowley, and Rayne, Louisiana. We operated these stores together until Henry became ill and retired. We then sold the business, and I returned to work in the oil industry at Lafayette, Louisiana.

It might be said that the work Henry and I did in South America and the business venture in our late years was not in our growing up years, but I disagree. I like to think that I have never stopped growing up and never will until I'm dead and buried.

A PLACE MEMORY: MY LEBLANC'S

by

Rosemary Sandoz

In my youth, the summer was the season. How I loved the summertime! When I was nine years old, Dad was transferred from Smoke Bend, Louisiana, to Lake Charles, Louisiana, some 250 miles west. From the very beginning of living there, I hated Lake Charles. My twin, Leisa, and I were so lonesome for our grandmother's home in Smoke Bend. To ease our pain, my mother sent us to grandmother's every summer for six weeks. Oh, how marvelous!

Mamo's was a lively, free household. Living there were eight people, all of whom we adored. First Mamo, our grandmother the matriarch, an extremely austere, undemonstrative, tolerant, patient, business lady.

Then there was Aunt Beulah, a widow living at her mother's home with her two children, Connie and Bud. Aunt Beulah was a quiet, responsible, gentle, religious woman. She was also a school teacher.

Thirdly, there was Aunt Myrtle, an old maid school teacher with many prejudices and many favorites, who ruled the roost with an iron hand. She owned the car, always a Chevrolet, which no one but she could drive. To lend her car was a lifetime "No, no."

Fourth was Aunt Hilda, volatile, the beauty of the bunch, generous, kind-hearted, another school teacher.

Fifth was Aunt Dotty. Aunt Dotty was fun, ambitious, carefree, cute, impulsive--another school teacher.

Sixth, there was Aunt Mino, another schoolteacher,the jewel of the whole clan. The youngest of twelve children, she was gentle, understanding, and empathetic. She was also unselfish and smart--forever my favorite as well as everyone else's. Her being five years my senior made no difference. Lifelong friends we became.

Seventh was Connie, a first cousin. God, how lazy that girl was! But she had musical talent such as piano, singing, dancing, fun--fun!

Eighth was Bud, the male cousin, Connie's brother--the whipping boy of the household. Blessed with a sunny disposition, Bud had exquisite humor and terrific music talent. I must admit, most of the LeBlanc's were gifted with talent, mostly musical.

Leisa's and my visit started in July, and two more people really made an overflowing house--still fun. Every morning at 6:30 a.m., Aunt Beulah made all but Mamo get up and attend daily mass--always a terrific rush, for mass began at 7:00 a.m. and we had to walk the two blocks. Of course, that made us run. No one dared be late, and a contest evolved as who would be first, never last. From that routine, I learned the glory of faith. After mass, we walked slowly looking in the ditches for crawfish and picking the flowers in bloom. Joking with the colored folks, just enjoying being alive, being together!

My grandmother always had a cook. My LeBlanc's could not, nor would they try, to develop the like or joy of cooking. Breakfast would be on the table for 8:30 a.m. and was ever the same menu of grits, ham, or sausage, eggs, milk.... Children were not allowed to drink coffee. I was thirty years old before I developed a habit for coffee.

After breakfast, we were free to roam, but the freedom was impaired by Aunt Myrtle who forced us to read two books a week. Her selection, of course! From that exercise, I developed the love of reading. In the early afternoon, Aunt Myrtle would drive this lively bunch to the Donaldsonville City Swimming Pool, a distance of some six miles. For five cents a piece, we swam from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Boy, we did make friends! When Aunt Myrtle picked us up at 6:00 p.m., all were hungry, exhausted and cross, so she would kindly drive to the drugstore where she bought each of us a five cent double dipped ice cream cone. That was so good! In those days there were only three flavors: vanilla, strawberry and chocolate. Some of us deliberately ate slowly so it would last, and we would torment the others with our delightful delay.

Suppertime was 7:30 p.m. This meal had more variety than breakfast. Although never a heavy meal, we were allowed to pig-out on sandwiches, cornbread, biscuits, and fruit. After doing the dishes we all sat on the front porch to sing, harmonize, dance, recite or joke. Connie played the piano beautifully. She graciously honored our requests. It was she who introduced us to classical music, along with other types of music such as spiritual, jazz and contemporary. There began my education in the beauty of music.

When we weren't sitting on the front porch, we would walk the levee. All of us made up stories of the awe and treachery of the Mississippi River. Fear of the river was driven into us by the grown-ups. Our stories were enhanced by the tales heard from our elders. My imagination was inspired and challenged by those tales.

In retrospect, those cherished summers became the backbone of my life.

The glory of faith; the love of reading; the beauty of music; the pleasure of people; the art of dancing; the exhilaration of imagination; and the joy of humor.

Now in my medicare years, the summers are long, hot, lonely...but never boring, for I have unforgettable memories.

GROWING UP

by

Betty Shoemaker

We adults consider ourselves grown up. However, there are times in our lives when we have some more growing up to do. I especially remember Christmas 1967. I always pulled duty during the holidays so my children spent them with their father and his parents.

We were living in New Iberia, Louisiana, and I was working in Dr. D. E. Bourgeois' clinic. I would finally have Christmas Eve and Christmas to spend with my children, Debbie, seventeen, and Chuck, fifteen. I was ecstatic; I couldn't wait.

On December 23, Dr. Burt Bujard called me at the office. He had a patient, Mrs. Chester Huval, who was five months pregnant. She had been hospitalized and was still recovering from a kidney infection.

In the meantime her teenaged son, Danny, had been involved in an auto accident that could ultimately cost him his life. He and his motorcycle had landed under a pickup. He was lucky to be alive. He had suffered internal injuries as well as broken bones. He was hooked up to a life support system. Mrs. Huval had not left Danny's side for thirty-six hours, and Dr. Bujard feared she may lose her baby. Although Danny was critical, there were no beds available in I.C.U., and he desperately needed an experienced and competent nurse. I would be required to work from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. and able to sleep during the day.

I was in a very precarious situation. Upon arrival at home, I discussed things with Debbie and Chuck. Debbie advised me to follow the dictates of my heart, while Chuck begged me to go to the aid of his friend. Chuck and Danny worked together at Duck's Drive Inn and were best friends. "If anyone can pull Danny through this crisis, you can, Mom." Sometimes my children placed me on a pedestal that was difficult to live up to.

Danny made it through this crisis, and I returned home for some much needed sleep. Chuck thanked me for taking care of Danny and assured me that there would be other Christmases for us. Little did I know it would be our last.

