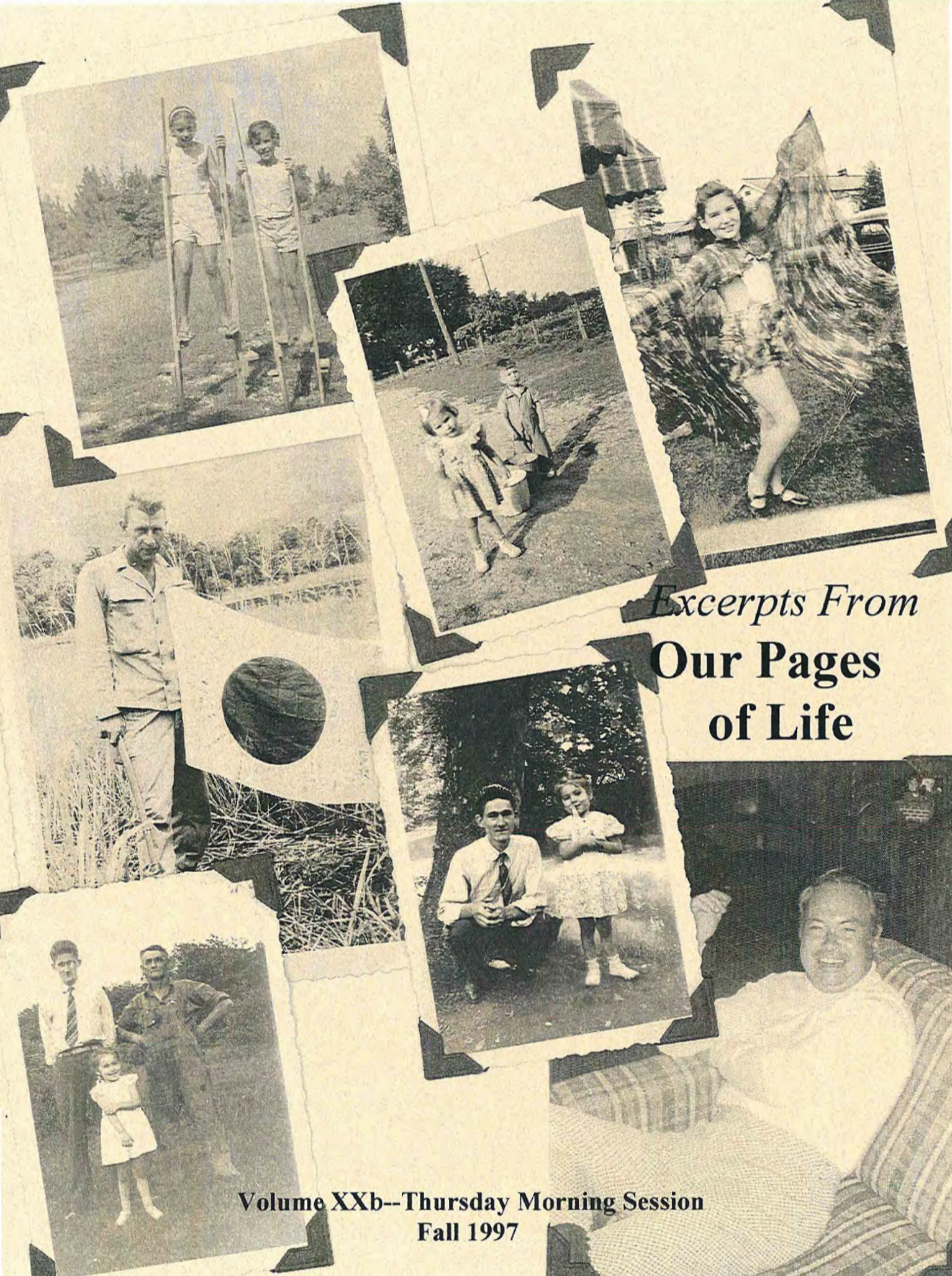

Excerpts From

Our Pages of Life

Volume XXb--Thursday Morning Session
Fall 1997

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ONCE UPON A TIME. Four of my favorite words. They speak of story, its mesmerizing quality and its place in history. American author Willa Cather has noted that, "There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they never happened." My favorite storybook phrase invites us to examine life one story at a time, to enjoy life as it is repeated in each of our lives--as though it were happening for the first time, a *once upon a time* experience.

