Life and Letters

Volume XIII

Summer 1995

I teach **LIFE & LETTERS** for the children's sake. Some say the lives of future generations hinge on technology or some other way to make their lifestyles more comfortable. Could it be that the success of our inheritance--the children, the grandchildren, the children yet to be born--really depends on stories, our stories, including the stops, the starts, the U-turns, the signs that become guideposts for others?

The writer of Psalm 78 makes this declaration: *We will not hide from their children the stories our fathers have told us, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.* The psalmist understood the nature of story--its power, its design, its connectedness. Students of **LIFE & LETTERS** learn these elements, too, by discovering that someone is listening.

A generation is listening. We are all watching and waiting to catch a soul who has walked before us, to find a generation that can say to us, "This way." We are looking, like children peering at a connect the dots pattern, wondering, "What's it going to be?" Sharing memories of former days helps shape and connect the curiously-wrought patterns. Through these lived-through stories we, too, can learn and live.

To my students, I am all ears. To an audience, always friends, we will not hide the stories. We will tell them to the generations to come. Listen with care and enjoy these memories.

→→→→→Joan Stear
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana
Summer 1995

LIFE & LETTERS thanks the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Lafayette General Medical Center for their continued support.

Front Cover (clockwise from upper right hand corner): Jim Jennings; Gertrude Pierce, mother of Joan Ireland; Jean Smith; Bonnie Andrus, 1939-40; Lou Richard, in front of car; Pat Hough; Orpha Valentine, age 15; Jake Valentine; Mildred Barry, second from right; (center) Lois Diehl with younger sister; Ruth Oates, on left with grandmother and siblings

LIFE & LETTERS
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Seated, l. to r.: Mary Thibodeaux; Marge DeVillier; Orpha Valentine; Elizabeth Poole; Joe Glorioso; Woodson Hopkins
Standing, l. to r.: Jim Jennings; Pat Hough; Jean Smith; Bonnie Andrus; Mildred Barry; Lou Richard; Joan Ireland; Lois Diehl; Jake Valentine; Joan Stear; Ruth Oates
Missing from photo are Anna Anderson and Mitzi Doucet

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DID MY DREAM COME TRUE?
by
J. M. Jennings, Jr.

I look back at things that did or did not happen to me, and I often think of the automobiles that I did or did not own. The first of these was a Model A Ford.

During the summer of 1937, I had just celebrated my sixteenth birthday. My friend Red Barnard and my younger brother Eddie and I concocted a grand plan to buy a car. In it we would travel from New Orleans to California and back.

We planned to purchase a second hand Model A Ford, because we had been advised, by knowledgeable older boys, that this particular auto got good gas mileage. A good Model A could be bought for about $250, said older members of Boy Scout Troop 32. Gee--it was fun and exciting to plan our adventure, and the planning gave us our first experience with the art and science of logistics. We did underestimate two major obstacles--first, we could not accumulate the $250 to buy the Ford and second, we neglected to tell our families what we planned to do. This second obstacle was really our downfall and our trip never happened. That Model A Ford was the first car I dreamed about and never had.

The second car I had a great desire to own (I was forty-two years old and should have known better) was a convertible--a red Chevrolet with a white top and wide, white side-wall tires. Unfortunately at this time, our family budget could not support so costly a purchase: three of our five children were enrolled in USL. My wife Margaret, who was the operator of our one-car family taxi service, threatened to quit driving all together unless she got immediate relief. Clearly, the Jennings family had to have another vehicle for campus transportation, but it could not be a red convertible.

Instead, we bought a second-hand, red 1960 Chevy Corvair. Gas mileage was excellent and the Corvair proved ideal for running back and forth to USL. On occasion, Margaret and I borrowed it on a Saturday afternoon to run the back roads to Leroy, Andrew, or Patoutville. So, goodbye, convertible.

By the time I was forty-five years old, in 1966, the car I thought I must own had become a Cadillac. It had a big 429 cubic inch power plant and real air-conditioning. What a great car for long trips. But, it was pointed out to me that a station wagon was much more sensible for hauling children and dogs and, with the passage of time, I accepted that suggestion as correct. So long, Cadillac.

By 1975, the three oldest children had left home and youngest son, John, and youngest daughter, Virginia, had arrived at the college-high school age. With fifty-four candles on my birthday cake, I imagined I deserved a Corvette with a big V-8 engine and black side-wall tires, ideal for speeding down I-10 on a Sunday afternoon. But a Corvette only seats two occupants, so the practical thing to do was to buy a used 1973 Chevy Vega which sported a brilliant orange paint job. This Vega was fun to drive and we ultimately traded it for a show-room new golden-brown Vega. In 1982, we

gave that car to Virginia for a wedding present. She promptly sold it and used the money to buy a refrigerator for her new home. Goodbye, Corvette.

Getting closer to the present, but still looking back, I had the envie, or desire, for a full sized pick-up truck equipped with everything: a big block V-8, air conditioning, and an AM/FM radio with cassette player. Why with that truck, I could haul 4x8 foot sheets of plywood. But I talked myself out of this purchase when I remembered, in all my life, I never had the need to haul a full sized sheet of plywood. Another factor in my decision was Margaret's announcement that she was not going to take a vacation trip to Colorado in a truck. Scratch one pick-up.

This brings me to the present and my look ahead. A van! That has to be the greatest thing for carrying people and traveling. We bought a Pontiac Trans Sport van with all the can't-do-without options. It has seven individual, comfortable seats, but I can remove five of those seats with just a little effort. With five seats taken out, a sheet of plywood easily fits inside.

Our van has room for lots of luggage, and maybe the Trans Sport can take Margaret and I to Alaska this summer or next. I like to look ahead and plan. The AAA maps are on hand and the only ferry ride that seems necessary is the crossing from Anchorage to Kodiak Island. Our computerized trip planner has mapped out a 4500 mile journey, one way, and the snow shovel and spare tires are aboard. I am looking ahead!

Is this new van my dream car? I should know the answer by this time next year.

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UP THE DOWN STAIRCASE
by
Lois Diehl

Conrad finally received his degree in Petroleum Engineering from Marietta College in 1964 after several interruptions. Following graduation he headed south to Houston in search of a job in the oil patch. I went north to Colgate University with a National Science Foundation grant to study more math during the summer. Kevin went to visit Grandma and Grandpa Meals in Pennsylvania. We hoped that by the end of the summer the three of us would be reunited and relocated in the Oklahoma-Texas-Louisiana area.

Towards the end of August we packed everything we owned in a small U-Haul trailer hitched to the back of our crimson and white Oldsmobile and left Ohio. Our destination was Monahans, West Texas. Conrad had taken a job with Skelly Oil Company. His choices for location had been Hobbs, New Mexico, or Monahans. Just before we left I had received a telegram from the principal of Monahans High School stating, "We are in need of a math teacher. Please reply 'yes' as soon as possible." Now I had a job that was to begin three days after our anticipated arrival. In those three days I was expected to recoup from the trip, buy furniture for our home, find a sitter for three-year-old Kevin, and mentally prepare to begin teaching.

As we traveled west, the greenery of the East and the central states began to turn into a brown landscape densely dotted with mesquite and pumps that constantly moved up and down. The clean, fresh smell of the air in the North, taken for granted, was replaced with the very pungent odor of sour gas that permeated the air everywhere. West Texas would be our home for the next two years.

The day after my arrival in Monahans, I attended my first organizational meeting for teachers. There I was given the textbooks to be used in my classes. The Algebra I and Algebra II were Dolciani's first modern algebra texts using the new 'Modern' mathematics symbols and terminology. That evening I wanted to sit down and cry. I told Conrad there was no way I could teach using those texts in just two days. Later I would tell people I would use no other texts but Dolciani's. I had been warned by some of the other teachers to arrive at the high school extra early the first day, but I was not prepared for the sea of cars driving on the school grounds. Every student from the age of fourteen and up had his or her own car. Where I came from no one even got a permit before their sixteenth birthday.

The first day seemed never ending and extremely hot. Finally the bell rang to begin the last class of the day--only one more hour to go. After I had introduced myself to the Algebra II class and called the roll, a hand went up in the back of the room. "Miz Diiaall, just what part of Texas are y'all from with that funny accent?" Many of the students giggled. I did not blink an eye nor smile as I replied, "The very far Northeastern corner. We all talk like this."

Teaching at Monahans High was an uphill battle. I was unaware that I had replaced a very popular teacher, Mr. J. L. Jordan. He had been promoted and was now my Assistant Principal. As the year progressed he became my very good friend and mentor. Some students thought J. L. was irreplaceable and told me so. Several of the 'brighter' students in the advanced math class asked to be removed and permitted to study on their own in the library. Later in the school year they apologized for bailing out without giving me a chance and realized they had missed an opportunity.

The senior football players thought my class was too demanding. One by one they began going to the principal requesting to drop my Trig class. When I realized what was happening I went to Lathan Walker, the principal, and requested that he deny any more to drop. I was very unpopular for a while, but at the end of the course those that stayed thanked me for keeping them in the class. My attendance at all their games indicated to them that I was also interested in their activities outside the classroom.

The year was an experience in learning and growth for me as well as my students. I knew that I was finally accepted when I arrived at the State Track Meet in Austin and all my students called to me to sit with them. During my second year the Junior class voted me to be one of their class sponsors. It was an unforgettable honor.

My two years of teaching at Monahans High were all too short. I can still hear the radio station announcing, "This next one goes out to Miz Diehl with love from her students," and then the voice of Nancy Sinatra singing--"These boots are made for walking all over you." It's a wistful reminiscence that I had a memorable experience when I went up the down staircase.