Chuck died in an auto accident the following spring. Mr. and Mrs. Huval brought Danny to see me at David's Funeral Home. Mrs. Huval started apologizing to me for separating Chuck and me on our last Christmas. I interrupted and told her it was Chuck's decision and I felt no remorse. I realized that my son had his priorities in order, and consequently, as painful as it was, I had grown up some more.

GUESS WHO IS COMING TO DINNER?

by

Virginia Lambert

Many of the places we lived as we followed a drilling rig from place to place were so remote that Mother often said, "The only person to be there before the oil people was God."

There were few recreational facilities in those places; but usually there was a movie theater. In those days we called them a picture show. Although air conditioning as we know it was far into the future. The theater owners had found a way for large fans to blow over water to cool the interior of the theater. On the hot summer afternoons, the picture show was the most comfortable environment in town.

The price of the matinee showing was twenty-five cents for adults and ten cents for children twelve years and under. At those prices, we could afford to go often. Finding a cool place to be was sometimes more of a motivation to be there than the movie. It was in those theaters that I became a "movie fan."

At that time in my life, the people on the screen were not real to me. I put them in the category with Tom Sawyer, Cinderella, and the Bobbsey Twins. In other words, I never expected to see a real live movie star anymore than I would expect to see a real live Cinderella.

That changed, though when Wayland, my husband, decided at the end of World War II to leave the oilfield business and go into politics. We were living in Houston at that time and his ultimate goal was to become Sheriff of Harris County. The incumbent sheriff was running for re-election. He was certain to be reelected; but in our precinct, the incumbent holding the office of constable was not running for re-election. Wayland placed his name in nomination and won. His plan was to enter the race for an office of lower rank an work his way up to the position of sheriff.

At that time in Texas many of the elected officers of the law sponsored honorary posses. Wayland sponsored such a group. The organization was a social organization. The men in the posse were given Deputy Constable badges--but no pay. All of the men in the posse owned horses. Once a week they would gather at an arena and practice riding drills with their horses. They were available for horse shows, parades, an Fat Stock Show to display their skills. Because this was a hobby, they performed free. Every year that Wayland was constable, this group performed at the Houston Rodeo and Fat Stock Show.

As an adult, I had long since learned that movie stars were real people. I still never expected to meet on in person. The Constable's Posse changed that. When the Houston Rodeo and Fat Stock Show was being held, we met many of the cowboy stars.

In February 1950, Wayland came home on a Monday evening and said very casually, "I have invited Gabby Hayes to dinner next Friday."

"You what!"

Wayland repeated himself. He was not teasing.

I had never entertained a movie star before. Not knowing his food preferences, I began to worry about what to cook. It didn't help any when on Tuesday Wayland came

home from work and asked how plans for Friday were shaping up. Then, as an afterthought, he said, "Oh, by the way, Gabby doesn't have any teeth!"

I almost lost mine from the shock of that statement. I didn't know anyone who didn't have teeth. What could I prepare that he could eat? I did know some people who wore dentures, so I telephoned all of them to ask what they were able to eat before they got their dentures.

I was getting very nervous. I decided I needed help. I called my mother and my sister who lived in Dayton, Texas, to come to Houston and help me. They were delighted.

By Friday evening, the house was in order. All of the children's toys and books had disappeared from the middle of the floor. Mother and Marion were there to help.

The magic hour came. At 6 p.m. Gabby arrived. He smiled a hello. It took only a glance to see that he did have teeth--a beautiful set of dentures!

Our children had their Shetland pony in the backyard. We spent some time making pictures before we ate. Later we made pictures in the house.

We always said a blessing before we ate. We often have our children give the blessing. Of course, all of the three older children wanted to sit by Gabby. But since he had only two sides to sit by, one was going to be unhappy. To decide who would sit by Gabby, I had them draw straws. The two with the short straws would sit be Gabby. The one with the long straw would say the blessing.

When I explained the arrangement to Gabby, he said, "The one who gets the long straw is the lucky one."

I must say, all of the crisp food such as celery, Gabby ate with relish. The soft mushy stuff he ignored.

Gabby had mentioned that Fred Waring was a personal friend of his and he always liked to watch his TV show. The Waring Show was starting just about the time we were finishing dinner. So we gathered in our living to watch the show, the adults of the couch and the children on the floor in front of us.

It was about that time our daughter, Carole, made a discovery. She looked at Gabby, then she looked at me and exclaimed, "Mother, he does have teeth!" I wanted to shake her! Instead, I calmly said, "Yes, Carole, look at the television."

Gabby was either so engrossed in the television show or he was too much of a gentleman to acknowledge her remark. My panic passed.

Gabby was a friendly, pleasant man with which to spend an evening. He told us about his work. He spoke kindly of his wife. He said she liked to play Canasta, a card game popular in the '50's. I was impressed. That was my favorite game at that time also.

If you would ask, "Did you learn anything important from this experience?" I would have to say, "Yes, movie actors are not shadows on a wall. They are real people...just like us."

MY GRANDMA

by

Betty Gerard

Catherine Hillman was born in Germany, July 20, 1856. She came to America with her family--her parents and two sisters, Mary and Louise--when Grandma was six months old. When she was seventeen years old, she married Dewitt Boyd Eckerman. They had twelve children, six boys and six girls.

I was just like others of my generation in that I did not take advantage of questioning Grandma about her early life. I do understand that she would try anything. She was quite a daredevil, as you will see as my story goes on.

Grandma and Grandpa were not above trying anything. Stories circulated of how they used to go bobsledding on Spring Street hill. Peoria, Illinois, has an East Bluff and a West Bluff. These two bluffs came together at the top of Spring Street, thus making a "Y" and then straight down to the Illinois River, about ten blocks away. My two grandparents would pull their bobsled up the hill and jump in the sled. Down they went, never stopping until they coasted to the middle of the river. All I can say is that the winters must have been colder then to have ice thick enough for the bobsleds and their passengers.

My grandparents celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in September 1923 at the Proctor Center in Peoria with all their family and friends. The party was complete. Their bridesmaid of fifty years ago was in the golden wedding ceremony. After this ceremony, a mock wedding was held My cousin Bertha was the bride and my cousin Charles was the groom. Really, I don't remember too much about the celebration, except that when the music started to play, a man came and got Momma. I guess I thought I was protecting Momma, as I hung onto her skirt and went everywhere they went. I was almost running as the music got faster. Finally, one of my aunts came on the floor and took me back to my seat. She told me that Momma was only dancing with her brother Boyd and that she'd be back when the music stopped. So that's what dancing is! It was my first time to see Momma dance!

