



SCHOOL DAYS
1936 - 39



Life & Letters





These collected stories of **LIFE & LETTERS**, a volume of life history writings--episodes from people's pasts--, could easily be entitled "Stories of Significance." Lucy McCormick Calkins, the author of *Living Between the Lines*, has pointed out that "writing memoir has everything to do with rendering the ordinariness of our lives so that [our lives become] significant." Hence, the commonplace becomes meaningful. The ongoing ordinary passages of days add up in life. It's no wonder that the most often expressed toast is "To life!" In every language, as in every story, life becomes a celebration. Even in the sickness, the dreariness, the wickedness, the lackluster of life, story adds meaning. And we see what can be--an extraordinariness out of the ordinariness.

LIFE & LETTERS is an extraordinary collection of extraordinary stories told by men and women who have lived ordinary lives. The final rendering in memoir form is not a conflict between fantasy and fact. These authors have considered life and its inconsistencies. They tell their stories as best as they remember them. And they listen for the meaning. They look for extraordinary ways to explain the ordinary. And they find them in **LIFE & LETTERS**, where an audience of strangers becomes an audience of friends. Welcome to our circle as friends. And thanks for sharing in the "ordinariness of our lives."

-----Joan Stear
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana
Spring 1996



Front Cover: (top right corner) Celina Haynie; Lois Diehl (on left); Betty Gerard;
Jean Smith (on right); (left corner) Mildred Joy; (center) Mildred Barry's brother and sister

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DAVID'S MAGIC

by

Ruth Burns Oates

MAGIC by Shel Silverstein

*Sandra's seen a leprechaun, Eddie touched a troll,
Laurie danced with witches once,
Charlie found some goblins' gold.
Donald heard a mermaid sing,
Susy spied an elf,
But all the magic I have known
I've had to make myself.*

David loved to spin tall tales. When I heard him tell them, he was usually spinning them for some child, but when we were first married and had no children about, he used to sometimes spin a few for me. I often told him, "I want to write these stories down. We'd all like to have them to read over sometimes." Unfortunately, each time we were doing something or other, and I never stopped to write one down.

David's tales were spun on the spur of the moment, to fit the time and activities. Each time he told a different one. When we began to have grandchildren, he delighted (and so did they!) in creating tales for their amusement. I have many snapshots of some child sitting with Papa Dave in his huge brown leather lounge, sharing a book, watching TV, having a conversation, or just laughing together. Papa Dave often entertained them with one of his stories while sitting in his great comfortable chair with them. Perhaps he told stories other places, too. Perhaps I simply heard only those tales he spun in that chair.

From the early years of our marriage, David kept the children happy while I was putting away the supper, washing the dishes, or folding clothes. I was a working mother, a school teacher, and I did most of my housework in the evenings.

One night when Bo Tatum, one of our earliest grandchildren, was about four or five we were babysitting with him at our house. Papa Dave had Bo in the chair with him, though Bo wanted to play about the bedrooms rather than settle down for the night. He had an idea, I think, that he would have to go to bed soon, and he wasn't ready for that yet. So David told him about the bear he kept in our bedroom closet.

"The bear goes to bed early, and he wouldn't like it if you disturbed him. He would wake up very grouchy, and you don't want to see that bear when he's grouchy!" Papa Dave assured him. So they talked about the bear in the closet, and soon Bo settled down and went to sleep with his head on David's chest.

Bo liked that bear so much that he brought him up on lots of other occasions. "Let's go see the bear today," Bo would say, waiting for the reason Papa Dave would give for why they couldn't. Always, there was some reason Bo could not see the bear now. "He's resting," or "He doesn't want to come out now." Once I heard "He needs a shower first."

So an elusive but interesting bear stayed out of sight in the closet during the couple of years before Bo and his mother moved away. Some time after his Papa Dave died about ten years later, I wrote to Bo in Washington State and asked if there was anything of Papa Dave's he would particularly like to have. Bo phoned. "You asked me what I'd like to have of Papa Dave's," he said. "Well, I'd like to have the bear in the closet!"

For a moment I was speechless. Suddenly it was late evening and I was back in the kitchen, washing dishes. David was sitting across the room in his big chair, his shoes off, his feet up at a comfortable angle, Bo tucked in at his side. They were chatting quietly, and Bo's small boy question hung in the air. I heard David say, "He wants to shower first." Finally, I recovered my voice. "I'll see what I can do," I answered Bo.

When I finally got around to trying to honor Bo's request, I couldn't figure out how to crate the bear. He refused to go into the crates I fashioned. When I finally got the bear satisfied with his box, he refused to fly! As you can see, my intentions were good, but shipping problems interfered.

Bo is grown now. I suppose that bear still lives in my closet.



COUNTRY FOLKS FOREVER

by
Mildred L. Joy

I was sixteen when Mama, Daddy, and I decided to move out on Highway 17, Ogeechee Road, on a thirteen acre homesite beside a creek. We were extremely excited about owning our first home. Daddy and Mama didn't believe in being in debt and never owned a credit card. Daddy, Mama and I put all our monies together from our work and paid the "home place" off in four years. We were so proud, we had a note burning.

None of us had any experience in farming since we never had had enough land to plant anything. Daddy would spend a good bit of his spare time at the seed store asking questions and listening to all the farmers talking about what was the best crop and what special seed to buy. He followed directions pretty good, too, because he almost killed Mama and me working in the fields planting, hoeing, spraying and watering if it needed it badly enough. Daddy had to have even more land cleared off for more planting.

One section of our property was low. We planted okra there, the growingest stuff you have ever seen in your life. I really enjoyed watching things grow. To see how much they would grow overnight was certainly a surprise to me. We had okra for everybody who wanted it, along with Mama canning. We didn't freeze anything way back then, but we had a huge pantry which Daddy had to put more shelves in so Mama could show off her beautiful canning. It was a beauty, too!

As the okra grew, we would have to cut it everyday because it would grow so fast; and, if we left it on the bush too long, it would get tough and no good to eat whatsoever. In picking or cutting the okra, we always wore long sleeves. If we didn't, we would itch all day long. I remember just before Robbie's birth, I was out in the field on another farm hoeing okra. It's a wonder I still love it, but I do, in any recipe--fried, boiled, on butter beans, in gumbo. You name it, I like it!

After Cason and I married, we decided to leave our beautiful little garage apartment and move out on the Ogeechee Road into a beautiful old home with his family to farm the land. Cason was serving his time as an inside machinist at Savannah Machine and Foundry. His Dad, Elmer, was a night watchman at Meddin Packing Company. I was working at Savannah Machine and Foundry in the personnel office at the time. Cason's sister, Latrelle, was working at Union Camp, and her girlfriend, Delores Raulerson, was working in town, too, but living with us on the farm.

Cason would go directly to the fields after working all day. There was always something for everyone to do, and as in most every walk in life, some of us do more than others. I was pregnant with Robbie while we were on the farm. My mother-in-law, Irene, would watch over me all the time to see that I wasn't doing anything that would "mark" the baby. Irene's youngest son, Ronald, who was around eleven or twelve at that time, had a pregnant rabbit. One day I went out to check her

feed and water, and there she was with the little ones. One had died, and she was pushing it out into the cage. I started to reach in and get it out, but Mrs. Cason came running and told me to "get away from that cage!" I was going to "mark" my baby. I left very peacefully. When Robbie was born, he did have a light brown spot on the top of one of his feet, which resembled the shape of a rabbit. It has disappeared though. Maybe the old wives tales do warrant our attention. It's a wonder he didn't have okra fuzz on his chest when he was born from all the okra I cut, hoed, froze and cooked. We enjoyed our farming experience, but we didn't get rich. Had plenty to eat, though.

Before Robbie was born, Mrs. Cason had to go down to Florida to be with her oldest son's wife. Glenevin had had a miscarriage of twin boys. Mrs. Cason did not want to go down because she said that I would "Domino" while she was helping Glen. Sure enough, that's exactly what happened! She was so disappointed that she wasn't there to help me. The night before the delivery, I had ironed, cleaned house, hoed that ever lovin' okra and did anything else that needed to be done. I was working like it was going to be my last day among the living. Cason and I went to the hospital about 10:30 that evening. I had a saddle block, and Robbie was born at 4:25 that morning. I had no pain after the saddle block, so with the next two children I had the same thing. I had never experienced pain until moving to Louisiana. I think they believe in letting you suffer during delivery. Times have changed a lot since then, Thank God!

