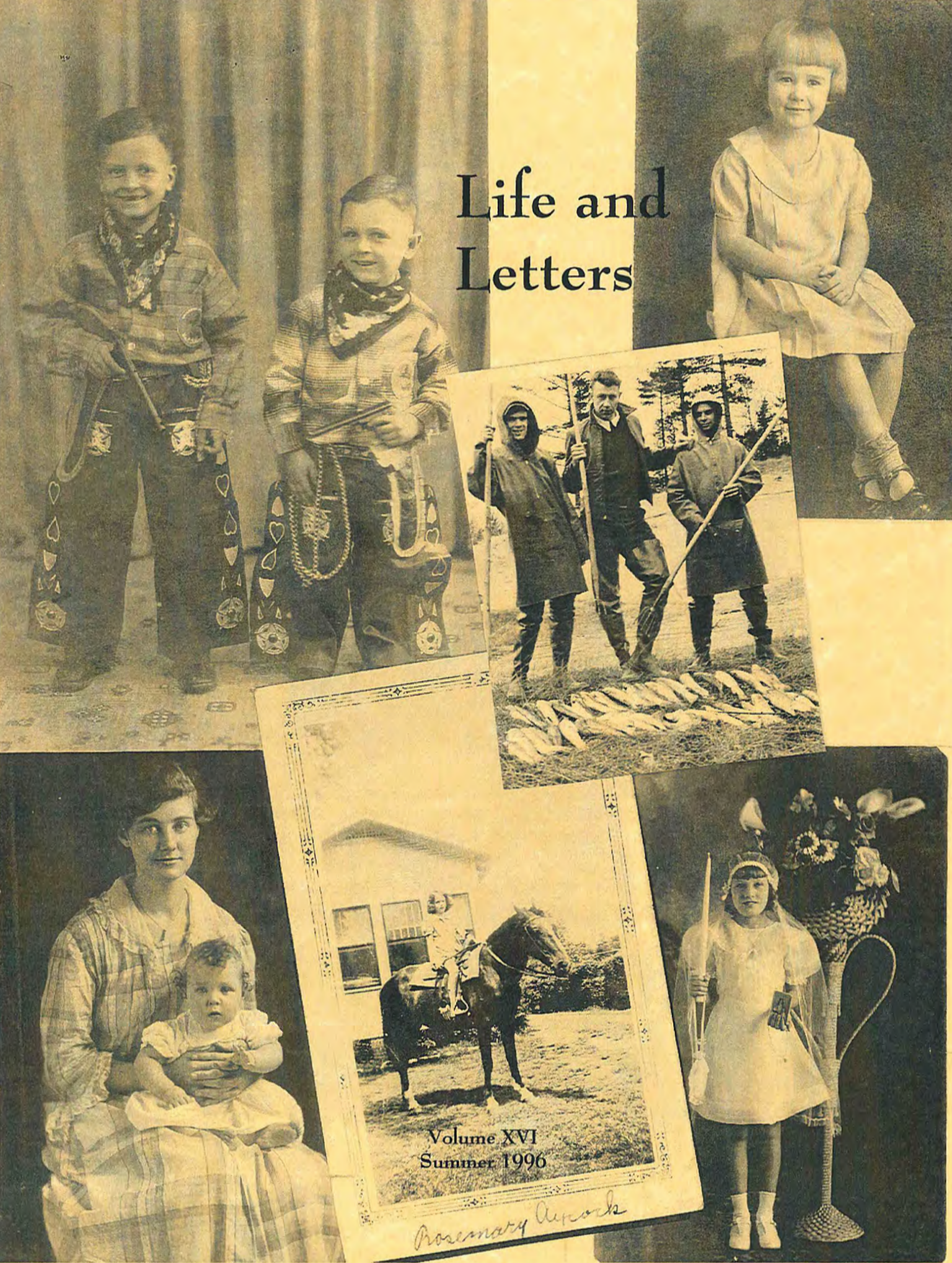

Life and Letters

Volume XVI
Summer 1996

When Leo Tolstoy wrote that "Every human being is a plot," I imagine he had looked at human nature with the same eyes I'm being taught to develop each time I listen to the stories of **Life & Letters.** The chronicles of the lives of my students approach the 2000th story mark this year, our seventh as a life history writing class. With each compilation of stories at the end of a semester, I find myself less and less worried about what to say. The catch is how to say it. If you have shared these volumes with us in the past, then you know by now that these introductory remarks repeat themselves each time.

So how do I write, again, a welcome that introduces new readers to the efforts of my students? How do I explain (again!) that these students are my teachers? That the lessons learned are the lessons lived? That the partaking of story is the sharing of life? I was not surprised when I read this month a newspaper headline of the plane crash off Long Island: *230 Passengers, 230 Stories.* The journalist recognized the crux of story--a life. Period. Old. Young. Somewhere in between. Its form has so many variables. But one thing's for certain: Each life is headed somewhere. As these writers reminisce those variables and that direction, they invite us all to join them along the way. Welcome to **Life & Letters.**

Joan Stear
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana
Summer 1996

Front Cover, clockwise: (top right corner) Fran Gross; Jake Valentine (middle) with friends; Lucille Landry Sellers, First Communion at St. John's Cathedral, 1937; Rosemary Aycock; Virginia Cook on mother Allene Harmon's lap, 1919; Jim Jennings on left with brother Edward at Mardi Gras 1928

What is *Life and Letters*?
by
Jean Smith

It's the sound of gunshot echoing through Tiennemen Square.
It's a tornado's roar, whirling and twisting high overhead.
It's the hearty laughter of yesterday's child,
now grown old--on the outside, at least--
Or the voice of a classmate as she calls from the past.

It's feeling the cold flood waters of Southwest Louisiana
Or the warm sands of a faraway beach
Or the cool peppermint breeze dancing by when the air is still.

It's feeling the pain of a son lost to a war long ago
Or the joy of a sunrise out the hospital window
the first morning after the birth of a first daughter.

It's touching the hurtful fingers of a blazing fire
Or the soft fur of a happy puppy.
It's the first tender caress of your own true love.
It's your mother's last kiss before death.

Life and Letters is the taste of Grandmother's lemonade
as it slides down your throat on a scorching hot day
Or the sometimes bitter taste of life--acrid as pure quinine--
Or the sticky pink sweetness of cotton candy at the passing carnival.

It's the waltz of a distant carousel--
your first dizzy ride on the ebony horse with hooves of gold.
It's the screaming siren of an ambulance--
the last fearful ride to the hospital with a spouse in attack.

It's suddenly remembering someone from out of the past, where forgotten things belong,
Or feeling a lump in your throat when you smell the warmth of baked bread or the sweet perfume
of one snowy white trumpet called Lily-of-the-Valley.

I suppose *Life and Letters* is about seeing things clearly--
and smelling the roses--before it's too late.

(Editor's Note: Jean's story earned a "ditto" remark from us all when she read this piece as a review of our summer session. My heart said, "Amen" to the last view I had of myself that very morning: dashing out, late already if I tallied in my driving time--not unusual for me these days--when I noticed a rose had bloomed overnight. My hand was on the gate, but I stopped and bent over to breathe in the rose's perfume. *Life & Letters* has been my own teacher. Though I kick against the goads, I'm constantly reminded that it's not too late, that surprises never are.--J.E.S.)

LIFE & LETTERS
Summer 1996

Seated, left to right: Ethel Bickham; Jean Smith; Lucille Sellers; Joan Stear
Standing, left to right: Jim Jennings; Rosemary Aycock; Fran Gross;
Virginia Cook; Doris Bentley; Jake Valentine
Class members not in photo: Joe Glorioso; Ruth Oates; Mickey Torcivia; Dee Wentworth

LIFE & LETTERS thanks, as always, the English Department
at the University of Southwestern Louisiana and
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ANN'S NOSE STONE
by
J.M. Jennings, Jr.

In the fall of 1947, my first daughter, Ann, a happy, intelligent child almost three years old, was an inquisitive youngster, and probably the first word she ever uttered was "why?". Ann was curious about anything that walked, flew or sat still.

This particular Saturday afternoon, Ann was studying stones, small, smooth gravel rocks she found in the backyard. We lived at 3155 State Street Drive, New Orleans, in a lower apartment rented from Mrs. Tom Coffer. After Mr. Coffer died, Mrs. Coffer converted their home into a "For Rent" downstairs apartment and an upstairs apartment which she occupied.

Mrs. Coffer was an enthusiastic flower gardener and kept a small pile of washed, pea-size gravel which she used to put in the bottom of clay flower pots for drainage. Many of the stones were as colorful as semi-precious jewels to Ann. She played with her "jewels" on the sidewalk, arranging some in the shape of necklaces and others in the round shape of bracelets. Every so often, she would call her mother or me to come see an especially beautiful, translucent pebble. Occasionally, Ann would bring a "jewel" for her one year old sister, Elizabeth, to inspect.

"Don't let the baby put that dirty thing in her mouth," Margaret or I would caution.

"Don't worry, I won't. I just want her to see something pretty."

Elizabeth, in a stroller, couldn't get down to the ground and find her own rocks.

Abruptly our calm and serene outdoors afternoon was shattered by Ann's screaming.

"I put it in to see if it would fit and now I can't get it out!" Floods of tears. "It hurts. I can't breathe!"

Our little darling had shoved a small pebble up her right nostril. Her frantic efforts to get it out, plus her crying and sobbing, had caused the little rock to become wedged tightly out of sight. Of course, she could breath through her mouth, but parent-like, we wondered if the offending stone could be sucked into her lungs by her frantic efforts to dislodge it.