There were many other happy memories of Grandma. After my grandfather died in 1929, Grandma lived with my Aunt Nora, four blocks from our house. I used to stop in often an most of the time, Grandma would be playing solitaire in her room.

The family used to tease Grandma about how she always got a "bang" out of happenings. Let me tell you about Grandma's eightieth birthday, July 20, 1936.

Grandma told every one that all she wanted for her birthday was a ride in a rumble seat, a ride on a motorcycle and an airplane ride. The big day was near, and as always the family gathered to celebrate.

Oh, yes, Grandma got her ride in the rumble seat. Bertha and her husband Al took her for a nice ride in their car with a rumble seat. The airplane ride was arranged by another cousin Kenneth. A big newspaper article appeared with Grandma shown in the airplane for this event. Those of us who were brave also took rides. Momma and I were among the riders.

The last request was for a motorcycle ride. I was able to get this for her, a motorcycle with a side car. Alas, my aunt said it was too dangerous.

Remember I told you about the bang that Grandma got out of things? Well...? We were all sitting around talking after the cake and ice cream were served. The sky came ablaze with nothing but red. It had to be something big! Somehow, radio or phone, I don't remember, we got word that Hiram Walker's Distillery was on fire. Off we went to the Southside and the river. We couldn't get too close. We were about five blocks away and could still feel the heat. We could hear the loud bans of the exploding whiskey barrels.

This was the day that the fish in the river got drunk. Winos in boats were filling containers from the run off the building. Folks said for forty miles away they were able to see the red sky, and Grandma Eckerman celebrated her eightieth birthday with a "BANG."

CATHERINE HILLMAN ECKERMAN

A RITE OF PASSAGE

by

Lucien T. Martin

It was a cold day on December 4, 1921. Our family consisted of Grandmother Noemie, whom we called Main Main and from whom I received plenty of tender loving care; next in the order of age was my father's blind brother who was fifty-one years old, André, affectionately known to us as Nonc Adé (Ah-day), who was known for his stories and songs; and, of course, my parents, Sidney and Anais, known to us as Pop and Mom, who had their hands full raising a family of six children at this time.

The first born in the family was my sister Noemie, then fourteen years old. She was boarded at the Mt. Carmel Convent in New Iberia and was not home this day. Rodolph, twelve, was next. He was the driver in charge of the horse and buggy that was used to transport the children to and from school. I had two other brothers whose names were Chester and Wilfred. The oldest was Wilfred, known to us as Pete. He was eleven years old, and Chester was eight years old. There were two girls in the family. The second one was Frances Anne, who had celebrated her seventh birthday Thursday, just four days before. She was a great help in teaching me everything she knew. Finally, there was me, Lucien, the baby of the family who would enjoy this status for only a few more hours. Being the youngest, I was spoiled rotten and enjoyed every minute of the attention.

Plenty of activity was going on this Sunday, December 4, 1921. There was a stranger in our house talking to my mother in a soft reassuring voice as my mother lay in bed in great pain. Of course, I wanted to be with her and kept climbing in and out of the bed, crying all the while.

Finally, I was carried out of the room and given to Nonc Adé, who took me in his arm and held me with one hand while I was struggling to get free of him to return to Mom. Nonc Adé's other hand held his walking cane, and he was probing his way through the living room toward the stairs, which he found without difficulty. Since he was blind, he had memorized every inch of the house.

Holding onto the bannister, Nonc Adé slowly made his way to his room, which was directly above Mom's room. A small fireplace was burning in the fireplace. Nonc Adé sat down in his rocking chair and started to tell me a story, when suddenly I managed to escape from his grip on me and I ran toward the stairs. My freedom did not last very long, for Frances Anne was waiting for me at the bottom of the stairs. But during this short period of time, I observed people hurrying back and forth across the living room. The scene was somewhat like a column of ants crossing each other, going back and forth from Mom's bedroom door across the living room to the kitchen door.

So I went back upstairs to Nonc Adé's room. This time he latched the door before he went back to his rocking chair and took me on his lap.

Nonc Adé started to sing loudly, I suppose to block out the noise from downstairs. I don't remember the song, but he must have made up at least a hundred verses.

Of course, I finally fell asleep. The next morning, bright and early, Nonc Adé took me in his arms and told me that I had a new baby brother and also a new sister Pop and

Mom named them Paul and Margaret. He took me downstairs to meet them. The twins had been born in the late afternoon. No doctor had come, and I found out later that the stranger in our home was a femme accoucheuse, a midwife.

Poor Lucien. Now I would have to compete with not one, but two additional members of the family, never again to be the baby. Even though I had lost my status as the youngest member of the family, a bond had been formed between Nonc Adé and me. In the weeks that followed he helped me to make the transition from babyhood to boyhood.

A few days later Pop hitched his horse named Old Betsy to the buggy, and in about an hour, I found myself in Lafayette at Mouton Brothers store where none other but the store owner, Mr. Quitte (Kit) Mouton waited on us.

"Master Lucien, I have just the perfect outfit for you," and he took a sailor suit off the racks and had me try it on. Well, of course I like it. What a change! I admired myself in the mirror a long time, until finally Pop said, "Well, Lucien, it's time to go."

"Wait, Master Lucien, I have a lagniappe for you," said Mr. Quitte, as he gave me a tie to go with my new sailor suit.

"Thank you, Mr. Quitte," I said, thinking all the while I would have preferred candy instead.

Pop and I left the store and went to the barber shop which was just a few blocks away. Pop tied Old Betsy to the hitching post, and we went in. We called the barber Nonc Darcy. I thought he was the nicest man I had ever met. He started telling me a long story while snipping away my long curls, which dropped to the wooden floor of the barber shop. Thus completed my rite of passage.

The day the twins were born Nonc Adé and I started a friendship which lasted a lifetime.

PLAYING PAPER DOLLS WITH COUSIN GIN

by

Lelia Drake

My cousin Gin's name was really Virginia, but my brother John and I were too small to pronounce it when she and her brother came to live with our family. We called her Gin-Gin, which was soon shortened to Gin.

Her brother Alva lived with us a while, but he ran off to sea. I suppose the reason he had to "run off" rather than leave openly was that he had to lie about his age. No one said "good riddance" when he left, but many no doubt thought it was a good decision for a restless, unruly boy.