Mr. Cason would bring home a slab of bacon each week, and Mrs. Cason would slice bacon each and every morning with the dullest knife you have ever seen in your entire life. Every morning we would have the same fixings. Grits, eggs, bacon, toast and coffee. Good eatin'!!! The grits pot was always left on the stove until Mr. Cason got home, so naturally it was hard to clean. If it was Latrelle's day to do the dishes, she would leave that grits pot for me to do the next day or that night after supper. I always had two grits pots to clean. After we left the Cason household, I did not cook grits for a year. I had worked up such a hate for that horrible, old, hard grits pot that I never wanted to face another grits pot ever again.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Cason loved the farm. If Mrs. Cason, Irene, could stay outside and plant and make things grow, she was at her happiest. She hated to come in the house to start supper, but, of course, she was the only one that knew how to cook. So we let her.

The kitchen in the old home was very small, and the kitchen table was right by the back door. Every morning we would hear the same thing. Irene would say in her very Georgian accent to anyone sitting by the back door, for instance, "Wilden, would you open that back door? It's so hot in here. I just can't stand it. I feel like I'm going to die!" I have since learned how much and why she wanted the door opened to let in the thirty degree weather. When a woman goes through her change of life, she can get so hot she can't breathe. I have found myself saying the same thing or making a fast trip to adjust the thermostat.

When Cason and I first started going together, I called him Robert. Then we moved to the farm with his family, and they called him Wilden. His name is Wilton! I never got back into the

habit of calling him Robert. Of course, when we opened the business, I would call him on the intercom, "Cason." He is called Bob by other folks now, but I still call him Cason!

Now, if you wanted to root any growing thing, just get Irene to get it going for you. She had the original green thumb; that is, until I became pregnant, then she swore that everything that I rooted took off! How do I know I had it? Because Irene said so! She says, "Whenever you're pregnant, you can surely propagate new growth on begonias and geraniums." She and I did make a lot of money that spring by selling plants that I had started off during pregnancy. Even to this day I enjoy growing plants, but I don't worry about becoming pregnant. I know you have heard the old saying--"You can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl."

Poor Mr. Cason, Elmer! He could never do anything right for Mrs. Cason. I remember her saying to him time and time again, "Elmer, that's not the way to do that," or "Elmer, when are you going to do such and such?" He was the easiest going man I ever remember knowing. He never let her nagging worry him much, or at least I didn't know about it if he did.

In between pregnancies, Mrs. Cason and I slaughtered one hundred chickens and had them to the market before noon. We were so happy when we got through. There were no chickens cleaner than ours in these United States. We would wring their necks and then chop off their heads on an old tree stump. Next, we placed them in hot boiling water to defeather them and used the old gas stove for singeing any feather that might be left. Then came the fun part--the gutting. The chicken was sold to the market whole. Back then you didn't buy drumsticks, thighs, breast or any other part as we do now. Mrs. Cason and I were so proud of ourselves, but once was quite enough for me. Naturally, we had chicken for supper that night. I didn't! It took quite a long time to get rid of the odor. It still stands out in my mind. That's one thing I'll never miss from the so called "good ole days." Veggies I can sell all day, but not my biddies, even if they were raised up to slaughter. Same thing with cows, and nobody loves beef any better than I do. When it comes to animals, I am anything but impersonal.

The five acres of watermelons were something else. Cason and Elmer would have to take turns going out in the field at night to scare the deer out so they wouldn't ruin the crop. We had fun times, but mostly hard work trying to survive the times.

One of those fun times is when Mrs. Cason and I had gone to town shopping and left Robbie, our oldest son, with his granddad. When we got back home, there sat Robbie on Granddad's lap in front of the blazing fire, wrapped almost from head to toe in a quilt, not the light weight quilts we have today, but the old timers. Granddad had changed his dirty diaper all right, but he didn't know where to find the Birdseye diapers, and he wouldn't go into our room. We all had a good laugh over this encounter, but we never left Robbie with Granddad again.

Granddad loved smoking his pipe. His tobacco choice was Prince Albert in the red can. That can always made the best rattles for the little ones. Put a few rocks in it and fasten the lid tightly. We didn't have to worry about the lid loosening because it never came open.

The next occasion occurred when Granddad left a small can with kerosene by the fireplace. Robbie, who was a toddler by this time, swallowed some. We were all upset, but Mr. Cason said there wasn't enough in the can to hurt Robbie. We gave him some milk and didn't worry any further. Irene went ballistic. Poor Mr. Cason, once again he heard with the twang, "Elmer, you know you can't leave that stuff around with toddlers! He could have been killed!" Poor, poor Elmer! Mr. Cason must have been right, though, because it never did phase Robbie. That child to this day will eat or drink anything and everything at least once.

As I explained before about Cason's name, I had forgotten that when we first moved to New Orleans, Gardner-Denver, the company which Cason worked for, would call the house and ask for Cason. I have called him Cason ever since. Now it just seems like the natural way to speak his name. Others now call him Bob. I missed that part of his life. I always knew that he would be a millionaire, and I am thankful that I was along for some of the ride. If anyone would have told me when I was growing up that I would have done the things and seen the sights that I have seen in my lifetime, I would have told them they were crazy. I thank my Lord and Master for all the beauty He has laid out for us all to enjoy, and I am going to try my best not to miss a single thing.

I truly enjoyed the country even before my marriage to Cason. They can say what they want, but farming is a hard life. I would not want it as a full-time job. The time that we shared was enough, and it's full of lots of good memories, which I will stumble through with my classmates' help.



BAD PENNY RETURNS

by
Betty Gerard

The spring classes of "Life & Letters" have started. Here I am, back again for my fifth time with these friendly folks. Oh, yes, I finished my book and gave each member of my family a copy. Why am I back, you ask?

First of all, our instructor, Joan Stear, makes each of us feel as if we are the world's best authors. [Editor's note: a compliment repaid to you and the other students--you make it easy to find the best authorship in your stories!!] Then the classmates are like old friends. Even though I think I have nothing else to write about, I'm like a bad penny that just keeps showing up. Lastly, I have learned that I need to add to my book.

My nephew, Duane Johnson, and his family came from New Orleans for the 1995 International Jazz Festival and visited me for a short time last spring. Of course, I proudly showed him my "book." During the conversation, I spoke to Duane about my dad, William R. Johnson, and his life in Leadville, Colorado. "Wait a minute," he said, a bit surprised. "No one ever told me about him living in Leadville."

Both Duane's mother and dad are dead now. I found that the stories about my folks passed on to Duane by his mom were incorrect. Duane was born after my dad died in 1952. He did know my mother, though, but never learned some of the stories I want to write for him now.

Yes, I could have written my stories at home. Somehow, the spirit doesn't move me! The weekly deadlines help me to write my stories. I love the casual, friendly atmosphere of "Life & Letters," and I am glad to be back.



MAKING AMENDS

by

Rosemary Aycock

The long awaited day had dawned; it was here! What happiness to awaken to!

"Brother, wake up!" I was shaking him, determined that my joy would be shared. "Today's the day! Come on! Wake up! It's Friday, remember?"

Yes, it was Friday--not Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday--it was Friday, and we were going to the picture show!

Miracle of miracles, at age eight I was being given the freedom to take my six-year-old "little brother" to the movies. Just the two of us were to go together after school--unbelievable! But Mother and Daddy had agreed on the permission, and they had not changed their minds!

Brother and I dressed without the usual reminders from Mother to "Get a move on," or "Breakfast is ready," and then, "Rosemary, Brother, did you hear me? I said 'breakfast is ready?'" Nor did we need prodding to "Eat your oatmeal, finish your milk," as Mother ordinarily coached us through breakfast. Our tasks were completed swiftly and harmoniously--we didn't miss a trick!

Waving goodbye to Daddy when he dropped us off at the bottom of the long set of cement steps leading up the hill to St. Mary's Academy, Brother and I knew with certainty that he or Mother would meet us at the show two blocks away at 5:30 p.m. when the 3:30 p.m. feature ended. Our plans were set.