I pounded on Ann's back, but no stone came out. I next held her mouth and left nostril closed while ordering her to breath out. That didn't get the stone out either. Margaret raced into our house and came back with a pair of tweezers, but Ann's nose was too small for the tweezers to open wide enough to get a solid grip on the rock. I produced my mechanics needle-nose pliers, but they were too large. Neighbors began to arrive to inquire what all the screaming was about. Some were muttering--child abuse!

One person, whose name I have forgotten, suggested that our druggist might have a pair of surgical forceps. No one said "take her to the emergency room." Were there emergency rooms in 1947?

Our drugstore was a block away on the corner of Calhoun St. and Claiborne Ave. The four of us rushed there (through the back yard of the Curtiss' house across the street) carrying our sobbing Ann. The druggist took one look and knew what to do. Placing an open can of snuff under her nose, he held his other hand over Ann's mouth. Desperate for air, Ann breathed deeply and inhaled a strong whiff of snuff. She began a series of gut wrenching sneezes. The rock came flying out. The patient was cured, and I was only charged fifteen cents for the tin of Garrett snuff. The treatment was free.

That pebble is stored safely in my cuff-link box, and I'm still seeking an appropriate occasion to have it mounted on a gold neck chain for a gift. Next birthday, perhaps.

THOSE WERE THE DAYS
by
Jean Smith

"Those were the days, my friend!....We thought they'd never end!....We'd sing and dance....forever and a day!"

The familiar song of the sixties spins 'round and 'round in my head like an old phonograph record. Linking my life to yesterday, a lively thread of a voice sings with wild abandon--calling me back to those days, my friend, when a tiny event could absorb itself in an aura of life and death importance.

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Smiling at my own folly, I drove at dusk along the snowy streets of Columbus, Ohio, thinking about, of all things, the Scarecrow of Oz--and of his receiving the coveted diploma, his undeniable proof of a brain. If I were lucky this icy February night, my "proof of worth" would be the Best Actress Award at the regional Community Theater Contest at Players' Club. My magic might be that little piece of parchment with three signatures hastily scribbled and scrawled by Charles C. Ritter, Ph. D., head of Ohio State University Theater. Raymond Savoy, Broadway's own costume designer emeritus; and David L. Dobson, director of Playhouse-on-the Green.

Driving and dreaming, I thought, "If by chance, I were to win, wouldn't that, after all, be positive proof that I'm somebody wonderful--even though my very own mother and the rest of my world say not? Wouldn't it? Wouldn't...?" Then sighing the small breath of lost hope, a faint, "Oh, well," escaped my lips. My thin smile faded to fear as my mind reluctantly erased the idea of winning. "How silly!" Of course, this honor was way beyond my grasp. I knew that. In the history of the competition, Best Actress had never gone to a neophyte. Not once.

Turning my old beige Chevy, Ringo, into the dark snow-covered back alley of Franklin Street, I parked behind the theater's rear entrance. My first car, the great old rattle-trap formerly owned by a good-natured hippie, remained outrageously decked-out with brilliant signs of the times, bodacious flower decals and bright round peace symbols. Suddenly realizing that neither of us, my prize clunker nor I belonged at the prestigious Players' Club, I hesitated. Soon Ringo would be surrounded and smothered by sedate Cadillacs, lofty Lincolns. Soon--I would be among a sea of strange faces and scared stiff with stage-fright. Sheepishly, I cracked open the door and put one foot on the cold ground. My stomach sank. Oh dear God, too late to back out now!

Slowly, I trudged toward the building, my footprints being the first to break the snow's sparkling surface. My face and nose stung with crisp clean-smelling swirls of winter air. Then nervously, I turned the brass knob and pushed open the rear door--a full two hours early. The metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly was, for me, a painstaking time-consuming process.

Tentatively, I entered the darkened theater. I wondered, "How in God's name did I get myself into this?" For a solid year, I'd been content to help with props at Village Little Theater, a tiny place on Columbus' north side. In awe, I'd watched the fearless thespians laugh, dance, scream, shout, cry, whisper, and portray life to its fullest--in all the most exciting, most agonizing, and most frightening and most joyous extremes! With casts and crews I'd partied after rehearsals, and laughed and sang 'till wee hours in the taverns, and silently envied those not born to be shy--like me.

Then one night, right out-of-the-blue, VLT's old director, Al Germanson, said, "Jean, I want you to try out for Maude in Captain's Paradise. You'd be perfect for the role." I laughed, "It's a joke"! But it wasn't and Al was right. He was a master at type casting. Immediately, I was hooked, addicted, submerged and surrounded in the thrill of the live theater! Acting became the love of my life, a magnificent obsession to the exclusion of all else...but the role of this cold winter night was only my second--and a far cry from type casting. Therese was a fascinating character, the title role femme fatale from a play based on a novel of the great French author, Emile Zola. A murderess in a French melodrama! An impossible challenge!

"What, in God's name, am I doing here?" I whispered to myself. Stepping into the eerie darkness, I took off my boots and coat, brushed the stray snowflakes from my face. Anxiously, I moved down the long terrazzo hallway, listening to the sharp click-click-click of my heels echo in the emptiness. I knew my way, even in shadow, having been there often--watching others. Turning left at the backstage door, I walked through the green room filled with ghostly silence, and on up to the room at the top of the narrow wooden stairway.

In the stillness, the wonderful aroma of live dreams filled the air! A flick of the light switch and...Voila! Walls and walls of mirrors sparkled and danced alive. With long tables and metal folding chairs in front of the bright glass, each vanity was surrounded with large, round, glowing light bulbs--and waiting patiently for an eager actor to sit and begin the strange slow ritual of transformation. Floor to ceiling shelves on the right wall contained box upon box of magic--make-up base, greasepaint, eyebrow pencils and liners, eye shadow, mascara, rouge and lipsticks of every shade and color--pinks, oranges, crimsons, purples and peaches--even green and black. White pencils for contouring, dark pencils for age lines--wigs, eyelashes, mustaches, hair-pieces, and beards. Powder for faces and powder for hair. Everything imaginable was there to produce illusion, fantasy, and tricks of the trade. Never had I had access to such a variety of dream-making material! With these notions it was possible to indulge in wiles, subterfuge, fraud, and imposture-- to create heavens and hells--and to whisper the sweet breath of life into them all!

Carefully choosing the right shades, I sat on an isolated corner chair and, ever so slowly, began the ancient Rite of Actors--that quiet metamorphosis of looks and attitude called--"getting in character." With the skillful use of beautiful paints and a silky, long black wig, gradually I left the consciousness of the ordinary American wife and mother of the '60's and became an 1880's Parisian, Zola's dark and haunting French murderess--Therese Raquin.

Quickly then, I dressed in a smooth ivory silk petticoat and long, bustled, black mourning dress. Taking a slow deep breath, I looked in the bright mirror one last time. Yes! Oh, yes! Maybe I had a chance after all. Therese Raquin of Paris gazed into my eyes...a tiny smile came to the corners of her painted red lips. Satisfied, Therese sat before her mirrored image and reviewed lines during the long void. Then, excited happy actors began clamoring in, breaking her spell.

"Ten minutes to curtain!" The stage manager's voice carried up the narrow stairway. "All actors below in the green room--now!" he yelled. Moving downstairs, Therese nodded politely, but did not speak to the noisy contestants and busy stagehands. Anxiously, while chanting the monotonous mantra of vocal exercises, the "nanaynee mamayme a-e-I-o-u," she alternated between sitting alone and pacing the wooden planks like a caged cat.

"Curtain call! Three minutes!" Only then did I learn from the stage manager that the scene from Therese would be presented last. I would have to wait and wonder the entire evening. I broke character! Now I wanted to run jump into old Ringo and sneak off to the safety of home.

Like shadowy fencing partners, the Frenchwoman and I dueled with imaginary foils, exchanging mental thrusts and parries...back and forth....

"God, why did I let the thrill of playing Therese get me into this mess?" I asked myself.

"Because you're a little fool! You adore playing me!" Therese snapped back, angry and impatient.

"Why did I listen to you? You trapped me!"

"You love escaping your own reality, and you know it!"

"Didn't you--didn't everyone know I was too new, too scared to play Therese?"

"Mon chere, who cares? You hadn't the power to refuse anyway! Don't you dare back out now!" Fencing back and forth...back and forth...thrust and parry.

I would make a fool of myself--and in front of the professionals and the whole city, by giving an amateur performance of HER! Damn!! Why on earth did I get stagestruck with the damn theater anyway?!

Terrified, I paced and sat and paced...and paced and sat again...waiting for hours for my starting call. My hands riffled nervously through the worn script. Desperately, I squinted at jumping lines of a scene memorized for many months. Wave upon wave of butterflies came over me. A trickle of icy sweat ran down my back. Fears mushroomed. Miraculously, all worked together to produce the exact tensions, suspicions, and shade of high terror required for the climax-scene of Zola's famous melodrama!

"On Stage!" The stage manager's call to the cast of Therese resounded through the quiet green room. "Places--please!"