Gin was by no means unruly; she submitted without question to Mom's somewhat rigid discipline. She got along well with Dad, too. She even begged to be allowed to mow the lawn, but this had to be forbidden because of what relatives and friends would think.

Although not considered a scholar, Gin could write well, as I discovered much later when I read some minutes she wrote for her church circle. They were just fine. Eventually, though, she was allowed to quit high school and take a business course with her friend Marie Chavanne. After they became employed, they took a trip together to Noel, Missouri, which became a high point in Gin's life. She brought me an Indian-head bank and a tiny crocheted doll.

Gin did many things well, in spite of her lack of scholarship. It was said that she was such a good shot with a BB gun that she could pick pears off the high limbs. She did beautiful crochet work and later became an excellent cook.

There were periods in her life with us in which she was able to teach me a lot of things that every little girl should know. She taught me hopscotch and jacks. It was a pleasure to see her rake in the jacks with her skillful hands.

Playing paper dolls was the most interesting thing we did. We never really played paper dolls. We were always getting ready to play with them. We scanned the Sears, Roebuck catalog for mothers, fathers, children and babies to cut out.

Then we cut out beds, ranges, sofa, chairs, and so on. Mom gave us permission to paste little strips of paper on the floor to designate the rooms in the house where our paper families lived. There was no end to furnishing the house.

Then, of course, the family had to be clothed. Much more searching and cutting were involved.

It was kind of Virginia to take so much time playing with me, her younger cousin. That was just the type of person she was, though.

A NIGHT IN A RYOKAN

by

Lois Diehl

Conrad, Kevin, and I left the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong with its streets teeming with so many people that it seemed to be alive. We settled down on our early morning flight to Taipei. Although we were unable to obtain our visas, JAL personnel assured us it would take only a few moments upon arrival in Taiwan. We watched the green mountain peaks arise around us as we landed several hours later and commented that it looked so peaceful after Hong Kong. We approached customs and, much to our dismay, were told there were no visas issued at the airport. JAL should have gotten them for us at our last stop. The officials were unwavering and at first would not even allow us to identify our luggage to be put back on the plane along with us. The plane's next destination was Tokyo, but we had no reservations until our planned arrival in three days' time. JAL assumed responsibility for the error and offered to pay for the early days' arrival.

But no one took note that we were arriving at the height of Japan's wedding season and there were no vacant rooms at any Tokyo hotel. I had just read about a Ryokan, a Japanese inn, and thought this would be a good way to get to know Japan. The cabin crew did not agree, but we had run out of options.

We left the airport in a taxi with a driver whose English was a tad better than our knowledge of Japanese--none. As he sped down the busy streets of Tokyo, we noticed that a lot of people were wearing white masks over their mouths and noses. They looked as if they should be in an operating room, instead of on the streets. We later learned the masks were protection from pollution. Western dress and western looking hotels were left behind as we entered a very quiet street and stopped in front of a pair of large elaborately carved doors. We were motioned out of the taxi and then motioned to enter the doors. We entered a large room that had no furniture with the exception of a window-like opening framing a Japanese face. The floor was covered with a woven mat that had row upon row of pairs of shoes and pairs of blue backless slippers.

I'm still not sure how we got checked in, but some how managed after repeating "Diehl" over and over. It seemed that we were expected. Next, a very small Japanese lady in a blue silk kimono indicated that we were to take off our shoes, place them with all the others lined up and put on a pair of slippers. Conrad's size twelve feet were way too large for any of the slippers, and he looked kind of strange with his feet halfway in the largest pair about a size eight. Next we were directed through sliding opaque paned doors that opened into a corridor that seemed to wind and turn in many directions. We finally reached another open pair of doors and when we entered, there, much to our amazement, was the luggage and the lady we had last seen in the entrance room. We never could figure out how that was accomplished.

We entered a huge bare room with the exception of a beautiful grandiose carved wardrobe. At the other side of the room was a one step up platform which had a threefoot high ledge all along the back wall. The only other furnishings were on the

ledge, a telephone and a beautiful airy arrangement of yellow and white chrysanthemums and twigs. Sliding panels on the right opened to another passageway ending in the bathroom. In the center of the room was a fourfoot high round wooden barrel like object with little wooden steps next to it. Our initiation would come later.

The Japanese lady, our personal maid during our stay, indicated with much giggling, bowing, and waving of hands that next on the agenda was to get us into our kimonos. It didn't take long for us to figure out she was there to do everything for us and was very much in charge. It was easy getting Kevin into his kimono. She had a little difficulty with my Obi. It was not quite long enough and then with a giggle and a pat on my stomach she realized that I was pregnant. Conrad was a different matter. Her problem was to make him understand that nothing was worn under the kimono. After much tugging on his kimono, he finally removed his shorts with some embarrassment.

THE DEIHL FAMILY

She was ready to bathe us and put us to bed when we tried to communicate that we had not eaten dinner and Kevin was very hungry. She got someone who spoke limited English on the phone. He told us to point to what we wanted on the menu that was placed next to the phone. That seemed easy enough until we saw the menu. It was covered with little black Japanese characters! We each took a turn and pointed to something. Well, at least it was food. How bad could it be? Our maid disappeared for a few moments and when she returned, opened the wardrobe and out came a square wooden table not more than 8 inches high. Next, three large square goosedown poofs were placed around the table. I'm not sure what Conrad and I had to eat that night. We were just thankful we had not pointed to sushi. The maid insisted that she help Kevin eat. He was a stubborn seven year old, but she prevailed. With the chopsticks she deftly picked up a tiny morsel and dipped in a thick golden yellow liquid. We watched as she placed it in Kevin's mouth. Within seconds the bite of food and bright yellow drops went flying across the table as Kevin loudly exclaimed "Yuck!" He refused to eat anything else but rice. The yellow liquid was a beaten raw egg. Sukiyaki was renamed--sukiyucki.

It was bath time. While we were eating, the barrel was being filled with steaming hot water. Kevin learned a new way to take a bath. He was lathered with soap from head to toe. All the soap was rinsed off before he was submerged into the barrel. The water in the barrel was only for soaking after he was clean. We had only one mishap. Conrad somehow convinced the maid he could bath himself and as he lowered his two hundred pound six foot plus body into the tub we heard this loud rush of water gushing over the floor and into the passageway.

Somehow the food, the table, and the poofs disappeared during the bath and replacing them were three huge down mattresses side by side. Our beds for the night were ready and we were ready for them. As we disappeared into them almost out of sight, our maid vanished until it was time to greet us in the morning with a cup of steaming tea. The ryokan was a great introduction to Japan.