I don't remember details of classroom work that day. I could not have paid much attention to anything so mundane when the splendor of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" awaited us! Anyway, the day was uneventful until afternoon recess when I spied Brother playing near the four water fountains which were lined up not too far from the building and surrounded by the usual muddy surface from the overflow as students drank or played water games, dousing one another until stopped by one of the teachers. So it was, that I saw Brother slip and fall as he turned to move away from the fountain after drinking. When he got up without any difficulty, I knew he was all right.

After school we met as planned at the end of the back sidewalk and steps which led down to Natchitoches' main street and the one and a half block to the show.

Brother looked as if he had been crying as he told me, "Rosemary, my arm hurts--" but I didn't let him finish as I interrupted with "You'll be o.k., Brother. Just wait 'til the show starts." And so I took care of his discomfort, hurried him up as he lagged, walking too slowly to satisfy my anticipation, and proudly paid the price of our two admission tickets.

It was a wonderful movie, my first Disney full-length feature, so colorful, so happy and funny! Brother kept telling me his arm was hurting him. His crying at times was distracting, too, but I hushed him with the reminder to “Watch the movie, Brother, it’s so good” or “It’s going to go away, watch Dopey.”

Brother was still crying as we left the show and came out into the light of the still bright sunshine of the late afternoon and spied Mother waiting for us in the car.

After looking at Brother and listening to his complaints, Mother swiftly made her registered nurse’s decision. Her next stop was not home, but Dr. Roy’s office, where an x-ray revealed that my little brother had a fractured collar bone. As the doctor fitted him into the brace he was to wear for several weeks, Brother looked at me, his big brown eyes tear brimmed, and said reproachfully, “I told you it was hurting. I told you.”

I never see a Disney film advertised that I don’t think of the wonderful experience of “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”--and Brother.

I do believe that despite my inauspicious beginning, my thirty-some years in nursing evidenced a kinder, gentler touch.

And surely, when fifty years later, my little brother returned home after many years away only to learn that he was dying with cancer, I could be there for him. I could help to make his last days less pain-filled and more love-filled as his wife, son and I nursed him through a comforted death into the never ending “show” of paradise.... It was my turn to cry.

I hope I made amends for “Snow White”; I needed to!



**WHEN WHIPPOORWILLS CALL:
A STORY OF MY PARENTS' COURTSHIP**

by
Jean Smith

Quietly sipping his coffee and feeling the cool morning air on his face, Ed Wyatt rocked in silence at his end of the porch. His tired eyes gazed at the tiny drops of dew, glittering like diamond dust on the dry prairie, and his ears heard the faraway crow of a Banty rooster welcoming the rising sun. Ed calmly lit the day's first sweet pipeful of tobacco and settled back to smoke. Puffing gently and resting his head on the rocker's high back, he looked up to the thin clouds drifting lazily by.

Suddenly he heard it! Ed sat forward in his chair, ears straining, listening to the steady hum. Oh no--not him again! The old man scanned the morning sky with angry snapping eyes. Then he spotted it--a tiny airplane on his Oklahoma horizon. Closer and closer the small plane flew, suddenly diving low from the blue heavens, just barely missing the brown tarpapered roof of his and Josey's house. Once--and then again!

With the flyer's first pass, Ed set his rocker in fast motion, clenched his teeth tightly on his pipe stem and grumbled to himself, "Dammit all! That crazy fool's gonna kill hisself someday!"

The young pilot of the single engine, open-air Stearman, all decked out in flight goggles, leather helmet, and flapping white neck scarf, gave a quick wave of his hand, pulled straight up, arrogantly looped through a layer of thin stratus clouds, leveled off, and dived once more.

And it sure as hell won't be soon enough for me!" Ed added.

Ed Wyatt wasn't nearly so impressed with aviator buzzing his house as was his young daughter--or even Josey, for that matter. Oh, Mal Sellmeyer was a charmer, all right! Ed saw that. Bea's new flame had sparked in the faded cowboy a fire of blazing memory that reminded the old man of his own wild youth. Yes. The young German from Tulsa had the same restless nature, the same sense of adventure, the same streak of wildness--maybe even too much. Mal Sellmeyer was *much* too wild. Not nearly god enough for Ed Wyatt's favorite daughter...not nearly!

In the sweltering summer of that year--1931--my parents met and fell in love. The Dow Jones had nosedived almost two years before. The stock market crash in the fall of '29 brought the country's party to a sobering, screeching halt.

That same October day, Bea Wyatt, a young student at Bristow High School, went softly clicking up and down the hall steps in her high heeled pumps, seamed silk stockings, and string-fringed skirt, cut daringly above the knee and jiggling merrily as she swung along. The young flapper hummed her favorite tune, "My Blue Heaven."

In Tulsa, a restless Mal Sellmeyer sat squirming in morning catechism class at Holy Cross Academy. Trying hard to ignore the mumbling monotone of Sister Mary Teresa, Mal stared out the window, watching--his mind, high in the dark thunderclouds. He was planning to cut school at the ring of the next bell and thumb a ride to Sutton's School of Aviation on the far western outskirts of town.

For the past four years, Mal had slipped away to Sutton's at every opportunity, eagerly washing down dirty airplanes in exchange for the thrill of the flying lessons he couldn't afford--nor was allowed to take. Today, at long last, after passing all the tests with flying colors and performing all the daring maneuvers--the dizzying loops and circles, spins, dives, and turns--Sutton's was presenting him with a treasured pilot's stunt license signed by Orville Wright!

Mal heard Sister's words no more. He sat in class, very still, his mind drifting back to two years ago, in '27, when Charles Lindberg soloed across the wide Atlantic, sailing high and free as a lone eagle with wings outstretch. Mal had got his first private license that same year, when he was barely sixteen. Secretly then, he hoped he would be the first to connect the two worlds, but the twenty-five-year-old from Missouri had beat him to it. Now, he dreamed of newer challenges. In his mind's eye, he circled the globe.

"Maybe, just maybe," Mal dreamed, "I'll be first to fly around the world. Who knows?" Suddenly the loud clanging school bell broke his trance. He jumped from his seat and dashed out of class, shoving past other students to get out--and on to Sutton's! But, each and every day, from then on, crawled at a snail's pace until graduation in the Spring.

Finally it came! Both Mal and Bea left their schools for the bigger world in the hot June days of 1930. Mal, especially, was overjoyed to be out. Fresh out of high school, he flew any and everything he could. Bea attended business college at a tiny Bristow school. Times were getting harder, but this Great Depression wasn't too unkind to them. Not like some. The Wyatts and the Sellmeyers had little to start with, and now wasn't very different--except for the hordes of hungry wanderers looking for some tiny scrap. Josey and Martha shared whatever they had cooked for their own tables. But, as the Depression deepened, the sad strangers still kept coming in search of something warm to fill their empty bellies.

Oklahoma, starved for some relief, some diversion to take its mind from the emptiness, looked up and into the heavens. The circus had come to town, and it was high in the air! With necks bent back and sun stung eyes fixed on the sky, they marveled at Mal's wild tricks, oohing and aahing at each of the famous flying circus' daring feats and breathtaking stunts. Within a year after high school graduation, Mal had filled Martha's fireplace mantle with scores of shiny silver trophies. He triumphed easily in every stunt competition he ever entered. None was braver, none more daring, than Martha' darling--her favorite son, Mal.

Then, Mal was outdone. On June 23, 1931, Wiley Post, an Indian friend and a competitor of Mal's in the circus' barnstorming circuits, stunned the world by putting on a show remembered

in history classes to this day--a high speed dash around the globe. Good natured Wiley took off in the Winnie Mae, a small Lockheed Vega owned by a wealthy oil magnate from Oklahoma City, and the young Indian circled the earth in an unbelievable eight days. Wiley astonished the world. And Mal!

At the height of aviation's frantic frolic of barnstorming, wing-walking, parachuting, looping and diving, and dashing across deep oceans and around new worlds, Mal met Bea and began a fiery dizzy-wild, whirlwind courtship--a courtship as compelling as the black tornados that troubled Oklahoma's stormy skies. One summer night, as the distant early star twinkled in the North sky like the diamond of a tiny wedding ring, Bea's lonely whippoorwill called its dark evening song. And Mal kissed her softly under the lilac tree's sweet lavender bloom, down by the old laughing waterfall on Ed's farm. Kissed her on the first date--and told her she would marry him. She said she would not!