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Curtain up! Upright and proud, escorted by her dark lover, Laurent, Therese enters and sweeps upstage! A haughty air of confidence barely covers the fright of having just drowned her invalid husband, Camille. In her mother-in law's parlor, the French lovers speak in hushed tones about the boating trip and the horrible "accident." Cunningly and convincingly, Therese pleads with Laurent to forget his guilt--to stay by her side. They whisper dark secrets, and cling together with a wild passion magnified even more by the surge of hidden dangers. Unexpectedly, from upstage left Madame Raquin, Camille's elderly mother, enters in her wheel chair and breaks into the lovers' scene. Like a spear of lightening splitting a black sky, Therese and Laurent part. Ignorant of their devilish schemes, Madame wheels to the small table downstage center. It is Therese, not Laurent, who tells Madame of the drowning of her only son. Just barely does Therese's voice tremble when the kind old woman shows loving sympathy for her newly widowed daughter-in-law.

Therese rushes to place herself behind the grieving woman's wheel chair. Poised nervously, ready to spring at the slightest provocation, the young tigress spits out the final hateful words!

"Pity yourself, woman! Don't pity ME!"

A long silence....a pin could drop.

Ever so slightly, Therese's fragile hands began to tremble. Gazing at Madame like a goddess who sympathizes with her own sacrifice, the murderess is silent. Slowly, a single tear slides down Therese's pale cheek, and she begins to crumble...her head bends slightly to her chest, her slender shoulders slump forward, and she, in sadness and self-imposed defeat, turns and exits upstage left. Silently. Step by slowly treading step. In the far, far distance, a church bell is heard...tolling mournfully....

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Swiftly, the heavy curtain fell! Thundering applause rang out, all through the backstage darkness--and I knew it was a job well done. I was elated. Breathing a long sigh of relief, I started upstairs. And as I passed the stage manager, he whispered, "Good job, Therese! It's a damn shame they don't give an award for beginners...or for melodrama...Great job, though!" Content, but with reluctance, I climbed up the stairs again. Sadly, the time had come to hang up the wonderful French costume. The party was over.

Mass confusion reigned in the crowded dressing room--with all the casts changing clothes and laughing and cheering and congratulating each other and themselves! Abruptly then, en masse they moved to the auditorium to wait for the judges' decisions. Lonely, and finally reaching total acceptance that I had no chance--really none at all--and not feeling a part of things anyway, I went

downstairs to the small kitchen, thankfully sipped hot coffee, and began helping the Ladies Auxiliary wash the pretty china dishes used at intermission.

After hosting the evening's event, Gerald Ness, the director of Players' Club, walked into the kitchen to drink a much deserved cup of coffee. When he saw me, Gerry took the dishtowel from my hand, laid it on the counter top, and said gently, "Jean, why don't you let the others do that? I know you're serious about acting--and the judges may give critiques and suggestions you'll find helpful in the future." And he guided me to the hall door.

"Yes, okay," I said and thanked Gerry. With heels clicking again, I returned through the side brick hall, pushed open the heavy oak-carved doors at the back of the auditorium, and entered. Alone, I sat in the last row. Lonely and tired.

Exhausted and glad the ordeal was ended, I thought about the long night-ride through deep snow. My mind drifted. Sighing deeply, I began to contemplate leaving early.... What?...I thought I heard my name, but wasn't sure. What?...Oh, surely not! The applause was so wonderful and so roaring and so loud and so approving and so unexpected! ! ! ! Yes! Oh, yes!! He said it again!

"THE BEST ACTRESS AWARD FOR 1964 GOES TO JEAN SMITH FOR HER MARVELOUS PORTRAYAL OF THE CUNNING AND DEVIOUS THERESE !!"

Oh, dear God! My body floated from the seat, my feet never touching the long aisle a single time. I flew gently and slowly and with great style up the five stage steps, crossed the boards to center-stage and accepted my award! Then, he kissed my hand! Damn! The old man from Broadway kissed me on the hand and said, "Thank you!" Damn! <u>They</u> are thanking <u>me</u>!

Their little paper with three scribbly signatures gave me self-worth I had never known before, gave me confidence, gave me joy and love and happiness and acceptance!

And...<u>THEY</u> are thanking <u>ME</u>!

I knew then I was an actress for life! Amid the most beautiful, wildest applause of my lifetime, I stood center stage; paused and in the spotlight's warm glow...slowly, I took my bow...and graciously walked away...a new person!

"Those were the days, my friend.... We thought they'd never end! We'd sing and dance...forever and a day! We'd live the life we'd choose, we'd fight and never lose! Oh, yes...those were the days!"

And....the record plays on.

THE ARTIST
by
Rosemary Aycock

Cane River ran clear and rippling along the bank which extended some sixty feet before it became a steep hill up to and all along Front street. Bricked in the once bright clay of the area, but darker now with traffic and the seasons, this street had only one main bridge connection to the less settled side of the river.

A native son has since written a book upon which the movie "Steel Magnolias" was based. Now, all the world can see the beauty of this river town called Natchitoches, the first settlement in the Louisiana Purchase.

In the 30's a one room artist's studio was situated at the northern end of the street at the widened top of the hill, and about fifty feet back from the road.

In front of the studio, but in the middle of Front street stood a statue of a black man dressed in a suit with his right hand in the motion of removing his hat. Around the base of the statue in a large surrounding circle, were planted seasonal flowers, while the brick street wound on either side of this tribute to the negro slave.

It was in this artist's studio, and outside on the river bank, that we youngsters, brought by parents desiring occupation for our summer free-time and hopeful of some hidden talent's discovery, spent an hour each day for a week's workshop in art.

Here we learned to recognize form and light and shadow and color, as well as action or stillness, that could be transferred to the sketch pads before us. We tried to handle the brush or chalk or pencil and to feel the touch necessary to transfer intent to sketch pad as we sought to make images take recognizable form.

We listened as our artist-teacher posed the questions that made us think and wonder. "Why does the river look blue?" she would ask. And we'd struggle for the answer only to hear her laugh and say "It's a reflection of the sky--look--see!" And we'd always remember that question every time we'd stroll through an art museum in years to come.

We were, most of us, in the 8-10 year old range and could have been less than enthralled by summer art lessons. But watching this teacher as she held her brush so purposefully, transforming blank pages into river scenes, street happenings and even portraits, we were enthralled, in awe of this young woman.

Mary Belle DeVargas, our teacher and the daughter of the town's jewelry shop owner, captured our attention with her pretty dresses, always with a big ruffle that covered her shoulders and flowed

over her armpits. And there were her colorful little slip-on high-heeled shoes that she could step out of so effortlessly, seeming to make everything so simple and easy. As proof that she could make wonderful things happen, we could almost taste the bright red apples she demonstrated in a lesson, and we could truly smell the perfume of the flowers she had splashed across the canvasses on display in her studio.

Watching her grasp her brush or pencil between her toes, seeing her smile, hearing her laugh, accepting her words of encouragement was a not to be forgotten time, as, armless, she taught us awareness of art, demonstrated her remarkable talent, but most of all, left us with an unforgettable portrait of courage. Miss Mary Belle, born without arms, had overcome this handicap to work artist's magic with her feet--no child could forget that wonder!

Today, Cane River has lost it pristine beauty to the clutter of tourist oriented boat excursion businesses. Front Street is interrupted by several bridges as Natchitoches has grown away from its earliest historic site. The statue of the negro slave is gone, a victim of the disapproval of the NAACP, and my artist-teacher's studio has been replaced by the Tourist Information Center. I'm grateful for having experienced Natchitoches in a kinder, gentler, fascinating time, and I remember, in particular, Mary Belle DeVargas and a very special summer.

FOG
2-8-96
by
Fran Gross

It's five o'clock in the morning in Lafayette, LA. I walk out onto our second floor apartment balcony to wave good-by to Art as he drives off to work. A daily routine.

As I step out onto the balcony a bird flies away, making a screeching sound. I have intruded upon its privacy.

It is foggy. I do not expect to see the moon, but there it is, the waning gibbous moon, shining brightly overhead. Yet I cannot see the lights from Ambassador Caffery Parkway, which usually greet me in the mornings.

The usual car sounds are muffled, yet I hear dogs barking in the distance. I love the early morning before all the hustle and bustle of the day begins.

As I stand by the railing, I watch the fog swirl and dance in the amber glow from the sodium vapor light on the outside of our apartment building. Fog is lovely to see, but dangerous to drive in.

I hear the sound of Art's pickup truck coming around the corner of our building. We wave to each other, and he blinks the light on the back of the pickup. He accelerates, and I listen as the sound of the tires becomes fainter. Art is off to work and it is time for me to start my day.

BOOKEY ET LAPIN
by
Doris Bentley

My brother, J.E., eight years old, died in November, 1926, of diphtheria just before Thanksgiving. As was his custom, Numa Julien had come to the house for a visit. Numa was a black man who had grown up on my grandmother Mamite's farm. He had married Aspasie and had several children, and they lived at the woods which was part of the old farm. Numa stopped by often to visit and to give an account of his family and his crop. This visit was to give Mama sympathy and support.

Numa sat on a chair at the corner of the fireplace in the dining room at Mamite's and entertained me with stories in Negro French about a fox named Bookey and a rabbit named Lapin. Lapin was always outwitting Bookey. The story would culminate with Lapin running into the briar patch to escape Bookey. (I wonder if that's where the rabbit and fox cartoon came from?)

Years later, when we lived in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and the children were very small, I attended a program where a librarian, Jane Wilson, gave a talk on appropriate gift books for children at Christmas. One of the books she recommended was "The Uncle Remus Stories." I was ashamed that I was not familiar with this apparently well-known and popular children's book. I immediately went to the bookstore and purchased a copy of "The Uncle Remus Stories," brought it home, and eagerly began reading it to the children that very night.