MY BOX

by

Ruth Burns Oates

My own things were kept in an apple box beside my side of the double bed in which my little sister Helen and I slept together, in "the girls' room" of the old wooden house. Helen had one, too, on her side of the bed, but it didn't have much in it. In mine I kept all my personal treasures--my doll Edward, his few clothes, some of my papers from school, a little note from Grandma, a ragged old book with the covers hanging off, a booklet about Holland that I made in the second grade (I got an "A+" on it! How pretty it looked! I had colored every page with such care!). None of these, though, was safe from my sister Helen. I had kept my box, at first, beside the bed, between my side and the wall. There was my small, private "place."

One day I came in to find my sister Helen sitting there! Around her on the floor were my papers. She had been looking at them! How did she dare! And now she was undressing Edward, **MY** doll. She was so intent that she had not even heard me coming into the room! I exploded.

After Daddy whipped me, I went into MY PLACE, knelt tearfully on the floor between the bed and the wall, and began slowly gathering up my treasures. My heart was sore. There would obviously be no justice. Bitterly, I plotted how to keep my own things safe... I would push the box under the bed where she couldn't see it.

So I carefully, lovingly, picked up my scattered school papers and put them on the bottom, then the book. No, the booklet would get bent if it was on top of the book. Finally, and slowly, weeping a few more bitter tears, I put poor little Edward's clothes back on and sat him precisely in one corner. My fury was spent. Resolution edged out my bitterness. Wiping my eyes with the hem of my dress, I began with great care to slide my box under the bed, parallel to the wall at its head. Then, from flat on my stomach under the bed, I pushed it flat to that wall, so the iron post of the bed would make it harder to pull out. Crawling out, I stood up, looked closely to be sure the box was not easily to be seen and that it was still under my side. Then I brushed the dust off myself with the same care, until I was satisfied that no one could tell by looking at me where I had been.

After that, I checked my box, that it had not been moved, whenever I was alone in the girl's room. For a while it was undisturbed. Then came the day!

I came home from my friend Rosalee's house and smelled the bread baking. In the kitchen, I showed Mother the rock I had found at Rosalee's, then hurried intently away to put it in my box. There sat my little sister Helen, in MY PLACE. Standing rooted to the floor, in the doorway, I imagined my papers scattered around her on the floor. I could just see the top of her smooth dark head above the far side of the bed, but I was sure she was taking the clothes off of Edward, again. I exploded. My rock hit the wall behind her head, and she jumped like a jack-in-the-box, then darted past me, screaming.

After Daddy whipped me, I limped tearfully into my own space. Edward did have all his clothes off. And, she had torn his shirt. Inside my head I reviewed the facts. She knew I would catch her. She did it anyway. Like the Elephant's Child, she needed

whipping for her insatiable curiosity. But I got the whipping. My little sister Helen was clearly off limits to me, but there had to be someplace I could put my box that my little sister Helen could not get to. That she would find it was certain. But that she could not get to it, I must make sure of. Ah-h-h! She was, after all, my LITTLE sister.

I had to nail my apple box so high on the wall that my little sister Helen could not reach it.

That Saturday I had waited carefully until everyone else was busy playing outside and the house was quiet. Now, on the floor by my side of the bed were all my personal belongings, other than clothes. On the bed was my apple box, emptied of those things, and placed purposefully on Helen's pillow, so I could reach it when I had climbed from mine up onto the iron bedstead. Slipping off first one shoe, then the other, I climbed carefully up onto the bed. The mattress gave, and so did the springs, so balance was chancy, and I bent one knee up to my chin and put a hand to the sheet on either side of my foot to do it. The bed was just about as high as I could manage to climb without doing it some other way. Now I balanced precariously, placing each foot with care, as I moved up to the head of the bed. I reached my skinny arms out to the round top of it, and resolutely tried to figure out how to climb up on it. It was too close to the wall! Stepping again to the middle of my side, still wary of my balance on the swaying springs, I jumped down to the floor. Grasping one side of the bedstead, I put my weight into pulling it away from the wall. It moved a little, squeaking against the floor, as the rollerless iron legs moved across the thin linoleum. I stopped to listen. The whole house held that Saturday morning quiet still. Moving barefooted around to the head on the other side, I grabbed the bed and leaned back again. It came away from the wall a little way, with another squeaking of each leg on the linoleum. I stopped to listen. All was still quiet. I might have been alone in the whole world, for all the response my noises brought. Then I looked at the bed and wall carefully, measuring. Far enough! I could make it now, I thought.

Moving on silent bare feet around the foot of the bed, I carefully mounted the mattress again. Stepping warily up my side to my pillow, I climbed the head of the bed. I had to use the wall for balance, and then I still had to stand up. Finally, very slowly, I made it. How far below me the floor seemed! How nearly impossible the job I had set myself. But I WOULD nail my box so high that my little sister Helen could not reach it.

So now I stood, precariously balanced against the wall, on the head of our iron bedstead. With extreme care, relying heavily on that wall, I squatted and caught the top edge of my box, where it stood on Helen's pillow. I struggled to raise it, but I couldn't without losing my balance. I would have to climb down and try another way.

This time, I stood my box on the head of the bed before I climbed up. I also made sure the two nails I had started in the back of the box were still secure, and that the hammer was in the box.

Before I was done, I had to climb down to the floor again and pull the bed farther from the wall. At last, I stood again on the head of the bed, my box beside me. This time, I was able to shinny it up the wall, just as far as I could reach, standing with exquisite care on my toes and driving my nails as near to the bottom of the box as I could hammer. My little sister Helen could not reach my things now! Finally, feeling very

shaky and spent, I climbed down off the head of the bed, then admired the job I had done.

But I still had to get all my stuff into the box. After many careful climbs, with papers, booklet, book, and doll, I had delivered all my treasure safely into the box, impossibly high on that wall. I was delighted, but tired. Finally, I lay on the bed and rested a few minutes, then went to the door, turned back to admire my box again, and went to replace the hammer in Daddy's toolbox in the garage. My legs ached, but my heart was singing. I hummed to myself as I skipped into the garage. Utterly content and pleased with myself, I walked out to the mulberry tree and climbed as high as the light branches would hold me. There I stood and looked around. I was monarch of all I surveyed!