The challenge, the madness, the delirium, the fight had begun! Mal called incessantly on the country phone, and when Bea answered his calls--that sharp, loud, jingle of the old black wall phone at Josey's house--fourteen sets of ears listened. All parties on the line picked up in rapid succession--click, click, click, clickity click--so as not to miss a single breathless word. But still--Bea said no!

Exasperated with eavesdroppers and rejections, Mal abruptly stopped calling--for one week. He was confident enough of his own wild charms to know that Bea would be longing and waiting.

Next Saturday, at daybreak, while the rich morning coffee brewed at Josey's house, Mal, with high expectations and great determination, revved up the open air Stearman at Sutton's hanger, and took off from Tulsa.

Quietly sipping his coffee and feeling the cool morning air on his face, Ed Wyatt rocked in silence at his end of the porch. This, the first time, he didn't know who in thearnation was causing the strange sound intruding into his heaven. Then, the pilot circled the noisy contraption over Ed's own white cotton field, tilted his wings in a cocky wave, and dived straight for the house. Ed knew.

Confidently, Mal buzzed over the scrubby green oaks and the low brown rooftop, swooping and climbing, and circling to swoop again. Bea ran out of the house onto Josey's wide front porch. With her left hand, she shaded the sun from her eyes, and searched the blue heaven. She had missed Mal--more than she could have imagined.

As frightened bluejays cleared the summer sky, Mal nose-dived straight down, leveled out low on the wide spread of open prairie, and raced toward the two giant oaks directly in front of Josey's house. Suddenly, he came roaring between the trees, wing tips barely brushing the little leaves on both sides. Screeching birds scattered from every branch. Bea held her breath, as Mal's plane shot straight for her. Closer and closer he came. Just short of crashing before Bea's wide eyes, Mal pulled back hard on the stick and raised the Stearman skyward. A scribbled love note fluttered from the open air cockpit, and landed at Josey's front gate.

Bea raced down the old porch steps, knelt on the wet grass to pick up the little letter, read it quickly, kissed it softly, and tucked it deep in her robe pocket. Smiling and brushing tears from her blue eyes, she stood, looked high above, and waved broadly--three times. The handsome arrogant young aviator sailing along in the bright morning sky looked down on a world below--and laughed. Bea had answered,

“Yes!”

Mal looped the Stearman upward three times, leaving puffy clouds of white trailing behind, like a huge holiday rocket. Graceful as a giant whippoorwill, the wings tilted again, in a wave good-bye. He leveled off and became a speck slowly fading back into the orange eastern sun.

Ed frowned and went back to his rocking, grumbling and mumbling. He knew his headstrong daughter only too well. No use for talk. Ed Wyatt sat alone, puffing on his pipe and muttering softly to himself...

“Dammit all! One day that crazy fool’s gonna kill hisself. One day....”

Ed sat alone.



AN AFTERNOON ADVENTURE

by

Mimi Barry

With a baleful look at the low clouds that had gathered while I was in the supermarket, I squeezed the last bag of groceries into the back of the station wagon and breathed a great sigh of relief. As a rule, I didn't mind shopping for groceries. Ordinarily, the rows of brightly colored cans and cartons all standing at attention with that special "come hither" look about them, made the trip a pleasure. But not today. Today I couldn't take time to read the label on the newest better-than-butter oleo. Today, Fan had me on a schedule.

Before I left the house, Fan had looked at his watch and said, "Now, Mama," (he called me Mama ever since our first child was born and I hated it but he wouldn't stop no matter how many times I reminded him I was his wife, not his mother), "Now, Mama," he said, "You have one hour so don't dawdle. You know Jim and Mary. When you say seven o'clock, they'll be here at exactly seven. You'll still have time to do your fussing around the kitchen. Now, go." Fan looked quite comical in his undershorts pointing his finger at me.

I didn't bother to answer him. I certainly wasn't all that anxious to see Fan's boss, Jim, and his wife, Mary. They were so stuffy. But then, Fan was a little stuffy himself sometimes. Right away I was ashamed of myself for thinking such a thought about Fan. If his idea of an exciting evening was a game of bridge with a couple of intense eggheads, well, I guess I could give in every now and then.

With that on my mind, I slammed the station wagon door shut and checked my watch. A few more minutes to go! I'd have enough time to run into the drugstore for the latest art magazine. I smiled, thinking how I could read it at the bridge table when I was dummy, a position I found myself in frequently.

Once inside the drug store I found *Art News*, the issue I was looking for. On my way to the checkout counter a gorgeous display of greeting cards caught my eye. Like a magnet, I felt myself drawn in its direction. I couldn't think right off of anyone who'd be having an occasion to celebrate but surely once I started looking, someone would come to mind.

Browsing through the friendly verses and sentimental expressions that sometimes brought a tear to my eye, I heard a young mother ask the druggist for ear medication for her child. Again I thanked my lucky stars that my mothering days were over. And that's when I remembered my latest grandchild would soon be having his first birthday. Now I could look through the cards with a purpose.

The store lights dimmed while I was deliberating over just the right card. The storm must be getting closer, I thought. I looked at my watch. *Mercy, how the time flies! Fan will be beside himself.*

Hurriedly then, I made my choice. The little fellow on the card blowing out his birthday candle even looked a little like baby John. I looked in my purse to make sure I had enough change. Snapping it shut, I was suddenly aware of the strange quiet in the store. As though trying not to disturb the silence, I found myself tiptoeing to the front with my magazine and card but the young lady was not at her post at the checkout counter. Puzzled, I wandered to the back of the store but the druggist was nowhere in sight either. *Now this is a fine how-do-you-do*, I thought.

Then it dawned on me. Everyone was gone and I was alone in the store! I rushed to the front door, frantically pulling at it and yelling as I watched the druggist drive off without even a backward glance.

“Come back, you dumb jerk!” I yelled. “You’ve locked me in!” I kicked at the door. Then a deafening siren went off. At that, I panicked. Its anguished wail went on and on. As I stood by the door, both hands over my ears, a police car drove up.

I waved excitedly to the policemen. Never again would I make Fan mad by calling them “the fuzz.” They had come to my rescue. Since everyone was gone maybe I could pay them for my magazine and card. I was sure they could be trusted to see that the drugstore got the money.

But what were they doing now? Brandishing guns just like on television, two men ran toward the back of the store and the other two sidled along the front of the building, slowly creeping toward the front door. Why, they hadn’t come for me at all. They evidently had something else in mind. Could a burglar be hiding somewhere around the store? *In the store? My, this is a lot worse than I thought!*

Quickly I ran to the back and crouched beneath the drug counter. I figured I’d be out of the way so the police could come on in and do their job. Another thing, I’d be out of the line of fire. My heart was pounding with such excitement! I glanced at my watch again. Fan’s schedule was shot to pieces. In fact, just about now Jim and Mary would be waddling through our front door. I had told Fan just last night that Jim and Mary ate entirely too much. Tonight I hoped they weren’t expecting a feast since all they were getting was lime sherbet and cookies. Then, in spite of myself, I began to chuckle. Tonight they wouldn’t even get that; the sherbet was melting in the back of the station wagon.

I heard the jangle of keys banging against the front door, so I flattened out on the floor, my nose just inches away from a wad of Juicy Fruit gum. Everything was quiet again. I peeked around the corner and saw a light beam going around in circles. Now the policeman’s foot was close enough to touch. How I wished there was some way I could help these fine men but I dared not move. However, the cramped position was getting the best of me. I thought I could relieve the pressure if I lay a little on my side. That was a fatal move. A charley-horse grabbed the calf muscle in my left leg and in no time I was off the floor hopping on one foot and yelping like a hurt puppy.

“Freeze!” boomed out a masculine voice. I was more than a little distressed when I realized that coming down from a painful leap in the air my face had grazed the barrel of a gun. “Hand it over, lady, and don’t get cute,” said the officer. “But, Officer,” I stammered and began to pour out my explanation.

Getting behind the wheel of the station wagon was as though I were being reunited with an old friend. The assorted odors from the bags of groceries had blended together, making me sharply aware of my adventure and this evening’s plans. Once again I looked at my watch. *More than two hours behind schedule! Oh, Fan!*

I drove home slowly. Surely the sherbet was slush by now so I’d just have to think of something else to serve Jim and Mary. Well, maybe coffee and cookies. It would have to do.