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COOKING TIME WITH MO-MO

by

Lou Richard

My Daddy's mother's house was a fun place for me. Mo-Mo was a very good cook. For breakfast she would make bacon, eggs and toast. Paw-Paw was a diabetic, so along with the bacon, eggs and toast, Mo-Mo served half a banana and an apple wedge.

I can remember watching Mo-Mo put one slice of bacon in the skillet at a time, holding each end down with a fork and spatula so it would not curl up. The eggs were done just right and the toast had homemade butter.

When the family gathered, Mo-Mo would make ice cream. She would beat the orange-colored egg yolks and white sugar until they were a light lemon color. That took a long time. Then she beat the egg whites until they were stiff. Mo-Mo didn't own an electric mixer (they weren't invented then), so all her mixing was done by hand. When the mixture was ready to be frozen, I got to be queen and sit on the freezer. Boy, that was fun. My uncles took turns turning the crank and teased me all the while, mostly by putting ice down the back of my shirt.

At times I can smell the bacon, eggs and toast cooking and taste the ice cream Mo-Mo used to make.

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THE RASPBERRY PICKERS
by
Joan Ireland

One of my favorite past times growing up in Maine was being a forager of Nature's bounty. Webster defines 'forage' as a search for food or provisions. I would say my father, Frank Pierce, could be rated, Forager, Number One.

I can remember always having plenty of strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries at home but we never purchased them at the local store. Wild berries grew in abundance in the Maine fields and woods for anyone who would spend the time and energy to pick them. It was my Dad who got me started hunting and picking wild berries. It seemed he had an inward compunction to gather what the Lord or nature provided and let nothing go to waste.

Not only did we pick berries but Dad always checked the fields after the English peas were harvested and after the potatoes were dug in the fall. We were 'gleaners' like Ruth, the Moabitess, and would pick up barrels of potatoes and bushels of peas missed by the harvesters.

We would take them home and my Mom, Gertrude Pierce, would start cleaning and boiling the canning jars, and, in no time at all, they would be filled with delicious peas and even the small potatoes. Also, in the early spring we would collect wild dandelion greens and fiddle heads that would appear along the river banks after the ice and snow melted and the water went down.

One early August morning, I crept out of the house with a ten quart pail all ready for the harvest of many red, luscious raspberries. Later on, it would get hot, so I wanted to get an early start. I left my sister, Connie, still sleeping in the other side of the double bed in our bedroom and tiptoed past the room where my brothers, Weston, Donnie, Walter, and the baby Forrie were sleeping. I knew if they woke up, I would have to take time to help get breakfast and help with the little ones, so I was especially quiet.

My Dad had bored holes in two sides of my tin pail and had made a handle of heavy twine so that I could use both hands to pick berries. I tied the handle around my waist, crossed the field in back of my house and entered the woods where I had previously spotted many white, raspberry blossoms.

Now, for the city slicker who doesn't know how wild raspberries grow, let me describe where the best, biggest and best tasting berries are found. First, look for an area that has had trees cut down and you will find tall piles of dead branches. Hiding amongst this "trash pile, " as we called it, grow an abundance of wild raspberry and blackberry bushes with thorns that can really hurt as you struggle to get a foothold and still reach for the berries that always seem to be out of reach.

On this particular day, I had been picking berries for a long while. I must confess many of the first ones I picked didn't go into the pail; they went into my mouth and tasted like nectar from heaven. They were so good. Maine gold!

It was very quiet and peaceful in the woods. The only sounds I could hear were birds singing, the occasional bark of a dog and the sound of branches breaking as I climbed over them, but no noise from the outside world. Suddenly, I became conscious of a queer sound; a kind of snuffling sound. I stopped picking berries and held my breath but could hear nothing. "Oh, well," I thought, "It must be my imagination. I'll finish filling my pail and head for home."

Once again, I heard a noise more like a moan or rustling in the bushes. Rising on my tiptoes on the precarious branch, I looked over the heavily laden raspberry bush right into the eyes and snout of a big, black bear. His mouth was open and I could see his teeth smeared with something red that looked like blood. He was standing on two feet and was taller than I was. I think he might have been 10 feet tall. (That's a fish story. He probably was 6 feet tall standing up.)

My heart started to beat like a jackhammer. I didn't know what to do. I was so scared I couldn't move even if he wanted me for a late breakfast. Poor bear, he probably was a startled as I was. After all, he was just eating his breakfast too. I realized later that that red stuff on his mouth was raspberry juice. It seemed like it was hours that we looked at each other, then the bear got down on his four feet and slowly ambled away.

I climbed down off that trash pile, and, once I reached the open field, ran as quick as my legs could carry me, home to safety. Where was I the next day? Back in the berry patch, of course.

THE FIREFLY TREE
by
Ruth Burns Oates

I lived at Burnsville, Mother's apartment house in Ruston, Louisiana. In one short month I would have my degree from Louisiana Tech, then go to teach school in Starks, Louisiana, two weeks later.

David Oates had gone to his job in Cotton Valley, Louisiana, that Monday morning after I helped wash his car. In those days, 1950, it was rather daring for a girl to call a boy and invite him to go somewhere with her, so I spent a lot of my time casting about for an acceptable way to invite him back. Then one of my little sister Alice's friends began planning a hayride for her thirteenth birthday party. Her father asked me to chaperone the affair and to invite a date for the male chaperone.

The chance I had been searching for! I would invite David Oates. But first I had to get his address. I was not about to approach David's mother, whom I knew only by sight. "She'd think me unforgivably forward and brash," I thought. "Besides, she hasn't been friendly since David and I appeared to ignore her while we washed his car. But David's sister Jackie often visits our twins. I'll ask her." So I asked my little sisters to let me know the minute Jackie came again.

When I got the word that Jackie had come I hurried into the twins' room to talk to her. "Alice's friend is having a hay ride for her birthday, and I am supposed to be a chaperone. They want me to bring a date," I explained. "I want to invite your brother David. Can you give me his address?"

Jackie hesitated. "I think he's engaged," she told me doubtfully.

I laughed aloud as I answered, "He didn't act engaged!"

"I guess it won't hurt to give you his address," Jackie agreed. So she went up to their apartment and got it. That very night I wrote David a note inviting him to be my date and help chaperone the hayride.

On Wednesday before the Friday night of the scheduled party, I was in a quandary. I had not heard from David, and I needed a date for the affair. However, after dark that evening David knocked on our front door.

"The mail is slow," he explained, "and I wanted to be sure you knew I was coming for the hayride, so I came to tell you. The party sounds like fun, and I will be there."

"By the way," he continued, "is there any place to get a fountain coke this time of night in Ruston? Maybe you'd join me and show me the way."

("This is an invitation I will not refuse!" I thought to myself. "And this time I am wearing shoes, not like the day we met. And my hair is dry, curled and combed! He won't know me!")

"Just let me tell Mother I'm going," I answered aloud.

In no time we were in David's car. When he asked, "Where do we go?" I named some nearby cafes, and he chose Hood's Drive-in on the Monroe Highway. I directed him there. He pulled in, drove all around the gravel parking lot, then chose a spot under a huge live oak tree at the back. Right away a car-hop took our order. Most of the customers had already gone home, so the car-hop came quickly back with two cherry cokes. David and I sat there alone together in the pleasant night, sipping while we chatted.

Our parking space was in deep shadow, but it was a darkness transformed by nature into something magical. On this warm midsummer night before air conditioning, the lightest of breezes came through the open car windows, and lightning bugs were out in massive numbers. They lit the great live oak tree before and above us with countless, ever changing points of light as they went about their business in the night. *I never could have thought of it, To have a little bug all lit, And made to go on wings.*[1] Hundreds of little bugs all lit, lights with wings, moved over and among the branches, twigs, and leaves of the oak, flashing their small bright lamps on and off before our eyes. Our entire field of vision was a randomly moving light show, while crickets sang into the softly stirring, faintly scented air, surrounding us with enchantment.

David sat behind the wheel while I sat on the passenger side as we enjoyed our cokes, the light show, and one another's company. Slowly the conversation ceased. We were caught up in mutual silence, a silence of awareness, a kind of awe, fraught with promise. We did not touch each other. He did not even try to kiss me goodnight when he took me home.

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[1]from "Firefly" by Elizabeth Madox Roberts

WE GO TO WAR
by
Bonnie Andrus

I was ten when World War II started; my brother, Jinky, was seventeen and a freshman at USL.

We heard about Pearl Harbor on that unforgettable Sunday afternoon. Mom, Dad, my sister, Iris, and I huddled around the radio, looking at each other, repeating over and over, "It can't be true!" But it was.

Sick at heart, we piled into the car and drove to Granma and Granpa's; we needed to be there. Angry and dread-filled voices of aunts, uncles, parents and grandparents echoed in every room, sometimes in hushed tones. Granma, my peppery Irish shoot-first-then-ask-questions Granma, had swollen, tear-reddened eyes, no tears left to shed. Faces everywhere without smiles, so different from the usual gathering of a Sunday.

"All those young men! How could anyone do that?"

"It's so cowardly!"

"I'm worried about Joann's husband. They have a child, but he's twenty-two. I guess he'll be called up soon."

"And Truman. And Tony. And L.J. Do you think they'll take Mrs. Leger's son, Pete? She's widowed and he takes care of her."

We stayed with Granma and Granpa, comforting them as best we could with a litany of "maybe it won't's," then returned home to be joined by relatives to talk more freely than they could in front of Granma. She had two sons of war age, with another who could be called up if the War didn't end soon. Losing three sons was more than she could face.

Actually, many months earlier I had had an inkling that something was going very wrong. I was listening to the radio when the program was interrupted by an announcer repeating in the most somber voice, "France has capitulated!" Frowning, I wondered where France was. At least on the other side of Lafayette--I didn't remember ever having gone there. And what did the big word mean? The announcer's voice told me that this was heavy news.