Imagine my surprise when I realized that I was reading in English the stories Numa Julien had recounted to me in Negro French at the fireplace at Mamite's house when I was six years old!!! A warm glow envelops me as I write this story about a loyal old family friend who gave me such pleasure that has lasted over the years.

SENSE-ING THROUGH LIFE
by
Lucille Sellers

As the youngest of five children, I was spoiled by my oldest brothers, Marcel, Rees and Clarence. I remember when I was about four years old, my second to oldest brother, Rees, would lift me upon his lap to let me play with his big soft lips. He would pucker his lips as I would pluck them with my fingers. All kinds of weird sounds would come out of his mouth, delighting me for hours!

The card games Papa attended on Saturday evenings about once a month were another diversion for my sister Helen and me. We knew we'd wake up the next morning with goodies on the kitchen table because Papa was a very good card player. Money was scarce during the 1920's and '30's, the years of the Depression, but we children preferred what he came home with, *banqueau*. Helen and I would dash to the sweet smelling kitchen to open bags or boxes which Papa had happily laid on the table the night before. Fresh fruit--oranges or apples-- and homemade *tartes à la Bouillie* (French for sweet dough tarts with fillings of vanilla custard, freshly grated sweet coconut or homemade fruit preserves). Sometimes he even brought jars of canned fruit or vegetables. All of these prizes, or winnings, were homemade by the wives of the local card players, who were wonderful cooks, including Mama.

Helen and I loved *tarte à la Bouillie* best of all. I can still remember the taste of those delicious sweets which we ate as our breakfast the Sunday mornings before going to Mass at St. Regis Catholic Church in Arnaudville. Pecan or peanut pralines or *benné* candy (French for the tiny sesame seeds)--we never knew what treat would be waiting for us--and Papa was so proud of his banqueau.

Another wonderful taste I remember as a very young child is fresh warm sweet milk. My brother Clarence would milk our cows early in the morning before boarding the bus to school in Cecilia. After straining it through a very special fine strainer and distributing the fresh milk into designated containers, he would fill a certain bottle with the still warm milk, put an old fashioned nipple on it and deliver it to me in Papa and Mama's bed. By that time of the morning I was out of my bed and in between Papa and Mama.

I also remember going into the barn yard, which I was forbidden to do without an adult holding my hand, and into the stall where Clarence would go through the same milking routine in the evening. He has always been known to this day as being *canaille* (mischievous). Unknowingly to me, he had sprayed my parade of cats with sweet warm milk straight from the cow's udder. When I gave my attention to my cats, he then sprayed me. I'm sure I ran to the house to Mama with a long sad story.

The smell of fresh coffee beans roasting on the kitchen oil stove in the summer time or the hot coals in Papa and Mama's bedroom fireplace in the winter time permeated our house for a day or so. Mama ground the roasted beans each day for freshly brewed coffee, eventually using the slow hand dripping of very hot water for the final stage. Each stage had a slightly different smell. I didn't like this odor then, but I do now, even though I'm not much of a coffee drinker. Just about an ounce and

a half of strong black coffee in my large cup of hot milk every morning--that's how I like it, coffee, that is!

In looking back to my past experiences and travels, my senses have come alive. I've touched so many beautiful objects and people, seen breathtaking sights and heard ear bursting sounds to gentle whispers. But I believe my most satisfying and heartfelt senses were stirred when I was able to touch and feel the soft tender skin of my six children and fourteen grandchildren as babies--the sounds of their crying as infants, their gurgling and cooing developing into words and then sentences. The sight of my children's beautiful perfect bodies that grew into independent adults with individual personalities and identities so quickly makes me aware of how fast time goes by.

WILD HURRICANES I HAVE KNOWN: BETSY

by

Ruth Burns Oates

I have lived for forty-six years in various towns in South Louisiana, a land of flat prairies, marshes, sugar cane, and rice. I have become accustomed to a view of the earth that is dominated by a vast bowl of sky. In summer, thunderheads come up in a parade of towering white masses along the horizon to the south, for just beyond that horizon lies the Gulf of Mexico. Afternoon thunderstorms are common, and hurricanes may also strike. A good many hurricanes have hit where I lived, and I remember some of them most vividly, for a hurricane can be a wild, wild storm.

In June of 1965 we moved into a big two story Victorian house in Jeanerette, in Iberia Parish. Having run away to north Louisiana from a number of hurricanes which finally moved inland to east or west of us, hitting somewhere else, we elected to stay with our house when Hurricane Betsy threatened in October.

The day before Betsy hit, I came in from teaching school to a bright, breezy afternoon, typical pre-hurricane weather. We had done nothing to prepare for the storm as yet, because it had been located at daybreak far enough offshore in the Gulf that its curving path to the North had become only semi-predictable. A vast stretch along the Mississippi, Louisiana, and upper Texas coasts was on "Hurricane Watch," and people with hurricane experience were watching intently. Everyone had a radio at hand wherever he went, and all TV sets were on. The hurricane was part of every conversation, and folks were predicting where it might hit. People were flocking to the grocery store to buy fresh batteries for radios and flashlights, as well as prepared foods and bottled drinks. Of course there was a radio in the store, and it was turned up loud. All shopping abruptly halted when a weather bulletin began, as everyone was intent on hearing where the storm was, how fast it was moving, how strong its winds were, the size of it, and whether it had yet committed itself to a landfall. Particularly the last. The path which the storm would finally take was very important to everyone listening. Was the great, menacing storm coming right over us, would we get an edge of it (if so, which edge?), or would it miss us completely? If it was striking us, when would it come? Answers to these questions determined what we had to do next.

The two young wives from our upstairs apartments were knocking at my door, seeking advice. Both seemed very young, and neither had ever been in a hurricane before. "We're going to my folks in Alex," the blonde told me breathlessly. "But what should we do about our stuff here?"

"Move the furniture in your apartment away from the walls, out to the middle of the house," I answered without thinking.

"O. K. We will." Both girls whirled around and were gone. They seemed willing, and it was great to have some help getting the house ready. Since they would not be staying, having the furniture moved next to the inside walls might protect it from water damage if a window broke up

there during the storm. But I couldn't just stand here! I'd better not even take time for a cup of coffee.

First, I'd fill up my gas tank. Then I'd go to the grocery store and get fresh batteries, bread, milk, and sandwich meat. Maybe some sardines, crackers, and pork and beans, too. Plus paper plates, cups, and napkins. Then we could picnic if we lost power for several days.

Heading for the gas station, I drove up to the light at U.S. 90, where I met an astounding sight. Traffic on the westbound lane was almost literally bumper to bumper, and it was barely moving! When the light changed, there was no room for me to turn into the lane! I got out and stood in my car door to look down the line of cars coming toward me, expecting to see the end of it. The chain of cars stretched as far as I could see, reaching all the way into town and disappearing around the curve there. When I looked west, the same chain moved slowly away, up a slight rise far down the road and around the curve there. No break in sight. After the light changed several times, someone left room in the intersection for me to join the line. As I inched toward the station, I saw there was already a line at the pumps, so I pulled out on the shoulder behind the last car.

After each driver gassed up and pulled forward out of the station, he had to wait for someone to let him cross the line of westbound vehicles in order to get on the vacant eastbound lane, find a side street, then go wherever he wanted to go. The car at the pump had to wait for the car ahead to get across the road before he pulled away.

As I left the station, I heard on the radio that St. Mary Parish had been ordered to evacuate. Because of the great Atchafalaya Swamp, there were no roads going North of U.S. 90 for 75-100 miles. Highway 90, two lanes angling northwest, was their only way out, and I was witnessing the evacuation. I began planning my route to the store so that I would use only the eastbound lane, eerily deserted under the fast lowering clouds.

As soon as I got home, I put on a pot of coffee, then drew extra water in jars, setting them at the back of my lower cabinet for emergency drinking water. Charles, my younger son, I sent to fill the bathtub as an emergency supply of water for washing and toilet flushing. Quickly, my daughter Ann began to fix supper, so we could eat before the weather got too bad and the lights went off. Joe, my other son, came in from his paper route, and about this time David, my husband, got home from work.

As we ate, we discussed precautions and how we would handle various emergencies which might occur during the storm which was now zeroing in on us. The wind was already gusting hard, howling and moaning around our tall house, making eerie sounds as darkness approached.

Supper over, the children settled down fully clothed to get what sleep they could. As David and I propped our feet up and enjoyed a last cup of coffee together, we heard the storm, noisy and insistent as it tore at our walls and lashed our trees about. The wind wailed, moaned, and whooshed, while the rain struck the windows in sheets, as if it were being thrown from pitchers.

"Let's try to get some sleep," David suggested. So we lay on the bed and drifted off in spite of the noise.

Suddenly we were jolted awake by a great crash from up on the roof. David sprang up and dashed for the stairs. I was right behind him. What could have made that noise? Upstairs in the hall we stopped for a second to listen. Everything sounded normal for a storm like this. We heard no water pouring in anywhere. David unlocked one apartment to check it from inside. He pressed the switch. The lights still worked. We rushed on through, to find nothing broken and no leaks. Still running, we checked the second apartment. Again, no apparent damage. Then we noticed the furniture. Carefully arranged, back to back, a line of furniture stood in the middle of each room! Not in the middle of the whole house, but in the middle of each apartment, each couple's "house." We laughed until we had to lean on each other.