I didn’t see the guests’ car when I pulled into the driveway; other than the porch light, the house was dark. I had a strange feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I opened the front door and flicked on the light in the foyer. Fan called from the living room. “Mimi? Mimi? Where have you been? I’ve been worried. Anyway, Mary and Jim couldn’t make it tonight.”

“I’m coming, Fan,” I said. When I started my tale of woe, we ended up laughing. I got out the bag of cookies, and Fan went into the kitchen for straws for the now liquid sherbet.



OUR FIRST HOUSE AND ITS NEIGHBORS

by
Celina Haynie

The structure of our first home is known as a “conch house.” Come visit it with me. In front is a door and two windows. Let’s open the door and step into the wide hallway. To the right is the room intended for a living room. Now it’s Mama and Papa’s bedroom. The only furnishing they have are a bed, a dresser, a small table, and a wardrobe for hanging clothes.

As you walk down the hall, again to the right is another door, this one leading to my bedroom. I love my bed. It’s made of iron painted a pale pink. Little angels are on the headboard. A small table, rocker, chest and a homemade hanging rack for clothes fill my room. A door between the two rooms is locked. I’ve been told never to open it.

In the hallway there’s room for a table, two chairs, a rocker and a sewing machine, which once belonged to Mama’s mother. The hallway ends as you go into the kitchen, which is the width of the house. There’s a round table with lion heads carved on the legs, four chairs and a china cabinet with round glass. An apple crate used as a small table holds a bucket and dipper for our drinking water. A two burner stove burns kerosene. There’s a window on the right end of the kitchen with a board built outside the window where the dishes are washed and rinsed.

After the dishes are done, I must clean the pans, as I have been taught, filling them with water and setting them out for the sun to heat the water. We have three kerosene lamps, one in each bedroom, and the other one is moved between the hallway and kitchen. As you can see, we have no running water nor electricity. The water for bathing is also heated by the sun in two big buckets. We use a number three galvanized tub which is placed in the kitchen. The water is then dumped in the backyard and the tub rinsed and hung on a nail outside in the back of the house. The house has a total of thirteen windows, all arranged for cross ventilation.

The outhouse is way in the backyard. We use old catalogs for paper. You have to be very careful before you sit down because scorpions and spiders like to live there. Papa keeps matches in the outhouse, but I can’t reach them. The scorpions are killed by setting the paper on fire and then burning the insects. I remember the first time I got stung. It was on my elbow and it really hurt. I was afraid because my tongue was numb. Mama rubbed garlic on the sting, but it seemed forever before my tongue felt normal.

Neighbors were very close during those hard times. The house next door was occupied by a couple from Cuba. The wife’s name was Nena. She and her husband had two grown sons. They lived there two months, and then moved into a larger house down the street in an alley.

Then the Peridas moved in next door. I’m really happy because they have two children. Poncho the youngest is only three years older than me. Then there’s Tonita and Armando. They all

go to San Carlos School. I learn my alphabet in Spanish by listening to them doing homework. Señora Meche can read and write. Everyday she reads novels out loud in Spanish from one o'clock until two in the afternoon for the few women in the neighborhood who can't read. No English is ever spoken in our homes.

Next to the Peridas live Señor Antonio and Señora Altagracias. They are very old and have no family. They are always laughing and talking to each other and never fight. Señor Antonio always tells his wife he loves her. I never hear that at my home. Everyday I go to their house through the gates in the back yards. I have to remember to close the gate because it's next to their hen house. Señor Antonio give me eggs for Mama. Señora Alta, as I call her, is really good to me. She gives me ice everyday so I can have ice water and also put ice in my milk. We use condensed milk mixed with water because it doesn't need to be on ice. But we would have to set the can of condensed milk in water to keep the ants away.

Señora Alta have an icebox and electric lights. Señor Antonio usually has a little brown bag with a piece of candy or a cookie for me. They have lots of books. She lets me look at them. She reads to me everyday. I sometimes fall asleep. Señora Alta taught me to love books and encouraged me to learn to read.

Those afternoons are some of my best memories.



WALKING IN FAITH

by

Betty Shoemaker

Just before the Thanksgiving holidays last year, I had an experience I would like to share with you. My good friend Jeanette Muskgrove, 65, had been caring for her husband, Marvin, 73, terminally ill with cancer at their home. Jeanette and Marvin have been friends of mine for many years; we also belong to the same church, Bethel Baptist Church.

One Wednesday afternoon Jeanette called to tell me Marvin's time to leave us was drawing very near. She asked if I would come over Friday morning and stay with her until noon. She didn't want to be alone when he died. The members of my Sunday school class are very close, and when one of us is in need, we all pitch in and help. As friend and a sister in Christ, I would help Jeanette in whatever way I could.

Once at their home, I met Kathleen, who lived across the street; she is also a member of our church and sings in our choir. Kathleen had been staying with Marvin at night so Jeanette could sleep. Kathleen also confided in me and told me she was afraid to be alone with Marvin when he died. I told her all she had to do was go in and very gently wake Jeanette and tell her "Marvin is with the Lord now," say a little prayer and call Hospice. With very large eyes and a furrowed brow, she said, "You don't understand, I can't handle it." I assured her that I would go home and rest and return to stay with her that night.

At 7:45 p.m. the thought entered my mind as I locked my front door. "Big Stupid, how are you going to find Cannberra Street at night when you have trouble in the daytime?" Cannberra is on the left going down Abbeville Highway. There are no street lights and I certainly can't read street signs across a four lane highway.

I made three trips, missing the street each time. I decided I would try one more time, and if I missed it, I would simply return home, call and apologize for not being able to go. As I approached the area for the fourth time, I said in my mind, "Now, God, You're going to have to help me. You know I can't see the street signs at night." Lo and behold, a long wrinkled skinny finger appeared about four inches in front of my face and a voice in my head that certainly wasn't mine said, "Can't you see it? It's right there!" I immediately turned into the street and shined my flashlight on it. Sure enough, it was Cannberra.

If I had been a skeptic or nonbeliever, I would have wrecked my truck. Was it God or my guardian angel? Someone up there was watching out for me. I wasn't frightened; instead I had a warm glowing feeling inside. I could hardly believe what I had seen.

I have heard other people relate instances similar to mine and I always raised an eyebrow and thought, “Sure, you think you saw that.” I had an experience that most people live a lifetime and never see anything like that.

The following Sunday at church, I shared the experience with Sam Brooks, our minister. I told him I couldn’t believe I had done that. He asked me what I had done. I didn’t ask God for help; I demanded it. Sam just laughed and said, “God is the one person in the world you don’t make demands to, but He understood your desperate situation and came to your rescue.”

“Yes,” I said, “God is the one person in this world we can always rely on day or night.”



MY FIRST DATE
by
Orpha Lea Valentine

It was summer time, between second and third grade. Donald Brown (yes, his real name) and I, as well as many other kids, were playing on the school yard swings, slides, seesaws and monkey bars. Among the group there were several I had learned not to share playground equipment with. I would not sit opposite Gaylord, Tommy or Joey on the seesaw. Nor would I get on the seesaw with Jeanette, a feisty redhead. Why? Because any one of them liked to get off on the down end of the seesaw while I was up in the air. Down I came with the board hitting ground--BRUNK!--which never sounded half as bad as it felt. More painful was how funny they thought it was to do such a trick.

Nor would I share a swing with Beverly, also a second grader, even though she was the best pumper in second grade. I would sit in the swing and Beverly faced me in a standing position. I would shove off, my feet pushing against the ground. Then she would take over, pulling hard with her arms on the swing chains, pushing at the same time with her feet against the swing seat. I had to hang on tight or I would slip out of the swing. We were nearly over the top if the swing chains went slack. We would then sit on my lap still facing me and we would each pull with our arms, legs reaching out, to help pump in our own low arc to keeping the swooping high reach of the swing in, hoped for, perpetual motion. I quit swinging with her because I did not like her smell. She seldom bathed and rarely changed her clothing.

I had just refused to swing with Beverly once again. "I'm going over to the monkey bars." Beverly taunted, "That's 'cause you just want to be with the boys." "Sure, it's fun to watch the monkeys. Come on." I was glad when she went to the swings.