I sped to the garden where Mom and Dad were hoeing, repeating the news using the same big word and tone as the announcer. Mom and Dad straightened up as one and gripped their hoes, knuckles whitening. In French, words flew back and forth like bullets. Mom, the pessimist, knew now we'd go to war. Dad asserted we wouldn't. Roosevelt would keep us out. Mom, of course,

took a mental leap to the death of her first-born and only son. A worrier, she invented if nothing was at hand, but she could usually be counted on to find something worrisome. I was secretly thrilled to have been the carrier of this news that caused such upset.

So, that Pearl Harbor afternoon was like something I had heard before, only much wrose. Uncles and aunts had sad worried faces. Teen male cousins talked about joining their favorite branches of the service, even if, until then, they had had none. Jinky was in Lafayette. How did he feel? I was soon to find out.

Home for Christmas, he and my parents talked far into the nights. At seventeen and three months, he wanted to enlist in the Army Air Corps and become a pilot. They wanted him to wait a while. Because of his age, our parents had to give their permission; eventually, with heavy hearts, they agreed to sign.

In January, Jinky enlisted. It was a tearful good-bye. For over three years, except for furloughs that seemed to end as soon as he arrived, he was absent from my life.

After flight training in Frederick, Oklahoma, he was refused an overseas assignment, perhaps because he was still seventeen. Disappointed, he was given the unheroic duty of flight instructor to new recruits. The country had been caught by surprise, and the war effort desperately needed skilled fighter and bomber pilots. He was to produce some of them.

War is not humorous, but some of the stories were. Like the time Jinky was in the instructor's seat on a ground-hugging training mission over the endless plains of west Texas. As he and his student pilot topped a hill, the ground below exploded white. Startled, they dipped a wing and looked back to see a woman shaking her fist at them. The sound of the plane's engine had been silenced by the hill; then hardly higher than treetops it roared over the hill upon...a huge chicken farm! Thousands of chickens scrambled, wings flapping frantically. They took to the air in one endless white wave before dropping back to earth, inside and outside their fences!

Another time, Mom and I picked up the mail from our little country post office on our way somewhere, probably to church. There was a letter from Jinky. Back in the car, I opened it and started reading aloud. Evidently I read too slowly, for my mother craned her neck to read also, forgetting to steer. Glancing up, she saw a "Caution School" sign directly in our sights and yanked the wheel sharply to the left. But not quickly enough. The now-bent sign had scratched the car from the start of the front door all the way back to the trunk.

Later when no longer embarrassed, she laughingly referred to the incident as the time she hit the little schoolboy, the white sign having a black knickered school boy outlined on it.

There were aspects of the War so very hard on the family left behind. Letters soothed; telegrams were dreaded.

I often visited across the road at the Simars where there were four children--friends about my age. On this particular chilly afternoon, I was gossiping with Mrs. Simar in her warm kitchen when we heard a knock. Mrs. Tip, we called her, opened the door. My mother, kerchief on her head and coat hugged tightly to her chest, stepped inside, then fell to the floor in a dead faint. Clutched in her hand was a telegram, the dreaded telegram. She had walked the mile from our rural mailbox in unspeakable grief, unable to open the telegram which would confirm her greatest horror, that she had lost her son. Revived, she numbly nodded when Mrs. Tip offered to read it.

Quickly, she read to my mother that Jinky was going on a cross-country mission and would buzz our house! He gave the date and time so we'd be home. We had no phone, and there wasn't time to write! We hugged Mom tightly and wept!

Granma's son, Leroy, and my brother had joined the Army Air Corps. Both returned safely.

Not so with a second cousin, Linus Regan. An officer in the Navy, he was lost at sea when his ship went down in 1944. My Aunt Hazel later played a recording for us whose lyrics puzzled us: "I know his name was Regan, from the little town of La Egan; that's the name that's tattooed on my chest." Someone who had known Linus...a best buddy, perhaps?

We on the home front banded together, too, to "beat the Nazis and the Japs." We saved paper and metal, grew victory gardens, and bought war bonds and stamps. We knew that "loose lips sank ships," so we watched what we said. Who might be listening?

We endured rationing of gasoline, sugar, shoes, and meat without complaint so our guys could eat well and be outfitted to fight and win. Cars had to last a long, long time. Tires were priceless, and very rare. We learned to make do and to do without.

I watched while Dad patched inner tubes, with an occasional patch-on-the-patch; the glue smelled sickenly sweet. Shoes were patched, too, re-glued and re-nailed, with tips added to make them last longer. We passed clothes down.

Mom, Iris, and I hired ourselves out summers to pick cotton, not for the money--we didn't earn much--but to help the war effort and because there was a shortage of field labor.

In time, our guys won the War, came home, and, picking up the threads of their lives, headed for two-car garages, split levels, and the baby boom.

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DUSTY ROADS TO HEAVEN

by

Jean Smith

It was a stifling hot, seven hour drive north and east out of Dallas...but heaven did exist! And I would be going there! One special day each June, I jumped out of bed very early and helped my parents pack their old Ford sedan with suitcases and sandwiches and sodas. I scrambled into the back seat, and--in an unusually festive mood--we started out. We backed away from the cold brick house, backed down the long, unpaved drive by the cemetery, turned onto Milton Street...and left. The lonely city faded far behind for awhile, memories and all. I was free! On bumpy two lane highways we drove, heading straight north sixty miles to the Red River Valley, and travelling through fields of orange spiky Texas plumes, bright bluebonnets, and soft yellow buttercups...all dancing merrily in the morning breeze.

Across the river's narrow bridge and on into the Oklahoma plains, the kaleidoscope of colors suddenly became a rich red blanket of clover and mile upon mile of riotous multi-colored Indian paint brushes. Deep in the state, the flower fields began to roll and change once more. The emerald green of prairie grass rippled endlessly as we approached the foothills of the Arbuckle Mountains. Bravely, the old sedan chugged on and up, being skillfully maneuvered through treacherrous hairpin curves. Beads of sweat glistened on our foreheads, as each turn was completed. The huge waterfall out the left windows laughed and splashed us with a cooling spray--fine and misty. Then, suddenly pulling out of the mountains, we kept the course straight north, until eventually, we barely could make out on the dim horizon the outline of ...Oklahoma City! Halfway to Heaven!

Route 66 was a breeze--a burning hot one--but a breeze, nevertheless! The noonday sun scorched the windy prairie, as the new highway took us in a little more easterly direction--through towns with names of brave Indian chiefs and dark lovely maidens--through prairies of ripe wheat, waving and glittering gold in the sun--through black dirt fields rich with plants of dark green leaves and snowy white cotton balls. Lazily, we rumbled on in the sweltering heat, going north and east almost as far as Tulsa, to the tiny town of Bristow. Then...only twelve more miles! For me...the longest mile was the last mile to Heaven!

"Will you hurry up!" Bea complained. "It's so dern hot and the thermos was outta water miles back!"

"Doin' the best I can, " Mal snapped. "Maybe someday they'll invent air-conditioners for cars. Then it won't be such a long old hot drive!"

"Are you nuts?" she popped back.

Secretly, I thought they both might be--but I sure didn't say it! Seems like they missed the dancing flowers and the laughing waterfall and the wheat waving to us and the tires steadily humming the old G note on the pavement. You know...all the good stuff!

"No!" my father said. "No kidding, I hear quite a few houses are getting air-conditioning now--so why not autos, too?"

"Uh! Dream on!" as Mother settled back into her familiar gray silence.

We whizzed down Bristow's main street, all three blocks of it--past the J & J Cafe, the feed store, the two-story Rollison Hotel, the five and dime, the movie house, and Harvey's Drugs. Continuing out of town straight north again on the roughly paved road, we soon rolled up to the last stop before our final destination. Four Mile Corner! The old general store was known only by its distance from town. Folks had called it the "Four Mile Corner" so long now, that its original name was lost.

My parents and I, we always stopped there! They gassed up the car and talked with Hank Johnston, the owner, and some of the local farmers and their wives. All the grown-ups seemed to meet there and talk--that is, all the country people. The uptown people gossiped over hot coffee at the J & J or over ice cream floats at the drugstore's fountain. But for us, it was always the old corner store on the highway. They had everything a person would want in their whole lifetime! Bolts of printed fabric for dresses, huge bins of flour and sugar, rich smelling coffee, big brown hen's egges, and--especially-- there was case after case of every kind of candy! Sweet brown fudge, chewy white taffy, red peppermints, and stick candy of every color and every flavor! All of it just on my eye level! Oh! They had everything! Most of all, they had that tangy red STRAWBERRY SODA POP!

"For gosh sakes, Jean, hurry up," Mother said, "or take that dern pop with you! And do not get any on your shirt!"

Swigging and chug-a-lugging, I tried not to miss a single drop, but finally, my father said, "It's okay, we'll just leave the bottle deposit. We can bring it back on the way through, after we leave her off!"

"Well, come on, Slow Poke. Bring it on then, and hurry!"

Scurrying into the sedan, I settled again in the back seat with my precious strawberry pop and watched out the window as the last eight miles became a dusty one-lane trail through grove after grove of small scrub oaks. Through these blackjacks, we bumped along.

"Do you think two weeks is too long to leave her?" she wondered.

"Naw, of course not!" he said. "We got things to do and places to see. We need to get away for once."

"Yeah, I guess." She kind of shrugged her shoulders as her mind seemed to drift on to other things.

I sort of wondered where they were going and what they were seeing, and what they were getting away from, but I didn't really care too much because--after all--I was on my was to Heaven!

The rickety old wooden bridge, I remember, swayed and creaked loudly as we crossed over it, complaining of the weight of the few cars and many wagons it had been forced to support over the years. Its sound was music! A symphony! It meant we were close--very close! Over the bridge, around one more curve, across the cattle guard on the right, through the small grove of trees where the redbird sings, and you could actually see it! There! In the middle of the wide golden prairie, surrounded by oaks and snow-white cotton fields, encircled by a clean sparkling creek as silver and shiny as diamonds dancing in the sun!...