A little later, Mother called us to supper. I ran by to admire my box on the way to eat, but stopped, thunderstruck, in the doorway. Forever etched in my memory is the picture of my little sister Helen, on top of the iron bedstead, stretching hard, balanced against the wall with one hand, pushing up from one set of toes on the top rail of the bed, the other foot in the air, and her reaching fingers curled around one of my doll Edward's feet. As I stood there, helpless and unbelieving, she inched him carefully out of my box! Finally, she lowered herself in a crouching turn, using the wall for balance. Seeing me in the doorway, her ebony eyes suddenly enormous, she jumped involuntarily and fell onto the bed.

I am proud to report that I did not explode.

HAMBURGER HEAVEN

by
Frank Simmon

During my high school days in Alba, Texas, I rode to school with the George Spear family most of the time. Since there was no school cafeteria I had to take my lunch or eat in town.

For lunch I usually ate at Naomi's Cafe, a small white frame L-shaped building about 30' x 40' on the northwest corner of the square. A door opened into the heel of the L, and as you entered a row of booths on the left had windows facing the street. An aisle ran parallel to the booths, then a counter with stools. Behind the counter shelving held various supplies, posters and a Philco radio. During the noon hour a program called "The Light Crust Doughboys" would be playing country music. This is the same group that carried a flour salesman by the name of W. Lee "Pappy" O"Daniel to the governor's mansion in the Thirties. A lot of activity went on during the noon hour with people coming and going and the radio constantly playing.

The kitchen, located in the toe of the L, had a candy case in front with a small dividing wall to separate the eating area. The first two or three stools next to the cash register had a good view of the kitchen and what was going on back there. I still remember the two or three pound package of freshly ground beef still in the white butcher paper on the work table. This was delivered every morning from the market down the street. Hamburger buns, also delivered daily from Tyler, were in a cellophane bag, six per bag.

After I ordered my hamburger, Naomi would go back to the work table, grab a handful of meat and form the burger patty. The griddle, about 24" x 30," sloped to the rear. Naomi used a spatula to push the excess grease to a drain.

A few seconds after the patty landed on the griddle, an aroma permeated the restaurant. The exhaust fan pulled the smoke, but the appetizing smell of the hamburger stayed with us. I guess that aroma will stay with me forever. A couple of minutes before the meat was ready, Naomi cut the bun and put it on the griddle next to the patty. Toasted a golden brown, the bun was flipped over on the baked side to put a grease sheen on the top. The bun was then moved to the work counter, loaded with salad dressing, the patty, and then the onions, pickles, tomatoes and lettuce. Later as I became more aware of the girls, I asked them to hold the onions. This was the perfect hamburger--you might say a custom built job.

The hamburger would come to my place at the counter and I'd order a Coca Cola. These were in 7 ounce glass bottles with a slight green tint. The name of the town where the bottling company was located was inscribed on the bottom of the bottle. When two or three people were drinking Cokes together, wagers were often made, and the person who had the bottle whose location was farthest away was declared the winner. Coca Cola Bottling Company claims that the formula has never been changed except once in the early part of the century. I am sure that is correct, but somewhere they seem to have

lost the flavor that was once dispensed at Naomi's. The total cost of this banquet was 10 cents for the hamburger and 5 cents for the coke.

Going from the sublime to the ridiculous, there's another hamburger I will always remember. During this same period when I was feasting at Naomi's, our family took a little trip. As we were driving through Tyler, we saw a big sign on the front of a cafe--HAMBURGERS--THREE FOR 25 CENTS !!! We just had to stop for this bargain. Since we planned to eat on the way, we ordered six hamburgers to go. Our order was filled quickly and we were back on the road. After about ten miles, we opened the sacks and passed the burgers around. After one bite we realized the patty was made of potatoes rather than meat. What a let down!

I don't dwell on Naomi's hamburgers as I know "They don't make them like they used to." Besides, my love for hamburgers came to a sudden halt on September 30, 1986, when I had open heart surgery at Methodist Hospital in Houston. My dear wife makes an excellent turkey burger and with my Light Crust Doughboys tape I can make a brief excursion back in time, and be thankful for my many blessings.

MY GREAT UNCLE CLEMENTS

by

Melvin A. Daniel

Some sixty-three years ago, give or take one or two years, I was faced with the reality of having no parents. My Mother died of high blood pressure, and within a few years my Father died from a blood disease.

As I grew older I constantly felt that this is a real part of my life which is missing. Becoming an orphan at the age of five did not have an impact at the time, but later on in life I realized that the love and closeness provided by a mother and father could never be there for me.

I was the youngest of five children, two brothers and two sisters. The economy was poor at the time and the country was on the brink of "The Great Depression." This forced my brothers and sisters, then in their teens, to accept whatever jobs were available in order to survive. Everyone went in different directions, which meant that the Daniel family was broken up.

I was taken in by Great Aunt Delia and her daughter, Myrtle, who was also my godmother. Uncle Clements, Aunt Delia's husband, was a lighthouse keeper and was away when my parents passed on. He was sixty-nine and was scheduled for retirement. It wasn't long when I was told that we were to meet Uncle Clements at the train station. The day had come.

I was too young to form an opinion of my new "substitute father" as he walked up to us from the train. I only knew that my life was in for many changes and new experiences.

My Great Uncle was a seafarer, having gone to sea on sailing ships as a young boy. He was Scotch Irish and born in Nova Scotia. I quickly learned that he was a strict disciplinarian and referred to me as "Boy" or "Mellie."

This was my first remembrance of how different my life was going to be. My Great Uncle had his own views and ideas pertaining to the upbringing of children. He went by the old adage "Children should be seen and not heard."

THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

by

Audrey K. Daniel

The day began as any other day, God's day, Sunday. Mother prepared dinner early, and 12 noon she and I walked four blocks to St. Anthony's Church on Canal Street to attend 12:15 mass.

When we returned home, Mother, Daddy, Elmer, Elaine's boyfriend, and I sat at the kitchen table for our usual Sunday dinner--chicken and dumplings, Mother's specialty, English peas, potato salad, and for dessert, pineapple upside down cake. This Sunday was not an ordinary Sunday. It was three days before Daddy's 52nd birthday December l0, and one day before Grandma Mac's birthday, December 8th.

After dinner, Elmer turned on the small kitchen radio to listen to some big band music. The program was abruptly interrupted with a special announcement. No, this was not just an ordinary Sunday, not just a pre-birthday celebration. It was December 7th, 1941, the day the news reporter had just announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. We were all very upset, but I was only 14 at the time and realization of the outcome of this horrendous act did not immediately register in my immature mind.