Back downstairs again, we elected to sleep in our recliners. Maybe getting jolted awake would be easier if we were in them. This time, the boom of a great bolt of lightning jarred us awake in time to see the lights had gone off, but dainty blue fire danced along the metal edge of our counter top from one end to the other before the room went dark. Immediately, another bolt of lightning lit the room, while our house shook as thunder slammed into it.

After that, the constant crashes of thunder kept us awake, as lightning flashed beyond the windows. No more came in to dance along our counter, though, and finally the thunder moved away a little, so the house no longer shuddered with the sound. Blasts of wind still shook the building from time to time, but the storm appeared to be moving away. Exhausted, we drifted off to sleep again. Our rest was not disturbed by the storm as it slowly lost volume, nor by the gale still pushing insistently against the house. Its whistling seemed almost comforting, now that thunder and wild wind no longer shook the walls.

Next morning, the wind still blew at a stiff pace--it was hard to stand up against its force--but the sun came up and lit a fresh-scrubbed world in brightness. Our white Ford station wagon looked as though it had been waxed and polished. Only the tiny, brilliant green bits of leaves plastered on it's gleaming surfaces betrayed the fact that a hurricane had passed. Similar bits of leaves were stuck flat to the sides of the house, the porch railing, the garage. Branches, some deadwood, some green wood with leaves still on them, littered the landscape.

David went outside to explore for damage while I made the coffee. Miraculously, the power was already back on, and as the coffee perked, David came in to report. "I found our big noise. Come see," he urged.

A big ball shaped metal ventilator, about two feet across, with fins to turn in the wind when it was mounted on a roof, lay on its side up against the garage.

"Yes, it probably made that crashing noise when it hit the roof," I agreed. We stood there companionably, remembering the fury of the storm and reliving our mad dash up the stairs in the darkness. Then we looked at each other and laughed, remembering the furniture.

MY FIRST VICTORY
by
Virginia Cook

I was born January 9th, 1919, four miles out in the country from Clarksdale, Mississippi. I don't remember much from my first four or five years. Even the birth of my brother, Joseph Ector Wilson, Jr., December 15, 1921, made no impression that remains with me.

Looking back, I wonder if my subconscious resented the loss of some of the attention paid to me and led to the first idea I had that I didn't like having a brother. Perhaps he didn't like being called Bubba. In our family, we remained just the two of us with no one else to play with. All we did together was fight. Whatever inspired the first animosity between us I cannot truthfully say, but when Joe was seven or eight, he was MEAN!!

Soon after Christmas every year, my new doll had a broken head or no head at all. I don't remember Papa ever whipping Joe, so the crimes were doubly resented. The excuse that saved him, I think, was that he was younger and hadn't learned better.

The last straw for me was the day Joe opened the door to the chicken-wire cage I kept my pet rabbit in. When the rabbit hopped out of the cage, even my mother was upset, and she asked "Why?" in unfriendly terms. Joe replied that he thought the rabbit needed some "fresh air." I determined to get revenge although at the time I didn't know what form it would take.

Several months later, Joe and I were in the pasture three or four hundred yards from the house where the cows were kept. We got into an argument, hitting and wrestling each other in the field near the fence. Suddenly a light flashed on in my head. I had the perfect plan! The next blow I took I fell on the ground. This didn't bother Joe until he noticed a bull headed our way. He told me to "Get up, quick!" but I lay there unmoving. Joe tried to lift me, about forty pounds of dead weight. I gave him no help, of course, though I was a little worried. Somehow he managed to half lift and half drag me to the barbed wire fence as fast as he could. He made the fence and rolled me under the bottom wire. Safe on the other side, I stood up and started laughing--ah, sweet victory.

LITTLE PEOPLE
by
Mickey Torcivia

One of my memories of my childhood remains today as strong as it was many years ago. I was five years old. I say five, because my sister Rosalie was thirteen, and we were celebrating her birthday. It had fallen on a Sunday that year. He birthday wish was to eat dinner at Carouso's Restaurant in Little Italy, which was really next to Chinatown, in the City.

The subway trip from Brooklyn to Manhattan was near empty. It would be packed tomorrow with people going to work. Today, however, we all had seats. I sat close to Papa, his hand holding mine, and I leaned against him as the Express rumbled along, passing all the local stations as if they didn't exist. There were only station lights flashing as we flew by. We finally came to 14th Street and got off at our stop. We headed upstairs to the street level, all six of us--Mama, Papa, Toots, and Tommy in the lead with Rosalie and me behind. There were repairs going on along the store fronts. I remember that we walked on planks of wood, as I guess the City was fixing the sidewalks as well. Rosalie held my hand loosely, so I let it fall from her grasp and lingered slowly behind her. I remember feeling almost as big as Rosalie, not having to hold anyone's hand.

I wondered what was going on behind the boards nailed up against the store fronts. To this day I figure they were building beautiful new stores. Was that an opening in between the wide boards? Yes, a large gap. I ran over and peeked between the boards. I couldn't believe my eyes. People as small as me, how could that be? I banged on the board with my fist. "Hey, little people, I can see you!" They were dashing to and fro, hammering, fixing counters, taking garments out of boxes, never looking in my direction. Some were laughing with each other.

I didn't hear Rosalie come up behind me, "What are you doing?" She yanked my arm. I winced.

"Roe, listen! Look! There are little people, real little people in there!"

"Oh, sure," she answered carelessly and pulled me down the street. "You better not tell Mama and Papa any lies. Such nonsense!"

"But, Roe, there really were little people in there, only grown up, just as small as I am."

"Stop this nonsense," she repeated. "I don't want to hear any more 'little people only grown up.'" She yanked me back to the sidewalk. "You better stop making up these stories. Look, Papa is calling for us to catch up with them."

We hurried down the street. I wanted to tell everyone about my find. It <u>was</u> real, but I didn't dare say anything. Maybe I didn't really see little people after all. So I said nothing and never told anyone about my little people.

Many years later, Roe told me she was sorry, for she, too, had found out that there were midgets and dwarfs, and no doubt that was what I had seen. I had not made up the story. We laughed about it then, but I still wish she had looked between the boards and seen them when I did. It could have been our secret to share with each other.

THE YEAR WAS 1941
by
Jacob M. Valentine, Jr.

The Selective Training and Service Act was signed by President Roosevelt, on 16 September 1940. Aware that they might soon be drafted, young men enlisted in a Service more to their liking. Unable to find jobs in Racine, Red Addleman, Dick and Clayton Valley were already in military services and home on furlough on New Years Day 1941. We called this abdication from civilian life, "rotting in the Service."

I was clearing hooks for a fishing boat in Racine, Wisconsin, but hoped that I'd soon get my job back at Case Tractor Works. When I was laid off by Case Company I lived with my uncle Helmuth Sorensen and his family in Racine. My family was in South Haven, Michigan, where my father was fishing. I had a little money and wanted to attend the University in Madison, but my uncle, who had little regard for academics, induced me to remain in Racine to collect "unemployment," as it was called. I could have cheated, gone to University at Madison, and come down each week to fill out the form saying I wasn't able to get a job. I did, however, study at the Extension while I was awaiting my job at Case Tractor. Off and on I managed to earn a semester's credit at the University of Wisconsin Extension School in Racine.

My diary reads: *Was in training for the Golden Gloves, but now I have a chance to go to college. Mr. Klein, a professor at U. W. Extension, got me a grant-in-aid of $75. I have to pay $35 a semester. Trippet sent me a letter. I've got an NYA job at $10 per month. .. , $75 grant in-aid from $110 fee.* 24 January 1941. *Went to Cases. They look like they'll be going good soon. Went to the City Hall--Selective Service office. No. 608. 200 already gone.*

On 28 January I rode my bike to Case Tractor South Works to work on the assembly line at $.85 per hour. The South Works built two kinds of tractors for shipment to Great Britain. The War in Europe was stimulating the local industries--soon everyone would have a job. Vic Petersen came back from New Jersey after a call from Cases.

On 4 February I went to Kenosha Youth Foundation with Marshall Simonsen, our boxing coach, Rudy Nilo, Tom Ingrassi, *et al* to start training for the Golden Gloves. I worked out at the Racine YMCA every night after work. My weight was 187 pounds, height 6-3. On 17 February I fought in the Novice Heavyweight Division at the Regional Meet at Kenosha. While waiting in the dressing room my opponent wanted to chat, which was the last thing I wanted to do before a fight. My coach was at ringside with his better fighters. The fellow I fought was short, so to avoid my punches he would come in and wrap his arms around me. The referee would separate us for a moment--then he'd clinch. I wanted to kill him. The newspaper account was not flattering. The reporter wrote, "Tarkenian was constantly entangled in Valentine's long arms. . . boring." Despite the bad review I did win the match by a decision.

From mid-February until I went into the Army, days were spent at Case Tractor Works. Few of my generation had ever worked at what could be called a regular job. But now the Great Depression and the Dirty Thirties were ending. Soon everyone would be working or in the military.

My friends and I were odd combinations--street smart and woods smart. Racine was the second largest city in Wisconsin, and yet the woods were within walking or biking distance. I had hitch-hiked and bummed on freight and passenger trains since my early teens and encountered drunks and fags, bullies, felons, and yet retained a kind of innocence.

Most of us never had a girl friend. Our libido was not strong enough to overcome our natural shyness with the opposite sex. Then again we rarely ventured into the realm of female society. What girls of our age did, I don't know. In summer evenings, some gathered in groups at Island Park where on occasion they did flirt with comfortable boys. Although we had sisters, they were not models of sexuality either.