...Josey's house!

Oh! So, the paint on Grandma's house was flaking some, and the fence needed mending, and the garden needed weeding. It was teeny tiny and had an old creaky metal glider on the front porch along with a broken down rocker. And so, in the yard, there was a black pot for washing and a windmill for getting water and a smokehouse for curing meat and a storm cellar chock-full of fruits and vegetables preserved in glass Ball jars--a cellar used, too, for hiding from tornados. And so, finally, farther on out was an old one-holer outhouse. So...it might not have looked like much to a lot of folks. So what! They just didn't know! Anybody who understands the Velveteen Rabbit would have understood Josey's house. It was just the same...old and warm and real!

Heaven!

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Christmas More Than Once
by
Marge DeVillier

December 25th is not the only memorable date in the Decembers of my youth. My father, Orvis Alexander Gurganus, Poppa to me, observed two Christmases, Old Christmas and New Christmas, each with its own traditions. We celebrated New Christmas on December 25, and Old Christmas sometime between December 25 and New Year's.

One of the traditions of Old Christmas was our annual squirrel hunting trip with Poppa and my two brothers, Array, the oldest, and Charlie Jackson, fifteen months older than me called Bro.

On the eve of one of these Old Christmases, Poppa announced, "I am taking you kids hunting tomorrow, so hurry up and get to bed." With no further orders or prodding, Bro and I jumped into bed. We didn't sleep very much, because we were going hunting in the morning.

This trip was an exceptional treat for us for Poppa to take off from his busy schedule of running a country store and tobacco farm for recreation for himself or to do anything with us kids. It seemed to us he worked all the time. Vacations were unheard of in that era. Poppa was not one to play and romp around with us. We didn't get many presents during those lean depression years, so that hunting trip was one of our biggest and most anticipated Christmas present.

The morning of the hunt was cold and frosty. We started out that morning in the same woods behind our house where we had gone with Array to pick out and cut our Christmas tree for New Christmas. This assignment of choosing and cutting was given to the oldest son, with Bro and me dogging his every step and asking a million questions. Now we had to be quiet because, after all, we were hunters tracking squirrels.

We could see our breath come out in little puffs of steam in front of us. Dead twigs and leaves crunched and crackled under foot as we walked through the woods with a branch slapping me across the face every now and then but that didn't faze me. "I can take it," I thought, as my brothers muttered, "Ugh! Girls going hunting?"

I would show them, "I'm just as strong as you are." I spent a lot of time trying to prove that because, secretly, I really wanted to be a boy. I thought my brothers got to do all the fun things. By now, my hands were beginning to tingle and feel numb from the cold but I didn't dare complain. I might have had a pair of gloves. I do remember, that sometimes gloves were a novelty Christmas present since my hands chapped so easily.

We had walked for what seemed like miles and miles when we came out through a thicket in the virgin woods. I was startled and gasped in surprise and amazement at a beautiful lake with many ducks swimming in the water. I wondered how the lake got there and Poppa said, "It was caused

by a falling meteorite which made a big hole in the ground. Later it filled up with water and became a haven for ducks and wild geese and was known as Duck Lake. Poppa and my brothers aimed their guns and shot a lot of ducks. Blackie retrieved most of them and the boys stuffed them into their hunting jackets.

I begged and begged Poppa to let me shoot the gun. Finally, in exasperation, and after a lengthy lecture on how to safely hold and shoot a gun, he let me try it. He warned me that the gun might kick against my shoulder, and it did. I wasn't too anxious after that to shoot the gun, at least not that day.

I think that's when my love affair with guns started because I begged for a gun the next Christmas. I got a doll and doll carriage instead, for after all, girls weren't supposed to shoot or own guns. I put on a good show, however, pretending how much I liked the doll and doll carriage.

I was probably overacting just a little because I was also trying to cover up my guilt for peeking through the key hole on the night before Christmas and didn't want Poppa or Array to know that I had found out their secret by watching them put the carriage together. However, I was disappointed to find out that Santa Claus wasn't who I thought he was. Later the doll and carriage became my favorite toys.

I did get the gun only much later as a teenager. My love of guns waned as the years flew by. The only birds and animals I shoot now are with a camera.

My love of the outdoors, nature and wild life continues to this day. That's why I retired to Cypremort Point where wildlife and natural beauty can still be enjoyed in its natural state. We didn't get any squirrels on that Old Christmas Day long ago, but how many people get presents like that? Two Christmases in one year.

CLUTCHING A CLOUD
by
Joe Glorioso

In early September with my mother, father and my younger brother, Rocco, I stood on the sidewalk with two packed bags near my feet in front of our restaurant waiting for Elias Ackal's maroon Hudson and his brother, Michael (Mitch), who would be my university roommate. My emotions were mixed. I really wanted to go to the university. Lurking in the shadows I knew awaiting me stood new, exciting experiences only university life held out for the taking. Yet, with misgivings, I yearned to stay home. As only a mother can, Mame sensed my dilemma and casually draped an arm around my shoulder. I knew I had her blessing and her support.

Elias's Hudson dashed around the corner and came to an abrupt halt in front of the restaurant. Elias vaulted from behind the wheel and nervously wrestled with the car keys. Finding the lid's key, he opened the trunk. Stepping off the sidewalk, I slid two bags into the car's trunk almost filled with two other stuffed bags and several articles of clothing, some neatly folded and stacked others scattered helty-skelty over the trunk's bottom. I turned to faced my family. Saying goodbye and leaving my family proved to be much harder than I imagined. I fought the good fight to clamp down on tear ducts threatening to cloud my eyes with tears. I shook Pape's hand, patted Rocco on the head and hugged Mame.

As Elias switched on the ignition and the engine idled slowly, I said, "Gotta go," and stepped away from the curb, yanked open the car's rear door, piled into the back cushion, slammed the door shut and rolled down the glass, in one continuous motion.

Mame leaned over the curb to caution me, "Don't let those conniving coeds con you out of your heart!" A little levity was Mame's way of hiding her own mixed emotions. To Elias, "You drive carefully. You've got my treasure sitting behind you." Pape stood silently on the sidewalk, just being proud of his university-bound first son.

"And mine up front" said Elias as he drove slowly away from the sidewalk's edge bound for Baton Rouge.

Elias pulled the car up to the grassy edge in front of the Pentagon Barracks, our home away from home for the next nine months. Somewhat hesitant, Mike and I edged slowly from the comfortable isolation of the Hudson to stand in awe of our new, exciting environment. Elias popped the trunk's lid as we gapped at the Pentagon Barracks. He called to us to shake us out of our reverie. Reacting swiftly, in three bounds we landed behind the car the back of the car. Mitch and I hauled our bags from the trunk and put them on the grass. Elias slammed the trunk's lid shut.

Mike and I had barely set the bags down when I caught sight of Kirk Franz and three upper classmen running across the Pentagon's grounds. They chanted and yelled "Fresh meat! Fresh meat! Fresh meat!"

What the hell is going on? I thought. Elias and Mitch were as dumbfounded as I. "On your knees, dumb dogs," Kirk grabbed me and pressed my shoulders, commanding, "Down on your knees, Dawgs. You, too, Mike." We dared not to resist and obediently knelt on the grass. I felt hair clippers up and down and across my head. I knew about shaved heads at L.S.U., but I never thought it would be as sudden as a shot from a cannon. I was showered with hair. Poor Mitch lost the hair he proudly grew and groomed. My head was being sudded, soapy water splattering my shirt. I felt the safety razor scraping across my shorn scalp. Kirk and his buddies stepped back to admire their handiwork. We kneeled before our tormentors rubbing our shaved heads. I looked at Mitch, appalled. He looked naked as a jay bird. I hoped I didn't look as naked as he.

Kirk unbuttoned his shirt and produced two purple and gold skull caps. Putting one first on my head and then on Mitch's, he solemnly proclaimed, "I knight you as bona fide freshmen of 1933. Arise, you dumb dogs."Alas, hazing had begun.

Mitch and I had become L.S.U. freshman. "Look out, Tulane!"

On Monday, Kirk took us to the cafeteria for breakfast and afterward on a walking tour of the campus. He left us for the day. Mitch and I lazily strolled over to the gym where we were scheduled to be at nine o'clock. When we entered about two minutes before the Campanile chimed nine, freshmen had already occupied arm chairs, girls gathered up front with boys sprinkled toward the back if the gym. I looked around and spotted Kappel surrounded by empty seats toward the back. I pulled Mitch with me and sat with Kappel, and two friends he had recently made. I introduced Mitch, and we sat next to Kappel. "What's gonna happen to us here, Kappel?"

"The rumor is that we're gonna be oriented and indoctrinated, and then we're gonna be tested. I'd rather be here than with those head-shaving, butt-beating upper-classmen. You get your butt swatted by a broom yet? They call it 'sweep clean your ass.'"

"No. Not yet."

"Give them time. They'll be around!"

Mitch, Kappel and friends swapped tales of head-shaving and generally engaged in nonsensical chattering about hazing and university life as we thought it should be. The Campanile bells chimed nine o'clock. Promptly, the president of the university, Dr. Monroe Smith, and others strutted across the stage and sat on folding chairs. Dr. Smith addressed the freshmen, followed by brief presentations by the various deans of the several cottages. In forty-five minutes, the first part of the program ended with a fifteen minute break and the gym emptied by order.