Later that afternoon, my cousin Jean came to visit. Her husband was in the Navy and somewhere at sea at the time of the bombing. In spite of the terrible news of the attack, Jean and I went downtown to a movie at the Lowe's State Theater. As we came out of the theater, newsboys were frantically running up and down Canal Street, flashing headlines that the U. S. was at war with Japan. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had officially declared war.

Jean was wild with fear; she was unsure of the location of her husband Emil's ship. Only then did I fully realize the impact of the war.

When the first draftees were called into active service, a parade was organized to honor those young men who were called to serve their country. I was a freshman at Sacred Heart High School, and my class was asked to participate in the parade. We gathered a few blocks past Lee Circle on St. Charles Avenue dressed in our starched, crisp white blouses, tied under the collar, a triangular navy blue scarf embroidered with S H H S, and completing our uniforms, a knife pleated navy blue skirt.

Patriotism was at an all time high; small American flags waved from our hands as we proudly marched behind the huge, rolling iron tanks and rifle-carrying infantrymen, down St. Charles Avenue, turning onto Canal Street and disbanding at Basin Street. This, I thought, was our major contribution to the newly declared war. We were caught up in the frenzy of a draft, never realizing the changes it would make in all our lives.

Having no brothers and very few young male cousins, it took years into the war to be personally concerned for the welfare of loved ones on active duty.

In the beginning, the only concern was the inconvenience of wearing underwear with buttons at the waist instead of elastic, shoe rationing, and a shortage of meat. Poor Mother would stand in line early in the morning only to be told the only meat available

was cured Spam. We had fried Spam, Spam and eggs, and a dozen other ways Spam could be disguised as real meat.

As the war progressed, my cousins enlisted in some branch of service and my boy friends were in uniform. Only when my Aunt Lou's son, a distant cousin from the rural town of Chenyville, Louisiana, was killed in the invasion of Normandy, was our family directly affected by the terrible war. Now the war was real! I no longer complained of shortages, but thought of all the young men, like my cousin, who would never return alive. World War II took a new meaning. This was the war supposedly to end all wars.

FIVE-POINT WIN

by

Melba Martin

Grandma and Grandpa Holland lived about two and a half miles south of Hayes, Louisiana in Jefferson Davis Parish just across the line that separates it from Calcasieu Parish. Mamma, Daddy and I often spent Sundays with them. We always arrived in time for Mamma to help Grandma put dinner on the table and for Daddy and Grandpa to take a short walk outside to look at the garden or perhaps a new calf in Grandpa's herd.

After dinner we usually went to the living room where the grown-ups would sit and talk. In an attempt to block out the adult conversation, which I found boring, I would take a book from behind the glass door of Grandpa's bookcase and slowly turn the pages while hoping to find some heretofore undiscovered illustration that would capture my interest. About an hour later we would say our good-byes and go home.

There was a particular Sunday in 1936 or '37 during the Christmas holidays that stands out in my memory. It started out like all the other Sundays with no variation in routine. However, it was to turn into a very special occasion for me. Mama and Grandma had agreed that since there was no school the next day, I could stay the night with Grandma and Grandpa. The mere thought of having them all to myself made me feel just about as happy as I could imagine it was possible to be.

It was Grandma and Grandpa's nature to be very calm and unhurried. It seemed to me that they always moved about slowly and deliberately with no wasted motions. This attitude produced a peaceful atmosphere without tension or stress. Grandpa rarely showed emotion of any kind, but even so, he was able to convey an air of amicability. His dark mustache gave him a rather stern look around the mouth; however, he had a way of smiling with his eyes that more than counterbalanced any trace of harshness in his face. Grandma always seemed very serious about things that were important to me. This made me feel that I was important to her.

After Mamma and Daddy left, Grandma sat down and took her ivory comb from her pocket. Her long dark hair, which had never been cut, fell to her waist as she unpinned the nub at the back of her neck. She combed one side while I ran my hands through the other side feeling the long silky strands against my fingertips. Then with a few quick movements she twisted the entire inky mass and wound it into a coil, deftly securing it with a few well-placed hairpins.

Grandma put the comb into her pocket and reached for her old guitar which stood propped against the side of the bookcase. It was her habit to take short breaks during the day. At these times she would play her guitar and sing while sitting in her rocking chair. Watching each string vibrate, I listened to the twangy sounds they made as she plucked first one then another while she twisted the keys back and forth. When she was satisfied that each string was tuned in relation to the others, she played a simple chord progression as she listened carefully to make sure that no string was the slightest bit sharp or flat. Her ear was attuned to the three primary harmonies: tonic, sub-dominant and dominant. She didn't know the chords had names, but she knew they fit with the

melodies of the hymns and folk songs she liked to sing. When she played and sang, her ear told her exactly when to change from one chord to the next.

Because it was Sunday, we sang hymns. Even though I knew all the words by heart, I had no idea what many of them meant, nor did I care. What mattered was that Grandma and I were making beautiful music together (beautiful to us, anyway), and it felt good.

Grandpa heard our vocal efforts while he was outside doing his chores. During a lull, while we were trying to decide what to sing next, he came in singing *Little Brown Jug*, an ancient cultural remnant of obscure origin which had been perpetuated from generation to generation in his family. He knew several verses, each followed by a refrain in which love is declared for the little brown jug. It didn't occur to me and I doubt if it ever occurred to Grandpa, who was a very conservative, non-drinking Methodist, what the contents of the jug might be. We just had fun singing it over and over.

Grandpa and I decided to play dominoes, our favorite game, until supper was ready. I can still recall the clackety-clack of the black wooden rectangles as we turned them face-down on the table, followed by the swishing sound of wood moving against wood as we shuffled them. I couldn't add up my dots as fast as Grandpa, but he was patient while I worked at it, sometimes having to resort to counting on my fingers.

He always won. It would not have occurred to him to let me win occasionally. Likewise, it didn't bother me that I always lost. At this time, winning seemed like a remote possibility that might happen at some time in the future when I could count better and add faster.

After playing several rounds, the table again held a maze-like pattern of dominos which seemed to have no order in its arrangement. Yet each black tile was connected to its neighbor by the rules of the game. Grandpa was 20 points ahead. I played my last domino and slowly added up the white dots. It didn't seem possible that I had made 25 points. I added again and got the same answer. I won. Grandpa smiled with his eyes and I knew that he was just as elated as I.

I consider myself very fortunate to have had my grandparents for so many years. We spent lots of time together throughout my childhood and adolescence. Grandpa lived to be 82 and Grandma, almost 101. They left me the best legacy I can imagine: the wonderful memories of themselves.