I sat on the ground to watch the boys do their tricks and feats. I was a good audience, applauding at all the right times. I especially liked watching Donald, a boy in my class. Later he came and sat by me. Together we watched the monkey boys until I said that I had to go home. It was then Donald asked me if I would go to the movies with him the next afternoon, an Our Gang Comedy. I told him I didn't think my mother would let me go but "I would if I could." I still recall his question, "What does that mean, 'would if I could'?" "That means 'yes'."

Later that afternoon Mrs. Brown came to our house. Mother asked me why I hadn't told her about being invited to the movie. I had forgotten about it, but, "Yes, I would like to see the Our Gang Comedy with Donald." Mother reminded me that I had never been to a movie before. "That's all right. I'll be with Donald."

The next afternoon Donald and I walked down the sidewalks in small town New London to the Grand Theater. Each time we crossed a street Donald took my hand, which embarrassed me, but I was also sorry when he let go after crossing.

The big kids teased us as we waited for the theater to open and begin selling tickets. I became a little frightened when we walked from the bright sunlight into the black cavern of the movie house. Donald found seats for us in the darkness just as the lights were turned on so that two vendors could sell snacks and drinks up and down the aisle. I asked for an orange soda and Donald got a root beer. Donald gave the vendor a dime. Horrified, I told Donald that I did not have any money to pay for my orange soda. "You're not s'posed to," he answered. Relieved, I enjoyed, through two straws, my first ever orange soda. The taste of orange bubbles filled my nose, stinging the back of my tongue.

Together we waited for the movie to begin. But the noise was too loud, louder than my ears wanted to hear. The smell of all those excited kids was worse than our classroom smell. And, when I sat in my seat properly, I could not see anything. Suddenly the heavy red velvet curtains with gold fringe began slowly to part, revealing a brilliant white screen.

After that I remember only how frightening those huge figures on the screen were. Several of Our Gang were in, or running alongside, a careening coaster wagon. The dog with the big stripe of circle around one eye was also in the wagon. The runaway wagon was going faster and faster down a long hill and several policemen were chasing them. There was shouting and hollering on the screen and even more hollering and screaming from the audience. I swirled into total fear.

I stood up and, without a word to Donald, walked back up the aisle and out of the theater. I ran, crying, still holding my orange soda pop, all the way home on that beautiful summer afternoon.

Donald went home crying, too, but not until the movie was over. He looked all over for me and waited until the theater was empty before going to his home. He sobbed to his mother, "I lost Orpha Lea! I lost Orpha Lea!" Neither of us saw Our Gang that day.

Early that evening Mother took me to Donald's house and both my mother and I apologized for my conduct. I told Donald that the movie was so frightening that I didn't know what to do, so, I went home.

I did not go to a movie again until I was in the seventh grade, junior high, a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie, and, I did not have another real date until I was in high school.



MY OLD PAL LLOYD GEORGE WAID

by
Jacob M. Valentine

I hadn't thought much about Lloyd Waid for the past thirty years until my sister Esther from Racine mailed me a news item saying Lloyd and his wife were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. I congratulated them and also asked Lloyd to identify our classmates in a school picture. He wrote back saying, *"It must have been in 4th or 5th, because the 6th is where I spent a few days under the warden's desk (Ole Lady Tidmarch). The other two teachers in the 4th and 5th were Miss Ciro and Miss Van Able or vice versa. I saw Ms. Ciro several years later, about 20 years...."*

In the class photo I sent to Lloyd is a row of drawings of Eskimos with the conventional dog sleds, kayaks and igloos. Lloyd's imaginative mind, hardly following the instructions of the teacher, filled the entire sheet with the face of an Eskimo in his fur-lined parka.

Lloyd Waid and I began Lincoln School at the same time, probably in first grade in 1923. Lloyd, the son of a Russian mother and an American-born father, became one of my best pals. Lloyd's father, a chauffeur for the Horlick's Malted Milk family, was probably Welsh considering that he named his son after the British prime minister, David Lloyd George. Whenever Lloyd was introduced to someone, he'd say, "Waid, W-A-I-D, not W-A-D-E." Lloyd always chose to be different. Lloyd and I were in the same grade until he dropped out of junior high school in the seventh grade. Later, he and I were in the CCCs together in the late 1930's.

After the sixth grade at Lincoln, Lloyd went to McKinley Jr. High but dropped out of the 7th grade and went to Vocational School. Also called the Continuing Educational School, the "Con School," taught shop classes, such as auto mechanics, carpentry, and printing, perhaps with good intentions. The public considered it a way of keeping troublemakers in school and off the streets.

I have always hung out with people who made me laugh. Lloyd, especially inventive in his humor, danced his way as I walked down State Street. His Charleston and acrobatic dances were precursors to some of Michael Jackson's popular dance steps. Another gag was to stand at the corner of a store with a large plate glass window. With half his body concealed by the corner, Lloyd would raise both his arm and leg on the outside. If you looked at the reflection and his half-body at the same time, the view would be of a person raising both his arms and legs above the floor. Then Lloyd would face the corner of the building. Putting his arms behind the building, he would bend his arms at the elbow and thrust them out to make believe someone was choking him.

Once Lloyd jumped off the Island Park bridge and broke his ankle. Because he could not play outside he sat in front of a window overlooking State Street. His view included an ice cream parlor across the street where my sister Helen worked. Lloyd wrote, *"I used to watch her sneak a*

spoon of ice cream once in a while. So crime doesn't pay. There's always someone watching. I am sure she is going straight now."

Muscle and bone with no fat, Lloyd could chin himself with one arm, and do kips on the parallel bar, but he couldn't swim. If he put himself into a ball in the water, he sank. Lloyd reminisced in his letter, *"By the way, I still can't swim. Wore my Mae West all the time. But never got seasick, both ways [Lloyd was in the Army in Europe]. Remember the diving bell you built out of an old water tank? You had a glass front cut out of it, a hose attached to the top, and somebody would have to keep pumping air in with a bike pump. I tried it once but the water came up to my face, and I didn't want any part of it. So you were pretty creative yourself."* Actually, someone else built the diving bell and brought it to the New Quarry, but nobody was brave enough to try it out so I did--water has always been my element, unless it's cold.

Some afternoons Lloyd and I would walk down to the docks where the fishing boats docked. My father sometimes gave us "bloaters" (foot-long herrings used for bait for lake trout) that we'd put on a stringer and walk home making believe we caught them. In the Negro section someone would usually ask if we'd sell them, which we did for twenty or thirty-five cents a stringer. Lloyd wrote, *"I remember the time when your Dad gave us a fish head (no doubt a large lake trout) and we cooked it up. I guess we ate it all up. Then there was the time you got hooked up on a post that had a clothes hook, when you lived in that alley between State and West streets."* I still have a scar from that episode when I tried to peek into our house on 934 1/2 Forest Street by climbing the clothes pole; then slipped and caught my underarm on the hook. Fortunately, no blood vessels or nerves were torn.

Our first adventure out of Racine was a hitch-hiking trip to Milwaukee. Each with a quarter for food, we headed out Highway 41 walking miles when rides were slow on the way to the Natural History Museum. The realistic taxidermic dioramas were inspiring, one in particular--in a snowy Wisconsin forest, four timber wolves were leaping into the air to bring down a white-tailed deer.

On our next adventure, Lloyd and I hitched rides sixty miles south to the Chicago World's Fair. In 1932, Sally Rand and her Fan Dance were the main attraction on the Midway. When we got into the city, we took the El into the Loop and walked the mile or so to the Fair. We talked to some kids who told us about the hole under the cyclone fence that surrounded the Fair grounds. There we found a gang of Near-Northsiders playing craps. Lloyd and I crawled under and, after checking out Sally, who never showed up on the outside stage, we visited the educational exhibits.

Soon bored, we walked the several blocks to the Shedd Aquarium, one of the first great aquaria in the country that had displays of exotic fishes. After a round or two, we walked to the Field Natural History Museum, where the grand elephant display by Carl Akely greeted us at the immense foyer. Congratulating ourselves for leaving the Fair, we walked the halls looking at hundreds of dioramas. At closing time we walked through beautiful Grant Park that stretched north for miles along Michigan Avenue and Lake Michigan, marveling at the fountains and statues.

Chicago, the Windy City, can be hot in summer but that day with the lake breezes was comfortable. The park darkened and after our busy day, we settled down to sleep on two adjacent park benches.