When the freshmen filed in, a booklet of tests rested on the arms of the chairs. Mitch, Kappel and I sat in the chairs we left. Kappel's friends found other seats. One of the deans gave us instructions. "You are not to turn your test over until I tell you to do so. You are being monitored by upper-classmen behind you and along the walls besides you. Your attention is directed to the large red number written on the back of each test. Memorize that number! It is important! Your standing in the university will be posted tomorrow opposite your memorized number. Your name will not appear. If you forget your number you will not know your standing. Read each direction thoroughly and completely! Turn your test over and begin. Complete the information at the top of the page. If you need a pencil, ask the monitor closest to you for a pencil. You have one hour. Begin your test. No talking is permitted."

Kappel and I finished the test about the same time. I ran my fingers across my brow indicating that the test was tough. He nodded in agreement. A monitor picked up our papers and told us to leave the gym quietly.

On Wednesday, the test grades were posted. My number was 266. Opposite it was the number 136. I really didn't know what the 136 meant, but if it meant standing, I was in the middle of the pack of freshmen. (To be politically correct today: first year students.)

Getting Acquainted Day was concocted by some old bitty to help boys get acquainted with girls. The boys scoffed at the idea. Maybe the girls cozied up to the notion that a special day was needed for boys to meet girls. Anyhow, the monitors alphabetically lined up the freshmen boys in single file for their march to Smith Hall, the girls' dormitory. Purple and gold skull caps adorned the scalped heads of scowling faces. We hated that old bitty, whoever she was.

The girls were randomly lined up single file facing front and spaced eighteen inches apart. The line-up of girls stretched from the entrance of Smith Hall to the sidewalk, about one hundred yards. It appeared to me they gathered in small groups to be with their friends. Looking past the bald heads in front of me, I stared at the wave of starched dresses in many colors, their designs and styles fascinated me, while at the same time frightened me. My knees were like jello in a bowl. I could foresee my fate, a six foot two hundred pound girl with a full peroxided moustache.

The old bitty's idea was to parade the boys up to and along the line of girls. When the first boy was opposite the first girl, the boys' line was stopped. The boys' parade stopped. I was in a slave parade. No iron shackles, but in our imagination, they chained us. As I paraded, I kept my head down, furtively casting my eyeballs to my left, expecting at any moment to face a six-footer two hundred pounder. My glances found frocked, solemn, unsmiling girls as I walked past. I could not imagine the absolute diversity of perfumes.

The line stopped. We struggled in line to face the best prospect available. When the dust settled, I faced a dawg. (In the vernacular of a lowly freshman, a dawg was a less than attractive girl. A dawggy-dawg was a pure ugly girl.) Thank heaven she was not a dawggy-dawg. In a very nice, quiet voice, not in keeping with the plain face I knew I had to get used to, she introduced herself,

"My name is Bonnie White. I'm from Gonzales, but I live in Smith Hall. I'm sixteen years old." Seemed to me to be carefully rehearsed. But why the sixteen year old garbage? "My name is Joe Glorioso. I'm from New Iberia, and I live in the Pentagon Barracks. I'm sixteen years old." I was satisfied with the conversation thus far. At least she was not six feet tall and two hundred pounds. Soon our parade of boys and girls turned and started up the street to the gymnasium. Bonnie was so close to me that frequently our shoulders brushed. I rather liked the little brush-up. My guess she was five feet or so, slightly built, not too thin and not too heavy. As we bumped along, Bonnie asked, "Do you dance?"

"Yeah," I was not sure where this was leading. Maybe she couldn't dance. I despised the idea, not even in the mood to teach another girl how to dance. "Do you like to dance?"

Bonnie with the straw colored hair as straight as broom bristles and her big grey eyes, and pleasant smile playfully said, "That depends. If my partner likes to dance, I like to dance with him. Do you like to dance?"

"If my partner likes to dance, I like to dance with her. Do you like to dance?" A pale smile revealing her thoughts, I knew she knew that I was deliberately tracking her conversation. I smiled at her acknowledging that I knew she knew what I was doing. She laughed softly. I began to think that I didn't have such a bad deal after all. Our hands fitted comfortably.

Our parade of girls with solemn faces and agitated class of boys erupted into cheerful couples of boys and girls. The Freshman Class of 1933 entered the gymnasium. It was decorated in purple and gold paper strips with a big welcome sign under one balcony. Claiborne Williams band sat with musical instruments on a slightly raised stage under a basketball goal. Punch bowls and trays of cookies covered a large table near the coaches' office. When all of us entered the gym, the matron of Smith Hall and the ROTC commandant, Captain Gayle, welcomed the students and told us to have a good time until eleven o'clock. Curfew was eleven-thirty. The band played and slowly, a few brave couples at a time, stepped on to the gym floor to dance.

"Bonnie, want to try?" We briskly slipped away from the punch and cookie table. I put my arm around her waist and eased her closer. There was no resistance, almost eagerness. My arms encircled a dream in a pink polka dot pinafore. I embraced a feather of a body. She danced ever so lightly. And I danced with her, clutching a cloud.

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GLIMPSE OF THE PAST
by
Mary Thibodeaux

Summer again. Time for me to vacation with Uncle Moise, Aunt Lena, and my cousin Ora at their home in Mowata, a small farming community in South Louisiana. In the 1940's, the South was still King Cotton, and my Uncle Moise had a large cotton farm. During summer and early fall, the fields were white as snow. The hotter the temperature, the quicker the cotton bolls would open, ready to be picked.

My uncle would hire many field workers to hand pick his cotton, paying them per pound. The men used burlap sacks with a strap sewed on it to hang around their shoulders. The workers would go down each row and pick all the fluffy white cotton bolls off each stalk. Some of the bolls were not open enough to pick so the fields had to be picked several times during the harvest season.

After the workers filled their cotton sacks, Uncle Moise would weigh the sacks and then empty the cotton into a large wagon. When the wagon was full, Uncle Moise would take a day off from the field work and hitch his horses to the wagon and take the cotton to the cotton gin. There the machinery would remove the seeds from the cotton and bale it into large bundles. The cotton gin owners would buy Uncle Moise's cotton, paying him by the pound.

Slowly, change began. With cotton picking machines, hand picking was no more. Smaller farms could not compete with progress. Slowly it all passed away. The South was no more King Cotton.

I had not seen any cotton fields for many years. Last year as I was driving past Alexandria, Louisiana, on Interstate 49, I was surprised to see a few beautiful white cotton fields. It was like a glimpse of the past, but only for a moment.

P.S. *Oh! I must tell you how much I loved my Uncle Moise. He was a very wise person who had a special way of understanding children. He just knew how to come down to our level, always challenging us to learn more.*

Once he told my Cousin Ora and me if we would pick cotton like the field workers, he would pay us also. Of course, we played around the cotton fields much more than we worked. Uncle Moise knew we would, but there was always that tender gleam in his eyes that let us know he understood that children must play also.

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POOR LITTLE RICH GIRLS
by
Pat Hough

These events are of two playmates that happened in the summer of 1936 near Smackover, Arkansas. Helen Beck, age ten, and myself, age seven, were rich in imagination. We were so creative that we constantly discovered new resources of entertaining ourselves. Some children of today are given sensational expensive toys. The toy industry now designs educational toys such as computers and electronic games. In "our day" of play, we created simple ways of entertainment. Our minds found ways of play without the cost. Some of our store-bought toys were dolls, trucks, wagons and tricycles. Our parents had been through the Depression in the late twenties. Money was scarce. As a child, I didn't feel deprived. At the age of four, my only gift at Christmas was a little red purse. Perhaps not receiving heaps of wrapped gifts was a blessing. Late in life I experienced seeing my own children tear open a gift only to grab another without being grateful for the one opened previously. In fact, having so little, was the very reason that both Helen and I became "rich in imagination." Poor means "needy" or "lacking in abundance." We were exceedingly rich in humor, amusing ourselves and being ridiculous!

Helen and I have laughed through the years of playful episodes in our "little girl" lives. One of the things we did was planning to become starlets. At the "Movie House" in Smackover, Arkansas, we had seen bouncy, curly headed Shirley Temple dance. In the film, people threw coins to her for her cute performance. About that time we heard over the radio that McQuade's Shoe Store in El Dorado, Arkansas, had talent scouts come to their store looking for young starlets. They could audition right there in the store.

Helen and I began to practice our dance routine. We imagined we were good. There was a dance hall about two miles away at Midway community. We planned to walk there one night and dance. If they threw money at us, we were sure we were ready for the talent scout at Mc Quade's Shoe Store.

One night we waited until Helen's grandmother, Mrs. Sally Sanford, went to sleep. We slept in the same room with her and knew when she laid her hearing horn down she couldn't hear us. We did make sure she was asleep because she might see us leave. Finally, hearing her snore, we found it safe to go. We crawled on our bellies out the front door! We were wide awake and excited!

Our little friend, Maxine, lived up the hill. We had invited her to go with us, even though she was not talented like us. We never considered her dancing in our routine. She was only an innocent bystander.

When we got to the Simmon's house, Maxine was asleep. We slipped around to her bedroom window and tried to awaken her. Helen got a long stick and tried to reach her. There were no screens on the windows. Their dogs begin to bark! We were so frightened! We ran under the house, only to

have the beam of a flashlight follow us. Mrs. Simmons cried out, "what in the world are you two doing under the house at this time of night?"Helen replied, "e came to get Maxine to go walking with us." Mrs. Simmons said firmly: "Maxine is asleep and is not going anyplace! You girls get back home and soon!!"

We pretended to go home, but sneaked past the Simmons home once again. Up the road we went toward the dance hall. We became so frightened of everything, trees swaying in the night wind and odd shaped stumps and even our own shadows. We ran back to the safety of the Beck's house.

We could only imagine we were stars. I became Hedy Lamar and Helen became Lana Turner. (These were movie stars of our times.) We still call each other "Lana" and "Hedy."