MY EARLIEST REMEMBERED EXPERIENCE

by

Nelia Myrhaugen

It was on a dark, cloudy night in mid-summer. It had to be summer time because I went outside in my nightgown. Daddy had gone to Abbeville, a Louisiana town about five miles away, to buy the weekly groceries. He traveled by horseback on our one horse, named Ole Ford. Ford had one crippled back leg, so he could not go very fast and I always felt sorry for him because of the way he had to walk. He always went very slow.

We lived in the country in an old house built up on concrete blocks or bricks. You know how houses were built back then in 1923. They had to be up off the ground to allow air to circulate around and under the houses. Ours was about three feet above the ground.

Mama and my two older brothers, Walter, age 6 and Lester, age 5, and I had gone to bed and were asleep. Later Mama and I were awakened by the weirdest noise. The boys did not wake up. I ran crying to where Mama was in bed and we sat waiting for Daddy to come home. She lit the kerosene lamp, but it did not quiet the eerie sound. Neither of us knew what it was or where it came from. Finally Daddy came home. He took his flashlight, which he always had with him whenever he went to town after a day's work because it was always in the dark of night when he returned. I hung on to Mama's skirt because I was so scared.

In those days there was a custom if a family had done something that made people angry, several men in the neighborhood got together, always in the dark of night. They attached a very thin wire to the corner of the house under the eave, stretched it very tight and tied it high up in a near-by tree. Then they rubbed resin on the wire. This action made a very loud noise and always scared the family inside.

Well, my family had done nothing to merit such treatment, but Daddy took a long pole to check for any wire attached to the house just in case there was one. There was none. So we went all around the house looking for the cause of the noise. I was scared but wanted to help, so I got on my knees to look under the house. To my horror, when I got up, Mama and Daddy had moved on and I was left behind with this weird noise all around. Needless to say, frightened little me ran to catch up with them. The brothers were still asleep. We all went inside and somehow the noise subsided, but I still couldn't sleep. So I spent the rest of the night waiting for the unknown to happen.

The next day I was sitting at the long, hand-made kitchen table, on a long hand-made wooden bench where the children sat against the wall. Mama and Daddy always sat in chairs at the table.

At this time I was alone when I heard the horrible noise again, real loud almost in my ear. I screamed "Mama, Mama come quick." (Before I continue with the episode I must tell you that our house was old and built of upright boards that always had cracks in between.) Mama came running and together we discovered the culprit that had scared us all half to death. In the crack, just to my right near the table, was a big water bug

trying to get free. When it beat its wings against the boards, the vibration made this loud eerie sound. So Mama took a flat dull knife and eased the bug out. This ends the telling of my earliest remembered experience.

OUTLAWS OF ALTO

by

Velma Boutotte

Alto, Texas, where I grew up is a small town in East Texas in the heart of the piney woods. At the time I graduated, 1940, the population was just under 900. The shopping area had three streets about a block long. Now it is only one street because in my years there the feuding Boyds and Aurant families shot so many of the store fronts during their war against each other the businesses closed. The two families owned several of the buildings and were kin to each other. This feuding went on Friday or Saturday morning for years before Bill Brunt, their cousin, became Sheriff of Cherokee County and filled the jail with Boyds and Aurants until they worked their problems out. Supposedly drinking of bootleg liquor or "rot-gut" as my Dad called it was the greatest problem. Cherokee County was voted a dry county every time the issue was up for vote.

Saturday afternoon drew the big crowds to town to shop for groceries and supplies and to mill around to visit with people we hadn't seen all week. We children were always curious as to how many new broken windows we could count from each end of the back streets. We were admonished by our parents that it was off-limits to us. We young people often stayed in town to see the midnight show if we could arrange a ride home. The movie started at 10 o'clock and ended just before 12 o'clock. They were silent and in black and white when I first started seeing them, but by the time I graduated they were in color and talking. Hop-A-Long Cassidy, Wild Bill Hickok and Gene Autry were the leading stars. We had a nickel coke while waiting. Popcorn was a nickel too. Our supper in town was special to us. It was a nickel hot dog or fully dressed hamburger ten cents and a large dill pickle that cost three cents or most of the time it was free, and a coke.

One day two robbers robbed our bank. Mr. Earl, our school bus driver, was sitting outside his shoe repair shop behind the bank when he noticed two strange men leave a strange car and enter the bank. One man returned to the car real soon and started the engine and was anxiously watching for the other one to return. Mr. Earl stepped inside his shop and got his loaded pistol just as the robber came running from the bank with a heavy sack and the bank employees chasing him, at a distance of course. He killed the robber with the money but the other one escaped in the car. That was some excitement for that little town! The robber was put on display for all to see the bullet wounds and our school marched down town class by class to view the body and march by to say "Thank you" to Mr. Earl for saving the money from the bank.

Our family suffered occasionally from the outlaw uncle who lived on the next farm and who over imbibed on rot-gut. He often came looking for a fight with just anyone who crossed him. Uncle Vernard would start a ruckus with Aunt Nettie and Grandma and they would scream for help. My mom would run to help her Mom and Sister and Eugene, my older brother would follow to help her. I usually ran with Gene to observe at a distance. Gene would distract Uncle Vernard and get him to chase him until he fell from being so

drunk and unable to get up, and would leave him to sleep it off in the yard. We dreaded seeing him go to town on Saturday as he would come home drunk and ornery.

My favorite girl cousin Ruth Hazel that had been a tomboy like me was spending the night with me one of those Saturdays and went with me to find Uncle Vernard chasing Gene with a knife. She stuck out her foot and tripped him and the knife flew out of his hand. She and I sat on his hands over his head and feet stretched out trying to get him to stop cursing and fighting. He kept on and we moved the heavy cover of an old well that they had been trying to fill for years and threatened to roll him into it, and put the cover back on if he didn't quiet down in a hurry. Gene came to pick up the knife and told Aunt Nettie to hide it from him for a few weeks. He was laughing at Uncle Vernard in his predicament, and after a few minutes our uncle quit struggling and promised to behave if we let him up and did not put him in the old well. Soon after that incident, we learned that the Revenuers had destroyed a still across the creek that the Cruisiner boys were operating, and that was one place Uncle Vernard was getting his booze. He would get a ride from town to the Cruisiner home and walk across to the county road where he lived. Scraps of the old barrels are all that remains now of the old still and the pine trees we set out on that land four years ago are higher than my house top. Our families have never consumed much alcohol. Maybe we saw the trouble it caused and learned an early lesson.