When good looking Bob Bingham, wiser in the ways of women, bought a car, we went "cruising for girls," as he called it, but that was pretty tame compared to today's standards. I was born forty, or is it fifty years, too soon? Considering my near-virgin youth and four years in the monastic Army, I might just as well have been a priest.

Our main concern was having fun in sports--bike riding and racing, ice skating, swimming, boxing, lifting weights. fishing, hunting. I might explain our interest in lifting weights. We competed to see who could lift the most or see how our strength increased day by day. We knew all the competitive lifts and knew by name the champions--all hired by the manufacturer of barbells.

Body building was our main goal. The Body Beautiful meant defining those individual clusters of muscles, abdominals, deltoids, biceps, and gastrocnemiuses. We spent hours lying in the sun to add a golden glow to our skin. That was a competitive sport in itself--who had the best tan. Narcissistic, of course, but our fantasy was that this body would attract girls. But we swam and goofed off at the New Quarry where girls were practically excluded. On rare occasions we went to North Beach at Lake Michigan to ogle the girls, but the lake was usually too cold for comfortable swimming.

I remember that Ming Lem, son of the Chinese restaurant owner, once took four guys (Vic, Karl, Ming, and me) and four Nelsen girls up to Milwaukee for a banquet at a Chinese joint. Ming was so short he had to drive looking between the spokes of the steering wheel of his father's big seven passenger Buick. Ming was smart, president of our high school class, and had been very popular with all the students.

We walked down the stairs of the Chinese restaurant, located in a seedy part of Milwaukee, and entered into a room filled with smoke. When our eyes got accustomed to the semi-darkness, we saw forms hunched over backgammon boards and or concentrating on playing cards. Others in the dark corners were smoking water pipes. It looked like an opium den. We were ushered up stairs to a

private dining room with a table set with flowers, napkins, and chop sticks and back-up knives, forks, and spoons.

The waiter asked us if we wanted whiskey. We weren't into whiskey then but we did accept a sweet Chinese wine. We had drunk our share of muscatel--"Sneaky Pete," the bums called it. Starting with bird's nest soup, we were served an array of exotic foods in ornate covered dishes. A most memorable evening, but girls were secondary, just Ming's way of treating his friends. One summer night we took Ming on a canoe trip on Root River above Horlicks Dam, two canoes--the same guys and girls. It was nice, but mostly I remember having to urinate, which was painful and I was too shy to go ashore.

As much as I liked Ming as a friend, bigotry raised its ugly head. I didn't think it was proper for a Chinese, as much an American as I was, to date white girls. The Nelsen girls were of Danish heritage but didn't seem to admit it. They were pinkos, or leftist radicals, which may explain their willingness to date a Chinese. Who knows? They probably were just nice girls.

I now remember one enchanting episode. It was during an end-of-semester picnic held with students from the UW Extension of Kenosha and those from Racine. We were sitting in a circle in the grass, a group of college men and women eating hot dogs. Across from me was a dark haired beauty from Kenosha, ten miles down the line, whom I was meeting for the first time. We talked and during those few minutes there was a sudden rapport between us, which if it had lasted, I'd have called "falling in love." The party ended and everyone went their separate ways. I didn't remember her name and never saw her again. I have to blame it on the War. Within a month I was drafted into the Army.

We ended many summer days eating ice cream together on the Sorensen's porch. If someone was broke we shared. I read constantly. Novels, of course, but also history, political and antireligious tracts, biographies, autobiographies. I was the left-winger, the radical of the bunch, espousing socialist theories far into the night to a bored audience.

I feel concern for the present generation of kids. We didn't know any better, and we did have fun while looking forward to nothing. You might say we had a long childhood. Still, it was a better life than my friend Bill Reese had growing up on a hard-scrabble dairy farm in Maryland with a frequently absent father and a domineering mother. His home life paid off in the end--he acquired the stamina and discipline to get a Ph.D.

For weeks my diary was devoid of entries except daily notes that I worked. Later I wrote: 5 April 1941. *Baraboo, Wis. Went on trip to Devil's Lake today with Bob and Rog. Left about 12 noon. Arrived at Devil's Lake in the eve. Rode into Baraboo. Slept 3 in a bed at a room for tourists.* Sunday 6 April. *Went out to Devil's Lake. Climbed the East Bluffs. Very pretty. Drove up to the Dells. Bob and I walked up the river on the ice. Took plane ride over the Upper Dells. First plane ride...nice.* 19 April 1941. *Sturgeon Bay, Wis. Left for Clark's Lake and sucker fishing with Gerk and Karl G. Speared lots of suckers.*

The plane was a small Cub equipped with skis that took off from a bumpy snow covered field near Wisconsin Dells. The roar of the engine with the snow flying alongside the plane was thrilling enough, but when the plane lifted into the air over the town and river--that was heaven. I think it cost five dollars for fifteen minutes. That trip was my last adventure as a civilian.

I did not fight the draft. Most American youths did not. In fact, I was looking forward to adventure and travel in Army life. I had spent enough time in the C.C.C. under Army officers to know I could cope. None of us were overly patriotic or anti-Japanese even after Pearl Harbor--that was for civilians. We suspected that Roosevelt invited the attack, but I welcomed the War against Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. I had read all the radical magazines and books and knew that the United States and Great Britain had allowed General Francisco Franco with his Moroccan troops, aided by Goering's Luftwaffe and Italy, to defeat the Spanish Republic. Right-wingers of the United States and Great Britain portrayed Spain as communist, but Spain had numerous political parties. Communists actually were never popular in Spain but they had nominal support from the Soviet Union. America finally woke up to the menace of the Nazis and Fascists.

The "draft" became a reality with the Selective Service Act in September 1940. The selectees, as the agency liked to call those drafted, were first inducted into the Army. The Navy, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Marines wanted to recruit, pick, and train their own men. On 23 April 1941 I was inducted into the Army. After a short stay at Milwaukee for examinations and swearing in, we went to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. We were given uniforms and shoes and started on a series of inoculations for small pox and typhoid. We went through an interview that asked about hobbies, civilian jobs and aptitudes. The interviewers asked leading questions like, "Do you like girls?" Of course, I liked girls but I didn't have one. The Army didn't want homosexuals and why homosexuals would want the Army, I don't know but some did--patriotic, I guess.

Most important for your career was the Army General Classification Test (AGCT), which contained 150 multiple true-false questions with a forty minute time limit. The test did not pretend to be an IQ test, but was used to weed out the dummies and find, as Yogi Bear used to say, those "Smarter than the average bear." There were three types of questions that included block counting, matching of synonyms, and arithmetic problems. I'd say I flunked the blocks test, passed arithmetic, and did well on synonyms. My score put me in Class II and made me eligible for Officer Candidate School.

The next day on the train to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, we chugged through Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas. The camp was named after Jefferson's minister to France who negotiated for the Louisiana Purchase. Diary: *Stood guard over food 2:00 AM up 3:00 AM. Going through Arkansas. Very interesting country. Lots of Negro hovels scattered about; seem very friendly. Very flat topography. Arrived at Camp Livingston at 4:00 PM. Ate with mess kits. The officers seem pretty good–mostly new. 13,500 men here now.*

Camp Livingston. Sunday, 27 April 1940. *Off today. Went to church--required. We missed spring; it's practically summer here. We are quarantined for two weeks. Monday 28 April. Army life began this morning. Drilled. School of the Soldier, Courtesy and Discipline, Organization. The sun is pretty hot and some of the boys are burning. Milton Veselic passed out in formation. Afternoon more of the same. Not bad at all. It's pretty much fun but some are pretty dumb. Evening march to the canteen. Sun very hot but a cool breeze came in from the Gulf. Every day we have close-order drill. Our first hike was five miles, the second eight miles.*

A cadre of noncoms and officers from the 120 Field Artillery Battalion, mainly from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, gave lectures and training drills. The 32nd National Guard Division had been inducted into the U. S. Army in October 1940. Between marching drills we were lectured on the School of the Soldier, Courtesy and Discipline, Organization, First Aid, and Guard Duty. We had hands-on instructions on pup tent pitching, chemical warfare, and cannoneering. We fired, took apart, and cleaned the Colt .45 pistol, then the weapon of the field artillery. It was repeat--repeat--and repeat.

Certain things you never forgot, especially your serial number (3620-8760). In the movie on sex hygiene, the actor posing as an Army doctor spoke these memorable words, "Most men know more about their automobiles than they know about their own bodies." The graphic full color displays of venereal diseases made a lasting impression. Each week or so we'd parade naked in our raincoats and line up for "short arm" inspection to detect venereal disease. The doctor would command, "Bend over. spread your cheeks." The rectal peek over, he would ram his finger up your inguinal canal and say, "Turn your head and cough." Humiliating and painful.

The weather in May was hot with long periods of rain. I made friends with Carl Ammian, Ben Stewart, Ralph Balzer, Dennis Tatman and Jerry Roberts. We nailed a parallel bar between trees where some of us would work out. On 22 May I won the company standing broad-jump event. Several times during the summer, Carl, Ralph, Ben and I hiked ten miles to Fishville: "The laziest town in the world. The little town had a dance hall, cafe, and bowling alley centered among weekend cottages and summer camps. A rope hung from a tree where you could swing out and plunge into the river.

The town is no longer on the state map, but I visited Fishville in the early 1960s when I came to my job in Louisiana. A rope still hung over the river and my son and daughter swam. I talked to a middle-aged woman who, when I told her I had been with the 32nd Division, said wistfully, "They were a good bunch."