As playmates we enjoyed cutting out paper dolls from the Sears & Roebuck catalogs. Shoe boxes were made into doll houses. We even had our own telephones. We made them with a long wire with two tin cans attached to the end of the wire. A board was nailed between two trees and "Hedy and Lana" sat in the trees having long conversations. We didn't have "call waiting" in those days. Our playhouse on the ground below was decorated with colorful broken glass we found in the woods or around houses.

Our most "laughed about" episode was the day we took a little dead pig up the hill in Helen's wagon. Daddy kept his pigs at the Beck's barnyard and he hadn't disposed of the dead pig. Helen and I decided to place the pig upright in the ruts of the road so that a car would run over it. We took sand and pushed it around the bloated stiff carcass, standing it erect! We planned to cry out to the driver of the car that hit it, "You killed our pet pig!" Of course we thought they would pay money to "the poor little girls" that had lost their pet. The first car to come was Mr. Parker's, my Daddy! Daddy jumped out of the car and said, "what in the world are you girls doing?" We didn't explain. We were two poor little girls with one dead pig! Daddy was shocked. He disposed of that pig. Helen and I are still "poor little rich girls" that have fun laughing about our imaginative childhood!

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HOW I BECAME AN OFFICER AND A HERO
by
Jacob N. Valentine, Jr.

Although the country was not at war, the 32nd Division, a Wisconsin National Guard unit, was called into federal service in October 1940 and sent to Camp Livingston, near Alexandria, Louisiana. I was inducted into the Army on 23 April 1941, along with several hundred draftees from the Milwaukee-Racine area, and assigned to the 32nd Division. The bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and the declaration of war by Germany put United States into World War II.

When Corregidor fell in May 1942, Japan controlled most of the Dutch, British and French colonies, and eastern China. In early May 1942, a large fleet of Japanese troop ships and aircraft carriers en route to New Guinea was intercepted by Allied warships. Those of us aboard the SS Matsonia, a luxury ship converted to carrying troops, didn't realize how close we came to the Battle of the Coral Sea. We spent an uneventful twenty-one days from San Francisco en route to Adelaide, New South Wales, Australia. Losses by the Allies were great but the battle stopped the invasion of Port Moresby, the capital of Papua, New Guinea. A month later, in the Battle of Midway, Japan lost large aircraft carriers and naval control of the Pacific.

The year and a half we spent in Australia was filled with travel, training and minor adventures. From Adelaide we went by train, trucks and planes to various camps all along the east coast. When the 32nd Division left Australia for New Guinea in October 1943, the division had trained nearly four years. We went through the gamut of big and little field maneuvers, on ships practicing getting on and off, running in and out to the beach in LCRs (landing craft rubber), LCVs (landing craft vehicles), and LCIs (landing craft infantry).

We marched through streets lined with flowering trees and gardens, where modest homes had names. I hiked the mountains and beaches and climbed rocky cliffs that overlooked the Pacific Ocean. I watched a Maltese fisherman make a puffer fish blow up like a spiny ball. Amused by my interest he gave me the reproductive organs from a sea anemone to eat. We liked the easy going Aussies, their slang and way of saying things long before Crocodile Dundee was born. The working men always wore shorts. During the winter, I was amused to see men at work wearing overcoats over their shorts. At one place, every cold morning we saw a horse trying to keep warm standing in a pond up to his shoulders.

The guys from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, where most of our outfit came from, bragged about Point Beer and the record number of taverns on The Square. Although complaining about "Green Death", as the Pointers called the beer, it was drunk in prodigious quantities. We gathered around great bonfires drinking beer, watching Beeler Badten clown around until we feared for his life. When on that rare leave, the Australians gave us a generous liquor allowance. I felt embarrassed to see the people on the bus in Sidney staring at Carl Bowman and I with two large sacks of booze each on our laps heading for the hotel.

Pub hours confounded the Americans. To control drinking, pubs were open from eleven in the morning to one and four to six in the afternoon. which meant serious drinkers drank fast for a couple hours. The best whiskey ran out first, then the gins, the wines, and finally the cordials. The drunks wandered the streets in a stupor until the pubs opened later in the afternoon.

The Australians deprecated Limmies, as they called the Brits, but they liked Yanks. Australia had been in the war since 1939, and most healthy Aussie men were overseas and the women craved masculine company. There were a few fights in the big cities between Aussie soldiers and Americans when the battle-tested regulars came back from North Africa and found rookie Yanks living it up with the sheilas.

Back to the real war. Despite the defeats, Japan did not give up any of its captured territory. Although the military abandoned the goal of capturing Port Moresby by sea, bases were established on the east end of New Guinea. From here Japanese troops on foot crossed the rugged Owen Stanley Range toward Moresby via the Kokoda Trail. Aussies and Americans slogged up from Moresby fighting the Japanese back to Buna-Gona. Under terrible conditions, Company E, 126 Infantry took forty-nine days to reach Buna. There, in a god-awful jungle swamp, the Japanese had built fortresses of elaborate bunkers and connecting trenches.

Aussie infantry and the 32nd Division infantry were major participants. One of our 105s was the only artillery support. After six months of fighting, Gona-Buna fell in early December 1942. The Japanese committed sixteen to seventeen thousand troops. Twelve thousand killed, and forty-five hundred were evacuated. Over three thousand troops, Australian and Americans, lost their lives and over five thousand were wounded.

Thousands of Japanese soldiers, even generals, like General Hatazo Adachi, were left to continue fighting. After V-J Day, General Adachi finally surrendered the remnants of the 18th Army on Wewak. Sentenced to life imprisonment for war crimes, he committed suicide in prison at Rabaul in 1947. After the battles, the Japanese that escaped moved westward along the coast or through the mountains, sick, starved, wounded, and cut-off from food and ammunition.

On 25 October 1943, my crew and I flew out of Brisbane to Milne Bay, crowded with military camps and airfields. There we went to a "naval gun-fire spotters school" to learn the Navy's way of doing things in case destroyer guns were needed during a landing. Aboard a U. S. destroyer, we sailed along the New Guinea coast, where I targeted abandoned native villages. The Australian administration of Papua had moved all of the natives away from the coast to keep them out of the hands of the Japanese.

Our little group joined the battalion again at Milne Bay. After a few weeks of more training (8 November 1943), we sailed for Goodenough Island aboard the Vaquero, a small vessel on contract, from Los Angeles. The island had only recently been recaptured by the Allies. "Jungle-rot", a fungal disease of the skin, was rampant and severe cases killed or sent people to the hospital. Blacky Tyhoski died in his jungle hammock when a large tree fell on him during a wind storm.

Despite some hardships, we had fun climbing a 13,000 foot mountain. We got off the trail and had to beat our way through the kunai (a tall grass) for most of the day. We slept on the side of the mountain, then found the trail, and headed back. We bathed below a beautiful water falls and fished in a pool where the fish ignored our bait. At camp, I climbed coconut trees with linemen's spikes and dropped the nuts down--filled my slit trench--the green milk cool and delicious.

On 5 January 1944 we left Goodenough Island in a convoy of seventeen LCIs, arriving at Cape Cretin, seven miles below Finchhafen, where we set up camp. On a day off, Dan Fink and I went out to the airport where there were hundreds of planes, including a P-47 that had 19 mini-Japanese flags stenciled on the side. On 18 January 1944 we left Cape Cretin on LSTs, arriving at Saidor on the 19th. On 20 January I went with Captain John O. Givens to the infantry CP by barge. Givens and I started for the forward guns in a peep, but he foundered us in a stream. The next day I went to Sel by barge with a number of officers to the forward outpost of the infantry. Then I walked back on a trail that I described as *pretty but perhaps dangerous trail through the jungle...one bad ford.*

During the period 23 January and 18 February I traveled to places named Mur and Galeck, back and forth between the artillery headquarters and the infantry. Life was quite pleasant with books to read and lots of swimming in the ocean. My diary on 13 February reads: *Start the push on Gabumi by the 3rd...1,600 rds. arty in about 15 min...planes, our own, bombed Yamai, on our side of the tracks...nobody hurt tho...our first real air-raid...two daisy cutters on the Cub airstrip... heard the planes but did not get out of my hammock.*

More diary notes: *Galek. 15 February 1944. Note many natives with elephantiasis...huge lower legs, one or both...skin diseases...ringworm, scaly skin...the women are not more than beasts of burden doing the carrying for the family; their hair is cropped short... some of the children are cute, however, and always ready to smile.*

And again on 19 February: *In the Field. Mot River OP. Went out to the OP with Givens... laid wire down to Mot...attached to 1st Bn 126...patrol out on other side of Mot...machine gun firing over our head on the OP...patrol returns to river crossing...Givens and I helped men cross on rope...Jap machine gun opens up...we hit the dirt. Givens calls for fire and gets it right close, in fact, wounds three men and breaks the rope...machine gun ceases fire...new rope across...wounded and others dragged across...some men lost down the river...finally got everyone across.*

THE SAME STORY AS I RECALLED IT FROM MEMORY

After a quiet time period when no enemy action was apparent, a recon/combat patrol of about thirty men was sent across the Mot River to scout out the enemy. To ford the river the patrol strung a heavy rope across a wide section of the stream. As the patrol hiked the trail that ran along the beach, they were ambushed by a Japanese patrol. After a brief fire-fight the Americans backed off and the platoon sergeant called for artillery fire.

When our headquarters got the request for fire, I was told to go with the forward observer, Captain John O. Givens, who picked me up in a peep. We drove a mile or two from headquarters and parked on a hill overlooking a narrow grassy valley. From our vantage we saw the Mot River edged with trees and shrubs. The jungle beyond the Mot ran westerly edging the Pacific Ocean. To our right the river entered the ocean. In the distance behind us rose the dark Finnisterre Range.