This collection marks the twentieth volume of life stories written, fashioned, and lived by my life writing students. Though a fraction of the two thousand plus stories I have heard these and other writers share, the stories in this edition echo the literary motif of *once upon a time.* Those words beckon us to open the eyes of our mind and to listen with our heart.

We are often stifled in our attempts to understand others, to show compassion, and to express sympathy, to see life through someone else's eyes. But we never will walk in another's shoes. It is story that allows that discrepancy--to want to understand and yet to be incapable of fully experiencing another's life. It is story that allows us to transcend the reality of living a life alone by sharing life together. I will never walk in your shoes, no matter how hard I try. But story says, "It's o.k. Just listen as I tell a tale of *once upon a time.*"

I invite you to listen with me. Become *all ears* as we learn from the lives of these students. You've heard their stories before, haven't you? They've been yours from the start.

❖ Joan Stear, USL
Fall 1997

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Twenty volumes, seven and a half years of thanks! To all of you who make this job so much fun--THANK YOU! Lafayette General Medical Center and the English Department and University College at Southwestern Louisiana continue to support our efforts--to them we offer our appreciation as well.

Front Cover: *(clockwise, beginning at top right corner) Pat DeLatte; "Blue" St. Dizier, husband of Betty St. Dizier; Lois Meals Diehl and her father; Lois Meals Diehl, her father, and Grandpa Meals; Jake Valentine; Claire (on left) and Camille Martin, daughters of Lucien and Melba Martin, 1964; Lois Diehl and cousin Bill Baker on Grandpa Baker's farm*

USL LIFE WRITING CLASS
Fall 1997--Thursday Morning Session

***Seated, left to right*: Joan Stear; Pat DeLatte; Charlotte McConnell; Lois Diehl**
***Standing, left to right:* Jake Valentine; Louise deBeus; Marie LaCaze; Mary Langford; Betty Speyrer; Melba Martin; Ruth Maher; Betty St. Dizier; Mildred Joy; Doris Bentley; Jane Ellen Carstens**

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WALKIN' TALL

by

Melba Martin

It was the summer of 1964. Our daughters Claire and Camille had just finished the fourth and second grades at the old Carencro High School, a twelve-grade school in the town of Carencro. Summer vacations always brought a welcome change of pace from the school session. There were swimming lessons, trips to the Lafayette Public Library, afternoons spent playing with cousins, and hours spent making things. Today, a hot June day, we would build stilts, and hopefully, learn to walk on them. We would need only wood, a few nails, and some paint. Since it was a week-day, Lucien was at work, so the three of us would shop for wood. We got into our old 1955 blue and white Chevrolet for the half-mile trip to the Country Lumber Company just off Pont des Mouton Road near the intersection of the Evangeline Thruway.

I remember the Country Lumber Company being a pleasant place to shop. Mr. Oswald Guilbeau, one of the owners, was always friendly and helpful when we needed building supplies for a project. When we told him we were going to build stilts, he set about to find just the right wood for us. While we were looking at lumber, Mr. John Benoit, Mr. Guilbeau's business partner, gave Claire and Camille each a bottle of pop. Before long, Mr. Guilbeau found four one-by-fours that he thought would be exactly right for our project. I remember paying $1.25 for all four of those beautiful almost-knotless boards. The pop was on the house. Mr. Guilbeau loaded the boards into our car, and we drove off with them sticking out of one of the windows.

Back at home, we measured the boards and marked them for cutting and for nailing on the footrests. The eight-foot lengths would be long enough for the poles and the footrests. However, braces for the footrests would have to come from the pile of scrap lumber left over from building our house and some large ABC blocks not yet put away for posterity.

As I began to saw, I soon realized that following a straight mark on the wood was beyond my carpentry skills. This was a job for Lucien. When he came home from work, he sawed all the footrests and braces, and also nailed them securely to the poles so there would be no danger of little feet getting pierced.