No one else was around until early morning when we were awakened by a prostitute and a cab driver arguing. Later, a cop showed up. By then we'd had enough of Chicago. Later that morning we walked blithely through tough Negro neighborhoods without incident. We never did buy a bike.

Lloyd shared my mortifying trips to the surplus commodities station. He wrote, *"We used to hop a slow train out to the Junction and get off to get our welfare flour, then carry the bag back to State Street."* When Lloyd and I were together in the CCCs, we rode freights and passenger trains from Merrillan Junction to Racine and back and hopped the Green Bay and Western from Hatfield to visit his relatives at Wild Rose. In his letter, Lloyd asked, *"Remember when we rode the train to Milwaukee and had to jump off when it was still going, you didn't run fast enough, so you rolled a bit?"* I explained later that my feet were so frozen after riding all night that I couldn't feel them when I hit the pavement.

In the spring and summer months when we were in our teens, we would wash up at home and put on clean white shirts and go down to Island Park where we'd hang around the swings and parallel bars where the more athletic among us would do chin-ups and kips. Mostly we hung out and tried to impress the girls. Once in a while we'd even talk to them.

Then there were times in my junior year in high school when Lloyd, Peter Brown, George Petersen, and I would skip school on Friday afternoons and play "Hearts" on George's porch. I never did learn to play cards and never enjoyed playing. The four of us caddied at the Racine Country Club on Saturdays during the summer season. The four of us joined the CCCs in 1934 and were stationed at Camp Arbutus Lake at Hatfield, Wisconsin. I quit after nine months, but Lloyd had found a home and stayed three years in the CCCs until he was twenty-one, which was the mandatory age limit. He then returned to Racine and worked for Case Tractor Works until he was drafted into the Army.

Lloyd's letter ended with, *"If you have any trouble reading this letter, send it back and I'll try to translate it for you."*

Your good friend

L.G.

"It's like I was telling my bride the other day, if the next 10 years go as fast as the last 10, we are not going to be here much longer."



A GRADUATE AT LAST

by
Lois Diehl

When Conrad finished high school in 1956 college was not one of his immediate priorities. The Diehl's had told Conrad and his four sisters over and over they would all go to college. The oldest sister, Joan, was a biology student at Ohio University in nearby Athens. Conrad's father was insistent and Conrad first enrolled in the ROTC program at Ohio State University. He dropped out after one semester. The next semester, his father drove him to Kenyon College. As the story goes Conrad and bags were back home in Chesterhill almost simultaneously with his father's return.

All Conrad wanted to do was work on a land oil rig in central Ohio and buy a new red convertible. Conrad had been fascinated with drilling rigs even as a small boy. He and his playmate Ron would build working models of drilling rigs out of lumber and scraps and then pretend they were drilling for oil. Conrad's sister Joan related that another kid, Eddie, used to bug them by tearing down their rigs. One day Conrad and Ron found a solution to the Eddie problem. Eddie was found tied to a tree later that day.

In the fall of 1958 Conrad enrolled in the Petroleum Engineering program at Marietta College without his parents' knowledge. He drove the 35 mile commute to classes every day for almost a semester before they discovered he was going to college and not to work. When they realized he now had the desire to attend college, he moved into a dorm on campus the following semester.

Conrad was not the typical college student at that time. He was several years older than most of his classmates. We married at the end of his Sophomore year. Nothing seemed to go as we planned. Conrad dropped out again with one year left before graduation and that elusive degree. He went to work for Halliburton Co. in Parkersburg, W. Va., and decided he didn't need a degree. Marietta College President, Bay Irvine, had taken a liking to Conrad. So, between the two of us we encouraged Conrad to return to classes. He took only several courses that first semester and babysat Kevin while I taught. Kevin accompanied Dad everywhere--to the petroleum lab, classes, and the library. At the end of summer school Conrad had only two semesters left. According to Joan, Conrad's father used to say, "Most students get through college in four years, but Conrad stretched it out to eight years." I'm not sure if the family was more relieved or proud that day in June 1964 when Conrad finally donned his cap and gown, marched down the center aisle, and claimed his hard earned degree. It was a red letter day for all and certainly for Kevin who pointed out his Dad to anyone who would listen.

PS: It was a double red letter day for him and his family when Conrad received his MS in Petroleum Engineering from Penn State University in December 1967.



THE FISH THAT FLEW AWAY

by
Joan Ireland

The sea gulls were sweeping low over the beach in Virginia at the Naval Dam Neck Training Station near Virginia Beach. Their raucous squeal broke the stillness of the early morning as each gull vied for position for that first tasty morsel from the sea.

The sun had just risen. Its hazy glow shone not only on the sea gulls but on other white clad fishermen trying their luck and expertise to catch that unwary fish. It was early in the sixties and the young seamen had just come off a six month tour of sea duty ending in the Caribbean Sea near Cuba. One of these young fishermen was my youngest brother, Dennis, who was stationed at the nearby Naval Base.

Dennis had his fishing gear, but, as he wasn't such an avid fisherman as his pals, both those flying high and those clad in Navy Whites, he cast his line into the water, sank down behind a sand dune, pulled his Navy white hat over his eyes and promptly went to sleep. The sun, as it rose higher in the sky, poured its radiant heat over the fishermen.

Soon Dennis felt a tug on his pole.

"By, George," he cried, "I think I've caught a fish!"

Dennis rose from the sand dune and began to reel in his line. The fish at times fought the line with such vigor that Dennis knew he must have a huge blue marlin or perhaps a tuna. He strained his eyes out to sea, but could see nothing. Now the line pulled and he could sense an upward movement as the line soared into the air.

"I wonder what I caught! A flying fish?"

A few more quick hard turns on the reel and Dennis finally viewed the catch of the day--a giant sea gull, the fishhook firmly entrenched under its wing. My brother, who is tender hearted and would hardly kill a fly unless it was biting him, gathered the sea gull, who by now realized he couldn't get rid of the hook, in his arms. With difficulty, Dennis removed the hook and found the poor bird was bleeding. Dennis wrapped the bird in his jacket and returned to base to bind up his wounded wing.

Dennis washed its wing and made a bed for the sea gull in a cardboard box and went to supper. Like Heidi of the Swiss Mountains, he hid some rolls and fish from his supper in his jacket pocket and fed his little feathered friend as soon as he returned to the barracks. Only a few of Dennis pals knew of his new friend. They intended to keep the gull a secret as the camp commander would surely look askance at the intruder.

A movie was being shown that night at the Base. As Dennis and his friends got ready to go to the Recreation Hall they thought of the sea gull and remembered that their barracks was inspected randomly and this might be the night.

"What are we going to do with the sea gull?"

Dennis was the last one to leave the barracks that night. As he hurried to his seat in the hall after the movie started, he hoped everyone would be watching the movie and not notice the suspicious lump under his jacket. By now, the sea gull knew Dennis and cuddled up close in his lap as Dennis viewed the movie. Soon however, the call of nature was too much for the sea gull and he started to squirm. Dennis carefully moved the bird and set it on the floor between his legs hoping he could hold the bird still with the pressure of his legs.

The sea gull had other ideas. He twisted out of this new snare and then rose into the air. In horror, Dennis and his pals saw the sea gull as it deposited various grey and sticky substances over the now shrieking and rowdy Navy Personnel. Dennis' eyes were glued to the Naval Commander who had decided to join the seamen that night. Then, it happened. His worst fears were realized as a huge blob landed fairly on his commander's upturned face and Naval Whites.

Everyone scattered and stormed the exits which were crowded as no one wanted to be in the room with a scared and diarrhetic sea gull. The room was soon emptied and finally the bird, sensing freedom and an open door, soared through the air away from the Naval Base. If you look high in the heavens, you may still see him flying today.

The next day, all the men were ordered to stand at attention outside the base while the Post Commander demanded to know who brought the sea gull into the hall. My brother stood at attention. Even his pals, who knew of his part in the escapade, stood silently. No one said a word.

Dennis told me about his fishing trip this past December while I was visiting my family in Connecticut. We were all sitting around the dining room table recalling stories and events of our past when my brother glanced at his wife, Lauren, and asked her, "Do you think the time limitation has run out and I am safe from prosecution on my fishing trip while I was stationed at Dam Neck?" They counted up the years and realized that over thirty years had elapsed and Dennis could now tell his story.



THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT/ALIEN

by
Marge DeVillier

I don't know what port of entry to the United States he/she migrated through, Ellis Island, Mexico, or Canada, but this illegal immigrant found its way to the Illinois State Psychiatric Hospital. I'll call it an 'it' since I was never able to determine its gender, but this Alien nearly got me expelled from nursing and it almost put me in the jailhouse.

I don't know why it was residing on the campus of the Springfield, Illinois, Psychiatric Hospital. It may have had schizophrenia, or some kind of psychoses or neurosis or it may have been suffering from alcoholism like its former owner; however, I believe it was a manic depressive, the way it raced around the grounds, up and down trees and even up and down the stairs in the nurses' home. Maybe it had rabies, I'm not sure.

Have you guessed what it is yet?

Let me give you some more clues. The Immigrant/Alien had a long gray bushy tail and a soft-furry gray body with an impish, cute little face and soft little paws. It was given to me by an alcoholic patient at the hospital. This story could have ended here, but the Immigrant/Alien hadn't dealt me enough grief yet.

The alcoholic patient, whom I will call Bob, entertained many of the student nurses like me with the tricks he had taught the Alien. The Alien would run up and down Bob's sweater. He would also take cigarettes out of a pack, then he would put them into Bob's curled up hand. The Alien would run up and down the trees, but he always came back to Bob.

I was especially fascinated by all this, and the Alien seemed to take a liking to me. It would crawl up my nurse's cape and onto my shoulder. But, alas, Bob was finally discharged. The big question was, "What to do with his trained and adorable Alien?"

Bob asked me if I would like to take over the ownership and care of the Alien. I accepted too quickly. I failed to ponder the responsibility and consequences of such an undertaking. Much to my later regret, I accepted the challenge and agreed to assume the ownership and transfer of the Alien to my care.

With some trepidation we made plans to transfer the Alien. We agreed to meet at 8:00 P.M. one night under the Alien's favorite tree. Bob agreed to build a portable cage to transport the Alien. At the appointed night and hour of trysting, I put on my nurse's cape and met my patient under the mystery tree where the exchange took place. I then hid it under my nurse's cape and high-tailed it back to the nurses' home and found a spot in my room to put the cage.

All my classmates came running to my room to see the new nurses home resident. Then we started feeling sorry for the caged Alien and decided to let it out. One of my classmates put her hand in the cage to take it out and it bit her on the thumb.

"What to do now?"

We decided we had to take her to the Emergency Room so we concocted a story that she stabbed herself with cuticle scissors. The doctor went along with us and bandaged the thumb. Later, he told us he knew it was an animal bite. Because of our youth and inexperience we didn't even think about rabies.

I let it stay out of its cage in my room. That night it went wild running up and down the beds and the drapes covering the long windows. The next morning I had to go on duty. I tried to catch it, but it kept running away and hiding from me. Finally I had to leave, leaving it loose in my room.

When the maid opened the door, it ran out of the room and scared the maid half to death. I was ultimately summoned to the director of nurses office later on in the morning. She had found out I had accepted the Thing from a patient so she really read me the riot act on the carved-in-stone law on no fraternization or such arrangements between a patient and a student nurse which would surely end in a discharge of the student from the Alton Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. Also, she ranted and raged on about removing the Thing which would be considered stolen property from the state of Illinois. She then ordered me to go back to the nurses' home and catch that Thing.

I was one scared student nurse. I ran up and down that huge three story building and somehow finally caught the Thing and got it back into the cage. That night I brought the Thing in the cage under my cape back to the trysting tree and released it, a first in the Catch and Release National Squirrel Program. I didn't hear any more about it from the nursing office in Springfield or my home hospital nursing office.

I don't know to this day where my Immigrant Alien squirrel is, but someone said they saw a gray furry streak heading for the border a long time ago, oh, in about 1948, in that far-away Illinois state.



THE LAST BET

by
Doris Bentley

At 93, Mama had her first stroke around January 10, 1986. It affected her left arm only slightly. She was able to come home in a few days. On Saturday morning, January 25, she asked me read to her the racing form on Evangeline Downs for that day's races. I told her I could not find the Evangeline Downs races.

"You can't read," she told me flatly.

So I read all the column headings in the paper to convince her that I had not overlooked the Evangeline Downs racing news.

Then she asked, "Would you go to City News Stand to get the program?"

When I went to City News, Mr.-- had her program ready. "No charge," he said, "we must have given her the wrong form."

I came home and, at the lunch table, Mama asked me to read the first and fourth races. "Tell me the horse, the trainer, and the jockey. And tell me the recommended winners at the bottom of the page."

After I had read it to her (several times in some cases), she said, "I want you to go to the racetrack and bet on these numbers in the first and fourth races. Now go to John's window. That's the \$50 window."

Soon she said, "Go now. The races start at 1:00."

"No," I explained, dodging her insistence, "The races are this evening. I have plenty of time."

By then Mama was tired and went back to bed, and I didn't go to the racetrack.

Soon Beebe and Tom Grace from Baton Rouge came to see her and they had a nice visit. Beebe and Tom are the children of Alta Grace, who was a childhood friend in Loreauville. They had kept up with each other all those years.

About 4:00 that afternoon, Mama had another stroke. I telephoned Dr. Smith, but he was not on call that weekend. I was referred to Dr. Al Rees, an associate of Dr. Smith. I don't know if Dr. Rees knew that Mama was a friend of his mother.

"I'll come over," he said, after I explained her symptoms to him. I didn't expect a house visit. I suppose that because he lived near Fatima Church, it was closer to come here than to meet us at Hamilton Hospital way out on Congress Street.

After examining her, Dr. Rees said, "As you know, this is very serious for a person of her age, and I doubt that she will get over it. If you can handle it, I would prefer keeping her here than taking her to the hospital. I think it's best she be at home."

Remembering the days before easy access to hospitals and funeral homes, when we had deaths and wakes in the home, I knew I could handle it. Besides, I had long ago realized that at Mama's age, death was near. I had accepted that. I don't think it was as easy for her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren.

The next day, on Sunday, I checked the newspaper, and one of Mama's bets had paid off!!! We put the racing program and her glasses on the stereo table next to the rocker where she sat to study the racing form.

Mama died on Thursday, January 30, Suzanne's birthday, about 11:00 a.m., only a few months before her April 22 birthday. She would have been 94 years old.

The next day, when the funeral home was open to visitors, I saw someone I did not know sitting among the guests. I went over and she introduced herself as "Bridget." I realized that she was the person from the racetrack of whom Mama had often spoken and with whom I had often overheard her speaking when she made her reservations. I thanked her for being so nice to Mama over the years, and told her about my not making her bets on Saturday.

"We always sent her to John's window," she said. "She couldn't see well enough to count her money. So she would put it in her hand and let the tellers take her bets; then, when she went to collect, she couldn't see what they gave her. We sent her to John because he wouldn't cheat her."

Imagine those employees taking such personal interest and care of a 90+-year-old woman at the races!

I asked the Catholic Daughters to say the Glorious Mysteries for the rosary. It was appropriate for her remarkable life:

Born in 1888, Martha Camos Broussard went to the State Normal for Teachers at 15 years of age, in 1904. She graduated with a teacher's certificate in 1911. There was no high school in Loreauville yet in 1904. She had completed seventh grade and had to take eighth grade work at "The Normal" before she could be accepted in the teacher-training program. That consisted of two years of high school and two years of college. She also lost a year when she had to come home because of illness--flu or pneumonia.

Mama was a pioneer in public education for 45 years. She taught in Brusly for one year, then came back to Loreauville to teach at Belle Place until she married in 1917. In 1920, she returned to teaching and became principal of the Loreauville Elementary School until 1945. She took classes by extension from SLI (now USL) after it became a college in 1920/21 and acquired a Bachelor's Degree in 1940. In 1945 she became one of the first "Visiting Teachers" in the state and began working toward her Master's Degree at LSU, which she was awarded in 1950. She served as state president of the Louisiana Visiting Teachers Association in ____.

Mama helped Daddy through his business ventures, nursed him through cancer, and welcomed me and her five grandchildren in 1953. She retired in 1956 because teachers were not allowed to teach after they were 65. She moved with us to Lafayette in 1959. She traveled extensively until she was in her 80s. Mama was a wealth of energy, information, wisdom--an inspiration--until she died. That wisdom and inspiration has affected me and her grandchildren.