We sat there looking down at the river and the jungle without seeing or hearing any action so I left the captain. We must have thought that nothing was happening on the patrol's side. I don't remember asking permission; I just told Givens that I was going to take a look at the river. I walked down the grassy slope following a trail that went through the trees to a ford used by the natives. There I saw a heavy rope loosely stretched from a tree on my side to a tree on the patrol's side. The infantry had crossed here and moved into the jungle. I laid my carbine and helmet on the ground and waded to the middle of the stream. The air hot and muggy, the water cool, so I hung on the rope and let my legs and body float downstream. Having a great time, I ducked and bobbed up and down, savoring the cool water. I spent about fifteen minutes playing in the water.

If the Japanese were watching, what I did would have been an example of battlefield dumbness. If you had seen this episode in a battle movie, you'd have said, "How stupid!". In a horror movie with spook music, when the heroine opens a closet you know something terrible is about to happen. In life, nothing usually happens when you open closet doors. But it is dumb to play in a steam with a war going on a few hundred feet away.

About this time I heard gunfire. I got out of the water, grabbed my helmet and carbine and ran up the hill. A sense of terror came over me that I can't explain--there was no danger that I could see. An impulse to go to our headquarters flashed through my mind. What was the rational of going somewhere? What would I say when I got there? Should I say "We need help"? The impulse to flee was quickly dispelled. I have always thought that I was almost a coward. But how could I be a coward when my life-style was based on hundreds of adventure books and biographies of heroes?

Back at the jeep, Captain Givens got the message that the patrol was pulling out and wanted artillery fire. He relayed this to our fire control section. While heading back I saw the explosion in the water. Ironically, the blast cut the rope stranding the patrol on the other side.

Returning to the river, I untied the rope, which was now too short to reach the other side, coiled it up, and took it downstream where the river was narrow. The stream here was almost a rapids. I tied the rope to a tree and with the other end crossed to the patrol's side where I fastened it to a tree. The infantry guys were gathering along the beach so I began helping them across.

When I came back to the friendly side I took off my clothes and shoes to make it easier to swim and maneuver in the water. As I ran around stark naked without my sergeant stripes, shouting orders, and acting in charge, the infantry guys who didn't know me, started calling me "Lieutenant"---my battlefield promotion.

Captain Givens and I alternated crossing over and helping the most hapless. As good soldiers, the GIs kept their steel helmets on and their rifles slung across their backs which made it hard to hang on through the rapids. Six or seven soldiers let go and floated downstream. I hollered for others to catch them as they floated down but I think most drowned. Rifle fire came from the Japanese but I didn't hear. I don't remember how many times Givens and and I went across and back. Except for the drownings I wasn't concerned---I was naked in an element where I had no fear.

Finally the patrol was back on our side of the river and we returned to camp. I recall sleeping that night behind a boulder near the stream. Adrenalin and the memory of infantrymen wearing steel helmets with rifles across their backs floating downstream kept me awake, so I took a couple aspirins to help me sleep.

During a ceremony at Aitape on 11 September 1944, Captain John O. Givens and I each received the Silver Star from General Gill, commanding the 32nd Division. Here is the official notice of the award:

> *Sergeant JACOB M. VALENTINE, JR.(36208760), Field Artillery, United States Army. For gallantry in action near Yamai, New Guinea, on 19 February 1944. A rope had been secured across the Mot River to serve as an aid for evacuating wounded from the west bank of the river to safety. When the rope was cut by artillery and machine gun fire, Sergeant Valentine, with an officer, voluntarily secured it at a point further downstream. A rope sling was improvised as a means of returning the wounded along the rope. Each time a man was brought back it was necessary for the empty sling to be returned to the west bank of the river. Sergeant Valentine and the officer alternated in performing this task. The crossing was exposed to a sporadic rifle and machine gun fire from an enemy position on a ridge overlooking the river. Sergeant Valentine risked his life repeatedly, and his courageous action was instrumental in saving the lives of many of the wounded.*

I don't think I would have gotten the medal except that the officer got one so I got one too. The moral of the story is, if you want a medal, be visible, keep your head down, and go with a popular officer. The document publishing the award describes the action:

> *SERGEANT BRAVES JAP BULLETS*
> *IN JUNGLE TO WIN SILVER STAR*
>
> *--a rope had been secured across the Mot River to serve as an aid for evacuating wounded from the west bank of the river to safety. When the rope was cut by artillery and machine gun fire, Sergeant Valentine, with an officer (Captain John O. Givens) voluntarily secure it a a point further downstream.*
>
> *A rope sling was improvised as a means of returning the wounded along the rope. Each time a man was brought back it was necesary for the empty sling to be returned*

to the west bank of the river. Sergeant Valentine and the officer alternated in performing the task.

River a Torrent

The crossing was exposed to sporadic rifle and machine gun fire from an enemy position on a ridge overlooking the river. Sergeant Valentine risked his life repeatedly. and his courageous actions were instrumental inn saving the lives of many of the wounded--.

To add to the official picture, the Mot river may be described as a torrential rain-swollen stream and the assumed front line for that phase of the Saidor engagement. The enemy position was on a ridge less than 50 yards away; the day was clear and sunny and offered no interfernce to the enemy machine guns' vision.

So who you gonna believe?

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IN TIME OF WAR
by
Mildred Barry

The early 1940's was a restless time for young people and also anxious years for the rest of the population. World War II had been formally declared on December 7, 1941, by President Roosevelt after Japan attacked the United States Military base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. At the same time war was also declared on Germany as we joined the Allied forces, England, France and Russia.

I was a student at the College of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau from 1940 to 1942, majoring in Education. I was one of the restless young. School was a drag, no boys around, everything was rationed and the future looked dismal. So, I migrated to Houston where two of my sisters, Margaret and Irene, lived to pursue a secretarial course. After two years there I again had itchy feet and decided to join the Women's Army Corps, the WAC.

One of my older sisters, Mac, was an Army nurse serving in England and another sister, Tappy, was a WAC recruiter living in Jacksonville, Florida. Reading their letters about Army life led me to believe there were greater horizons to consider, and besides, I would also be serving my country. I soon learned I really had no idea of what I was getting into.

On a hot day in June, I boarded a train in New Orleans and was on my way to Fort Ogelthorpe, Georgia, for basic training. In the latest fashion, I wore a blue crepe suit, hose and high heels and a wide brimmed blue hat. My hair was blond and shoulder length, also a trend of the times. Hanging on to my purse that had a little money, but also the makeup I was sure I'd need, I was on my way.

There were five other girls--just as elaborately dressed as I was--waiting at the depot in Georgia for transportation to Fort Ogelthorpe. Soon the transportation arrived. It was called a "6 x 6," but actually it was an oversized olive drab pickup truck.

"Everybody, on the double! Fall in!"

I turned around. Surely the khaki dressed masculine looking WAC Sargeant didn't mean us! But she did.

I hobbled over the gravel road on my high heels lugging my suitcase and somehow got in the back of the truck. Holding on to my beautiful hat, my hair whipping across my face, I wondered if I possibly could have made a mistake in choosing this journey into the unknown.

When we reached the Army base, after the jolting truck ride, we were not the same six girls that had started out. Dirty, grimey, and hot, we were led to our barracks and assigned our beds. Other girls, obviously newcomers too, were already in the barracks looking as bewildered as I felt.

"Fall out!" came another order from the Sargeant. We were led outside and formed a line to follow our leader submissively to the uniform supply barracks. There we were measured, sized and then given our uniforms. Every article of clothing from underclothes to hats were khaki. We were also given a fatigue dress for dirty work.

We then had physicals and immunization shots where many girls keeled over in a faint just looking at the needles.

Then...back to the barracks, where we donned our fatigue clothes and were given a brush and a bucket of soapy water to scrub what was called "our area." Soon we were on our hands and knees scrubbing under and around our beds, hair drenched and sweat dripping down our faces.

We were given foot lockers for our clothes. The clothes had to be rolled for maximum room. We were also taught how to make our beds so that a coin would bounce on the top blanket.

After showering and getting dressed in our clean uniforms, we had inspection by the platoon officer.

"Your hair will not touch your collar!" she barked. So there went my precious locks! I had to keep it in a roll until I could get to a barber. There were other rules we had to learn before going to the Mess Hall for dinner.

After a sleepless night, our arms still sore from all the shots, came a command at five in the morning.

"Fall out in fatigues fully dressed in five minutes!" That meant making our beds in the Army way, dressed and our footlockers in order. No time for all the makeup I had brought.

It was pitch black outside, and we were really put through our paces with sit-ups, push-ups, and jumping jacks. Then on to the Mess Hall for breakfast. We were required to eat everything on our tray, so I gained twenty-five pounds in six weeks. I had started out as barely a hundred.

We marched every day for hours in the hot sun, but it was worth it when on Saturdays the band played, and our squad got first honors.

Everyone had to do K.P. Duty. The crusted pots and pans were bigger than me, and tears mingled with sweat as I rued the day I had joined the Army.

After six weeks of basic training I was sent to Orlando, Florida, for classes in operating IBM machines. Orlando, with all its clear springs, was like Paradise.

The business machines were huge, some taking up half a room. These were the printers. Each day they had to be wired by a specialist. We worked on key-punch, sorters and collaters, quite a contrast from the tiny ingenious computers of today.

After three months in Orlando, I was sent to Washington, D.C., to use my training for the Air Transport Command. We worked mostly on Army personnel, their comings and goings in other parts of the world. Our barracks were next to the International Airport where we watched and cheered returning heroes. One that has stayed in my memory was General Wainwright, emaciated but still holding his own. I was also in the crowd that watched the funeral procession for President Roosevelt who did not live to see the end of the war.

In the meantime another sister, Mammy, joined the service and later on, my brother Mickey, who was barely seventeen. By the end of 1945, all of us except Mammy were back at home ready to embark on another phase of our lives.