After six weeks in basic training, we were assigned to various batteries. Ben Stewart, Dennis Tatman, and I, among others from Racine, were assigned to Headquarters Battery. On 1 June we left camp for our first division strength "field problem" near Leesville. A pressing memory is that I was always hungry. We moved a lot and laid out many rolls of telephone wire through the piney woods.

In the simulated battle our gun batteries were shelled and we were captured. June was spent in the field on similar exercises alternated with days in camp. We slept on the ground or shared pup tents. Chiggers were the bane of our lives. Ankles and belt lines, always covered with itchy welts, were scratched until bloody. The Army issued sulfur powder but it didn't seem to work. These rebel mites took revenge on the fresh blood of the Wisconsin Yankees.

On payday, I went to town and bought a three-quarter length air mattress that served me well for the next three years. A short air mattress, big enough to keep my body comfortable, was easy to inflate. Whenever there was a lull in the action I threw the mattress on the ground and took a nap--I was a good soldier.

Diary: Camp Livingston, La. 4 June 1941. *KP today. Paid at noon, around $25,00. After taking away $4.00 for insurance and $6.00 for canteen books, I had about $15.00.* Monroe, La. 5 June. *Left for Monroe for a pleasure trip. Along the roads, women waved to us all the way...all very friendly. Pitched tents behind Merrill High School. Held formal retreat. Speech by mayor. Barbecue. Went swimming in wonderful pool. Walked around downtown.*

Near the end of June, Henry Duda, the division boxing champion, broke my ear drum with a round-house blow. I didn't realize it then. I got an infection in my ear from swimming in bayous. On 27 June I went to the Camp Livingston Hospital where I stayed until 9 July. The infection was treated with ethyl alcohol which was not effective. Sulfanilamide had not been compounded yet or was not in vogue. Friends visited me every day, but life was boring with little to do except walk around, go to the PX, or to the library, and read. The infection would go away, then flare up to a swollen jaw when I had only liquids to eat. After discharge I went to the EENT clinic every other day until 17 July.

In July, we got disappointing news that General George Marshall and President Roosevelt agreed that the National Guard and draftees would stay in the Army another year. We had "alerts" often which kept us confined to camp. In mid-July my diary reported heavy rain and cold. On 25 July 1941 we left in a convoy of trucks for New Orleans going down a highway lined with burning oil flares. On arriving at the Recreation Center at Ponchartrain Beach, Ben Stewart and I rode the roller coaster, then took the street car into New Orleans. The next day a Catholic Women's Association took us on an automobile tour of the tourist sights.

Went all over the town. Beautiful town. Saw Metairie Cemetery, Tulane, Loyola, the Stadium. Beautiful oaks in Audubon Park. Went through Huey Long's home. Went on walking tour of French Quarter with a Gov't-guide (WPA). Crossed river on ferry to Algiers. Saw interned Norwegian and Italian ships.

I had been in Milwaukee and Chicago, which were nice cities with their own glamor and excitement, but to me, New Orleans was intriguing. As one of the oldest cities in the country, it retained buildings and houses that dated back to the seventeen- hundreds. Jackson Square, Cabildo, Pirates Alley, Pontalba Apartments, the stuff of history. I was fascinated by the tropical flowers, the

stately royal palms that lined Canal Street, and the great live oaks in Audubon Park. I tasted my first raw oyster at a bar and proceeded to eat two dozen on the half-shell at twenty-five cents a dozen. Except for the oysters, I don't remember eating at a fancy restaurant with Ben. We probably ate at the Recreation Center. The next morning I swam at Lake Ponchartrain beach: *Wonderful water...warm!*

That summer we trained on maneuvers, setting up camps, moving equipment around, simulating fire, moving the guns, laying wire, and doing all the artillery things. Running behind the wire truck as it went down the dusty roads we saw shacks in the forest openings. Often there would be a gaunt, skinny, woman in a shabby cotton dress hanging out clothes, peering at us suspiciously, unsure whether she should wave or hide. Electricity had not come to the back woods of Louisiana. During the cold season wood smoke rose from the chimneys. Along the paved roads, the people were friendly and waved at the convoys of GIs roaring by.

One of our campsites was next an abandoned Negro cemetery. That first night we walked through the graves using our flashlights to look into the concrete crypts that were partly above ground. Where the covers had cracked and decayed and fallen in, we could see skeletons lying in the darkness. It was spooky, a strange and eerie place in the dark under the moss-covered live oaks. On Sundays we could hear the sounds of preaching and music coming from the Negro churches that in our ignorance we called "holy rollers."

That summer we spent weeks at a time on what became known as the Louisiana maneuvers, probably the largest simulation of combat in U. S. history. They involved two armies, one located in East Texas, the other across the Sabine Louisiana, where George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower, and Omar Bradley directed the maneuvers.

I was on the wire, or liaison section, during the maneuvers and "laid wire" as it was called. I sometimes sat at a message center and took messages. At other times I ran behind the wire truck flipping the telephone line off the road. When we crossed a road we climbed trees with "spikes" to put the line above the road. One day twenty hungry cavalry men from Texas rode into our camp and gave themselves up.

Diary: *Bivouac area near Leesville, La. Today is Sunday 17 August 1941. We're almost ready to move out. The problem began last night 12:00. Life has been easy. Exercises in the morning. Then lectures for an hour or so. Or perhaps we clean guns, or pack equip. Then the afternoon has been off. Had a talk by General Fish, commander of the 32nd Division. The morale is way down. This is because of the 18 mo. extension. I met "Shorty" Moriarty with whom I was in the CCCs. He was drafted in April and now transferred to Reg. HQ. My mattress is pretty good--a life saver in fact--sleeping on the ground is hell.*

Went on a problem Sunday morning. On liaison as usual. This time we're with the 126 Inf. Quite a bit of action on this problem with the tanks in action. Whole companies in the 126 were wiped out--simulated. The batteries also suffered. I didn't have much to do. We laid very little wire as

the 126 was near us. I sat at a telephone and gave quite a few messages. The problem ended Tues. afternoon. Went back to a bivouac area soon after the problem ended.

The next move for our outfit was to North and South Carolina for more maneuvers. Our truck convoy carrying all the equipment and troops drove along the southern highways, staying overnight at Army camps or parks. The speedometers were set at 45 miles per hour so we traveled only about 200 miles a day.

Diary: Sunday, 26 October 1941, Camp Livingston. *Left this morning for the Carolina maneuvers. Arrived at Jackson, Miss. around 4:00 P. Went into town. Everything closed up--blue laws. Went through Natchez, Brookhaven, Jackson. Saw hundreds of buzzards soaring around. They may be preparing to migrate but I doubt it.*

Monday, 27 October, Selma, Alabama. *Saw a Negro chain gang working in the fair grounds where we slept. They actually wore individual chains. Left Jackson around 8:00 and arrived Selma around 5:00 P. Had to work, so did not go to town. Very little change in scenery throughout this trip. Rode in a "peep"(small Willys quarter-ton)--also drove about 60 miles.*

Tuesday, 28 October. *Left Selma; arrived 6:00 P, Macon at some Army camp. Was on guard 12 P to 2:00 A. Still not much of a change in scenery. Rode in "peep." Red clay all the way. Camp at Camp Wheeler.* 29 October. *Left Macon, arrived Columbia, the capital of South Carolina. Drove a peep about 100 miles--rode the rest. Went into town. Saw the capital building. Stayed at Fort Jackson.*

30 October. *Left Columbia around 2:00 P. Camp at Hoffman, North Carolina, or rather about 5 miles west of Hoffman in the woods. In the Sand Hills of N. C. Saw a pack mule outfit with .75 mm howitzers. Made camp. Camp near Hoffman, next day. Worked in the morning. Not much doing.*

1 November, Hoffman, N. C. *Went to Fayetteville, a town about 47 miles from our bivouac area. An interesting town--old slave market building still stands--Place like Liberty Point, where the patriots of Cape Fear declared their independence in 1775. The Negroes are less servile than at Alex and Louisiana.*

2 November, Hoffman, N. C. *We expect to go on a problem this noon. Lots of flies and gnats. Cold in the morning, warm later on. Took walk in aft. Land all around sand, some small pebbles, a few pieces of red "sand stone," presumably from the rock hills of the west. 3 November, moved to Ansonville during the nite.*

During 4-7 November 1941 we were on maneuvers near Ansonville-Cheraw, South Carolina and moved to Mc Farland, North Carolina where the maneuvers ended. During 8-12 we had time for recreational trips to Durham, North Carolina, where I visited Duke University. On 13 November we moved to Pee Dee. Diary: *Lazy life. Cold!! My air mattress and Chashin's bed roll helps me keep*

a little warm. Wear long johns at nite. Moved about 35 miles to bivouac north of Pee Dee. Arrived around 2:00 A.

The Carolina maneuvers continued through the rest of November until 1 December when we headed back to Louisiana, stopping at Dublin, Georgia, Albany, Alabama, Selma, Alabama, Camp Shelby, Mississippi, arriving at Camp Livingston on 6 December.

On Sunday morning, 7 December 1941, Dennis Tatman, Ben Stewart, and I walked to the Service Club. Acting silly, we marched and hollered commands down the camp street. Suddenly a major in civilian clothes stopped us and bawled us out for not saluting the American flag that was displayed outside an office building. After questioning our patriotism he told us that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor and we were at war.