Mammy, unable to cope with the rigidity of military life, became one of the casualties and remained in Army hospitals for several years. She is now still in their care, and with the latest in psychiatric medication is kept fairly stable.

We were all proud of our time in the service, and Mom and Pop were especially proud. They followed the progress and setbacks of the war with news from the radio. They also kept a huge world map taped on the dining room wall using red thumb tacks for the day to day positions of the Allies. They were most happy to take down the map when the world was once more at peace, their children and the country safe from the ravages of war.

P.S. This past month, fifty years after the end of the war, ground-breaking ceremonies were held in Washington, D.C., for a memorial honoring all the women who had served in the military.

A PLACE MEMORY
by
Orpha Valentine

When Mother and Dad first discussed the move, I only knew how very much I wanted to live in the country. It was the Great Depression. I did not know that my parents had no work, no money, no house. I prayed and prayed that we would move to the country.

My prayers were answered. We moved to a Wisconsin dairy farm with thirty Holstein cows and a big red dairy barn. I was twelve years old. Living in the country was my idea of heaven on earth. It still is.

It became my daily work before leaving for school to take the cows, after milking, out to pasture and bring them in at night for feeding and milking again. I was given three cows to milk, morning and night.

I soon acquired my very own heifer, Smokey, who became as remarkable a pet as our old, mixed-breed dog named Napoleon. Napoleon looked like a long-haired Labrador retriever. His head was huge and at his shoulder he was nearly as tall as I.

I had two other jobs. I carried pails of cow-warm milk to the cooler in the basement of the house where I would empty the pails over a metal coolant rack, like old-time washboards. Cataracts of milk sloshed freely to the stone basin. From there it was funneled into milk cans. Each can of milk was placed in rows in the cold basement to be picked up by a big stake truck early the next morning.

The last daily job I also liked. I truly enjoyed shoveling manure from the gutters in long rows behind the cows. I liked the smell of the manure and the heft of it as I shoveled it into the huge overhanging metal buckets and pushing the buckets along on the overhead trolley to the manure pile outside. At times I would help shovel from the steamy manure pile to the manure spreader. Napoleon and I would go along, I on the back of one of the two pulling horses, Napoleon ambling alongside me as I went to spread manure on one or the other fields.

On each of these jobs hangs many a tale:

I loved taking the cows to and from pasture every day. I saw glorious sunrises and setting suns that filled me with life. I learned the phases of the moon. It could be spring, it could be hot summer or a brittle blue sky on a cold winter 's day. Herding the boney black and white Holsteins through black and white winter days is still a favorite memory.

As any lunkhead learns, sooner or later, unless there is good reason, doors and gates on a farm are always closed. I had opened, as usual, the wide barn door before going out to get the cows. The Holsteins were in one of the pastures by Lake Winnebago, which meant

I had to get them across the busy, two lane highway. It was snowing heavy, wet flakes, perfect for making snowballs. The black earth was already white.

Flying snow was so heavy I could not see all of the cows in the pasture. As they entered the cow path, I realized cars on the road would probably not be able to see them either. The cows were always eager to get to their stanchions for feed and milking. I ran to get ahead of Nelly, the lead cow. Fortunately, she stopped for me. Napoleon, of course, had decided the weather was not fit for beasts so he was warmly in the barn.

I carried against the winter dark a big barn lantern. Two cars pierced their lighted way through the slanting snow. Then stepping out onto the highway, I swung my lantern forth and back, back and forth, as high as I could swing my arm. I "saved" my cows from the next cars which came to an easy halt to let thirty Holsteins cross the road.

When we all got back to the barn, Nelly led all thirty cows in through the wide barn door, straight across the barn floor and out through the Dutch door I had opened but failed to shut. They walked out into the wet night of swirling snow. It seemed hours before I got them all back into the barn. By then Napoleon was helping me. His barking, my chasing and grabbing ears and tails, yelling names, caused so much confusion that of the thirty cows, though eager to be milked, not one went into her own stanchion. Fred, the hired hand, laughed until I cried. Supper was VERY late that night.

My cows taught me another lesson:

I was no longer taking piano lessons, and I had learned that there were boys in the world. I let my fingernails grow to a sophisticated length just like the nail polish ads. By then I had been milking my three cows for several months and thought I knew everything there was to know about milking cows.

I had always milked Mandy first; she had been the most tolerant of my first bumbling attempts at milking. This night she was also very tolerant, but I was too unaware of Mandy's messages. First she swatted me across the mouth with her tail, not once, but three times. Next she leaned hard against me, forcing my head out of that lovely soft place between her big hip and her ribs. I scolded her as I continued pulling on her teats. Then she stomped her hind legs, twisted her head around her stanchion and bellowed at me. She tried to tell me. The next thing I knew, my partially filled milk pail, my milking stool and I were in the gutter right behind her. There I sat spluttering and splattered with cow urine and cow dung. Looking at my dung and milk covered hands, I knew why Mandy had kicked me over. I never again milked my cows with my fingernails too long.

The first time I saw my heifer, she was outside in the barnyard shivering, puffs of breath floating from her soft, black nostrils. Yes, I named her Smokey. I still can feel how boney soft she was when I put my arms around her to lift her into her special pen.

I was to feed her and to teach her to drink, using my finger as a teat. I often went to the barn after supper just to be with her. I would bring my homework or read a book. At first we only shared the same pen, but by the time Smokey was old enough to go to pasture with the cows she liked to curl up, body to body, or put her head in my lap. I would rub her bone hard head between her eyes, up to the top of her head, crossing slowly forth and back between her ears, then back down. If I failed to do that she would bump me with her head, even shove me from my comfortable place.

Whether I took the cows out to pasture or brought them in, Smokey always walked, too often gamboled, beside me, at times nearly knocking me over. If she was feeling quite sedate, she would push her head under my arm and we would follow the cows down the lane, my arm over and around her neck. It was then she would wet my face with her soft, pink, wet rubber tongue.

One summer afternoon, the corn "as high as an elephant's eye," Napoleon ran barking down the cow lane then hurrying back to me. If he were suggesting that we go to the lake for a swim, it was an awfully good idea. When I came from the house with my swimsuit on and a couple of cookies for him and me, I was surprised when he showed no interest in a cookie. He would not follow me to the lake either. Instead he insisted upon another direction. I followed him. When he showed me whatever it was then we would go for a swim.

Napoleon led me to Smokey, lying on her side, balloon bloated into death, her four legs straight out as if still standing. She was not in the pasture where I had left her that morning but two fields away in the awful cornfield. She had died from eating too much corn.

Napoleon and I sat with Smokey, the three of us lost together in the field. I would not leave Smokiy. I could not cry but I understood despair for the first time. Mother was frantic when we did not return in good time from the lake. Napoleon barked our location to her. I could not call out to her. I had lost Smokey.

For years I dreamed about Smokey. There is an anonymous old Scottish prayer which says, *From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us!*

Smokey was my long-leggety beastie bumping me in the night. She often stood in my dreams just looking at me with her huge black eyes fringed with curving lashes, her soft pink tongue reaching up to lick her glistening black muzzle.

I was a freshman in college when I had my last dream about Smokey. In my dream I was taking the cows out to pasture. Smokey was leaping and gamboling all around me until she knocked me down. She knocked me down but not in the cow lane. I had fallen out of my still-new-to-me bed in Chadbourne Hall, the freshman dormitory at the University of Wisconsin. Now, no longer a child yearning for the farm and Smokey, I put away childish things. I was starting over, young and independent.

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THAT KIND OF DAY, THAT KIND OF DAD
by
Joan Stear

(The following letter is an excerpt of a contest entry I submitted one Father's Day in hopes of winning for my dad a fishing trip and rod and reel. We didn't win. But as I recollected the bits and pieces of our relationship over the years, I relearned, as my students have, that "people are the lifeblood of our history.")

...I think my almost seventy-year-old dad deserves to go fishing because in all my life I can't remember seeing him pick up a fishing pole.

Most of my high school friends' fathers had camouflage jackets, rifles, fishing gear, camping equipment, and a joeboat. Some of them even owned fishing camps at the Point or Toledo Bend. Our house was cluttered with Dad's barbells (weights now) and books. No rods and reels. No fishing gear. No boat. Not that Dad wasn't a sportsman. He taught me how to throw a pretty good Joe Namath style pass and how to swing the bat hard enough so that once I broke a neighbor's window with the best self-pitched hit I'd ever made. But I've never tied flies with Dad. For years I begged him to put up a basketball goal on our slanted driveway. He wouldn't budge an inch. I always had to play with a neighbor's basketball, and I never got my goal. When I was about twelve, though, Daddy took my sisters and me--a big fan--to see the Harlem Globetrotters at Blackham Coliseum. I'm probably the only daughter in the world with a copy of the Harlem Globetrotters soundtrack recording. That record album was Dad's surprise to me. I've never fished with my dad, but I have run miles and miles with a man who was running before jogging was "in." He taught me to "spring off on the balls of my feet and land on my heels." Last fall I took flyfishing lessons. I learned to cast on a football field. Although my coach was an avid sportsman, being taught by a serious fisherman wasn't the same as being taught by Dad.

I've never considered that maybe Dad just doesn't care to fish, but I have always wondered what more I could have learned from him if we had gone fishing together. Whether he likes to fish or not, after all the years of marriage, work, raising a family of five girls and enjoying his grandchildren, my dad deserves to go fishing. He may not want to, though. He has glaucoma and his eyesight is failing. Dad doesn't read much anymore nor does he run the distances he used to. And although after all these years I've never seen him bait a hook, I figure he deserves the kind of day catching the "big one" brings.

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P.S. Happy Father's Day, every day, Dad!
Love,
Joan