My diary reads: Camp Livingston. Sunday. 7 December 1941. *Went to the Service Club with Denny and Ben. WAR DECLARED. Quite a bit of excitement but I can't comprehend it. It seems unreal. Went to Service Club in eve. with Ben. Listened to radio--war news. Girl and boy holding hands--girl almost crying. Ben and I laughing.*

After Pearl Harbor the world changed. We heard Roosevelt's "day of infamy" speech with little enthusiasm. On 11 December, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, hardly a surprise, considering Japan and the Axis were allies. Training continued but with no increased intensity. On 12 December we received orders to be ready to move, but the next day the alert was called off. Another alert was called off and I was allowed to go home on furlough. I had great visits with the family and friends in Racine and spent Christmas Eve at my Uncle Magnus's home in Kenosha where we celebrated a real Danish Christmas. On New Year's Eve my cousins and I took in a stage show and movie at Milwaukee. So ended the year 1941, a most memorable year.

GOING OVERSEAS
by
Joe Glorioso

Heralding a new day, a red sun peeped over the horizon in the New York harbor. The side of a huge ship, shrouded in a thin haze, appeared over a wharf of rough, thick planks studded with mooring posts. Sailors in blue uniforms lowered a gangway from the ship to the wharf. A sign on the massive ship read *Ile de France*. Officers struggling with their overstuffed duffel bags and GIs with their barracks bags slung over their shoulders were destined to make the *Ile* their home for several treacherous days across the paths of German U-boats lying patiently in the deep waters of the Atlantic.

A boatswain in a gold braided blue jacket piped us aboard. I was near the front of the line talking to a fellow second lieutenant waiting for the two blue clad sailors at the foot of the gangway to signal the officers in line to embark, dragging fully loaded duffel bags along the wharf. At the top of the gangway, a blue clad sailor speaking in English said, "Follow me." English on a ship with a French name? Amazing.

The officers and I were assigned a cubby hole on the upper deck with a single port hole--there were several decks below us for the enlisted soldiers. I grabbed a middle bunk with the port hole level with my pillow. Twelve officers stuffed into twelve bunk beds in a room not larger than a prison cell forced us to use our duffel bags as the floor of our scanty accommodations. A second lieutenant, I remembered as Clyde, and I decided to reconnoiter the ship, while the other officers glumly sat on their bunks as though their own world was coming to an end.

Leaning over the rail on the gangway deck, we saw thousands of GIs leaving hundreds of trucks to make their way up the gangway, some laughing and joking, others swearing and bitching, and still others grunting and hustling their barracks bags aboard. I saw fear on the faces of the young GIs. Clyde elbowed my sides and said, "If the Germans blasted this ship with torpedoes, the U-boat captain will be an honored guest and at a banquet be proclaimed the Reich hero of the year." I smiled as I continued to watch the GIs coming up the gangway.

About three in the afternoon, a tug boat slipped alongside the *Ile De France*, and men on a tug boat threw light lines that were attached to heavy ropes, which were pulled up on the ship and attached to the ship. The lines tightened on the *Ile* as the tug slipped the ship away from the wharf and toward the channel. The tug, now joined by others, turned the ship around to face the open waters. The ship, soon under its own power, shuttered its way up the river and by Long Island on its way past Ellis Isle and the Statue of Liberty and into the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean. We were bound for the European Theater of Operations.

Dinner was served at four o'clock in the afternoon and breakfast at seven in the morning in an officers' dining room which was the size of a football field. The enlisted men were served chow in mess kits in four cafeteria lines, two aft and two forward. To our dismay there would be two meals

per day. The men soon learned to eat breakfast and stay in the line that was forming up for dinner because the chow lines were continuous. The ingenious GIs played cards on shelter halves or shot craps while in the chow lines. Others catnapped as friends held their places in the line.

In the open ocean, I noted to a ship's officer that the ship did not zig-zag to avoid U-boat. He told me that the ship depended on its speed of thirty knots to prevent a much slower U-boat from zeroing in on the ship with any chance of hitting it. He also said that when we got closer to Ireland, British and American aircraft would provide overhead cover for the ship. I asked him. "Why the English crew on a French ship?" "Reverse American Lend-Lease," he replied and moved on down the deck.

The *Ile De France*, France's luxury liner, moored into a port in northern Scotland shortly after midnight on the sixth day of our uneventful Atlantic crossing. (I never learned the name of the harbor.) The officers were awakened and told to disembark the ship as quickly and quietly as possible. We left the gangway and walked across three sets of railroad tracks to a large brick building with a wide deck occupied by English Red Cross women handing out freshly made doughnuts and steaming hot coffee. With one hand clutching several doughnuts and the other circling a plastic cup of hot black coffee, I sat leaning against a metal steel post, to relish the doughnuts and coffee.

Lounging comfortably, sometimes dozing, on our duffel bags with my fellow officers, a "choo-choo" train slowly rolled on the tracks behind me. When it halted, screeching and groaning, a captain ordered us on board the train, yelling, "Six men to a compartment!" I saw a complement of enlisted soldiers coming raucously down the gangway to replace us. They must have smelled the doughnuts and coffee.

After boarding the train, it quietly pulled away from the station. Enlisted men, serving as conductors, came by the compartment I shared with six other officer from Fort Benning, Georgia, to give each of us three boxes of K-rations, breakfast, lunch and dinner. We surmised that we would be on the train a full day and part of a night.

The next night about eleven o'clock we pulled into a large building that was not a train station. We were told to leave the train and bunk down for the night as best we could. We were given three more boxes of K-rations. Before dawn I saw, through a large opening in the building's wide doorway, a channel steamer silently slip into position near the wharf outside. We were in the Southampton, England. Once again we were awakened and directed to board the channel steamer bound for France.

The waters in the channel rippled with occasional white caps. It was going to be smooth sailing to France. I watched the sun come up bathing over the cliffs of Dover behind us. I slid my duffel bags on the deck to join a few officers at the bow of the steamer. I wanted to be one of the first to see France, my first visit to that Republic. As the ship eased into a hastily constructed dock, I saw the horrors of war. Steel girders were twisted out of shape, girders hanging precariously from bent-over steel uprights, bricks were crumbled in huge piles every where we could see. I cannot describe, in

my wildest imagination, the utter destruction I saw that early morning. We were in the completely destroyed port of LeHarve, France.

Trucks awaited us on the docks as we disembarked the steamer. We climbed into the trucks, fellow officers threw in our duffel bags after us. I noticed that the officers were young men, either recently out of officer training schools or ROTC. I was the only calvary officer on the truck. They kept ribbing me with "Where's your horse?" "Didn't you bring your horse?" "I know, your horse is in your duffel bag." Everyone in the truck would laugh, including me.

The trucks took us about five miles to "Camp Spam," which was on the D-Day landing beach. I sat on my duffel bag and opened my breakfast K-ration. I was getting accustomed to the rations, which were really tasty. Too bad I didn't have hot water to mix in my Nescafe. Later, I learned that coffee was available in a tent located under a cliff in the camp.

Lunch was served in the camp and later dinner. We were informed at dinner that we were immediately to prepare to entrain after dinner. The train was bound for a replacement depot somewhere in Belgium. In the late evening, trucks lined up on the dusty road to take us to the railway stop. We climbed aboard following the same process as before, man followed by baggage. The trucks rumbled across a dusty, rutted road for an hour and stopped abruptly, dust covered us as it gushed in the trucks open back.

The train was waiting, sixty small box cars and a puny engine. The officers were assigned one per box car. Mine was number 31. When I found the car, there were thirty-nine GIs standing, sitting or lounging in the car and thirty-nine barracks bags. I was number forty. A corporal said, "Welcome to our 'Forty and Eight.'" The name was applied to the cars by soldiers in World War I because they carried forty soldiers or eight horses.

At dark, the engine huffed and puffed, groaned and shrieked, under the load of the cars and the twenty-four hundred bodies. It rolled out of the rail head, never getting above twenty miles an hour on level tracks, a little faster downhill and agonizingly slow on uphill grades. At one time, the train traveled several hours on the rails only to have to back up several hours to be switched to the correct track.

There were many incidents on this two day trip to the replacement center--one was when we received seven boxes of K-rations. Another was when the GIs built a fire in the box car to keep warm, only to find they had burned a hole in the bottom of the car. An exciting moment when we stopped next to an open rail car filled with apples. In no time at all, the GIs emptied almost half of the apples.

I'll write of one instant to illustrate the enormous difference between cultures. The engine stopped on a siding to re-supply the water loss from gushing steam with fresh water and to have the cars' wheel bearings oiled. Women carrying large oil cans spouted oil into each bearings, two on each side of the car. The woman oiler on our side wore a dirty, oily, canvas apron over a short blue denim skirt

and a brass button jacket. After oiling the wheels, she evidently felt an urgent need to relieve herself. She stepped a distance from the box car, lifted her apron and skirt, dropped her drawers around her ankles and relieved herself. The GIs, including myself, crammed into the open door to watch. When she finished, she pulled up her drawers, arranged her apron and dress and continued nonchalantly to oil the bearings, much to the delight and applause of the GIs in my car and all the cars up and down the tracks.

On the third morning, the train finally pulled into a siding. Twenty-four hundred GIs and officers were glad to bid farewell to the "Forty and Eights." We filed into a very large building. It appeared to have been a factory from which machinery was removed. With a PA system, an officer announced that names were posted and alphabetized on the walls. Each alphabet was listed separately. "Note the desk number and report to that desk for your orders." I reported to my desk for my orders, and read that I was assigned to the Eighty Seventh Reconnaissance Squadron, Seventh Armored Division.