Each pair of stilts had two sets of footrests. Claire's were twelve inches from the ends of the poles on one side, and twenty inches on the other side. Since Camille was a little shorter than Claire, her stilts were built on a somewhat smaller scale. The footrests on her stilts were ten inches and eighteen inches high. With a choice of heights a walker could be eight inches shorter or taller instantly just by flipping the poles around.

We painted both pairs of stilts with paint left over from other projects. Claire's were light green, and Camille's pink. When the green and pink paint dried, we used red and dark green paint to decorate both sides of the poles with drawings of flowers, leaves, and a few favorite toys.

Both girls were soon walking about confidently on either level of their stilts. However, I was never able to stay on them long enough to take even one step. But in spite of my clumsiness, I have happy memories of the stilts and all the fun Claire and Camille had with them.

FRENCH AND ACADIAN CULTURE
by
Anna Ruth Boudreau (Ganucheau-Maher)

I have always considered my ancestry to be agrarian. In various lines of my family, besides farmers, there have also been notaries, lawyers, doctors, teachers, judges, blacksmiths, salesmen, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs and others. I love getting my hands dirty in a garden, watching plants emerge, and enjoying the beauty of flowers or vegetables produced. When the temperatures are pleasant, I always find time to spend in my yard daily, even if it is only to sip a cup of coffee or work the daily crossword puzzle while listening to and enjoying the sounds in the garden. I think I inherited a chunk of that agrarian ancestry in my blood.

As a child I remember my parents and grandparents being loving and family oriented people. I remember hard times for some members of the family and how other members reached out to them to share what they had in the way of food, clothing, and even shelter. During the Great Depression my grandparents from both sides of my family, and aunts and uncles lived with us for short periods of time when they suffered great losses.

We often lived near family members and would visit frequently. Mama visited her Mother and Father, Mére and Pére Labbe. They spoke to each other in French. We had not been taught French so we never understood what they said, a regretful loss of this facet of my culture. I can still visualize Mama and Mere sitting on the porch, aprons tied around their waist, a big bowl on their lap, shelling peas, snapping fresh green beans, or cutting okra as they spoke in French of the latest news of family members or friends. They seemed to enjoy themselves so much. Sometimes my mother's sister, Aurore Fournet, would join them. They had such a good time together. Some of the happiest times of my childhood were our visits to Aunt Aurore's home and visiting with her family (ten first cousins) when we lived in the Lafayette area.

Another trait of the French Acadian culture was to be frugal, and to never waste anything that could be used. Clothing that still had use was passed on to younger members of the family, cousins, and sometimes neighbors. Food was never wasted either. Mama had a saying, "Eat everything you take or are served. Remember there are starving Armenians on the other side of the world who have nothing to eat." This

little saying of Mama's, "there are starving Armenians on the other side of the world," has taught me to be generous when there are good causes to make a contribution and also helped me to realize how tremendously blessed we are in the United States. On Sunday evening, all the leftovers from previous meals of that week were gathered together to make a casserole or stew, by combining and adding another ingredient to make it tasty. Furniture, too, was stretched. It was passed on to someone who needed it or stored in garage or attic until there was a need. When shopping, Mama checked the newspapers for sales on clothes and weekly food specials. I still do many of these frugal acts.

Another trait of my culture is helping a family member, a friend or a neighbor whenever you can. Whether it's a painting job, a repair on an auto, adding or enlarging a room to accommodate an addition to a family, everybody was willing to help. In 1958 shortly after we had moved into a new home in Metairie, we decided to enclose the back porch. My Dad and my four brothers came over to help my husband, Louis, to do this job. Dad, particularly, enjoyed such a project. With six people on the job it was completed in no time. Just last evening, Tom and I went to check Tom's mail box and much to our dismay, when Tom went to start his truck, the starter would not turn over. It was too late to call the service station so I called my brother, Bill, and he came to give us a jump-start. Before he arrived, two students from USL asked if we needed help and gave us the jump-start we needed, reinforcing the trait of lending a helping hand in our culture. Bill followed us to the service station and then called to be sure we got home.

This culture also has a "joie de vivre" when it comes to special holidays and celebrations. As far back as my memory goes, our family always gets together with other members for these occasions with a big festive meal. First, we met at my grandparents, then at Mama and Dad's home and now we gather at my home.

My Acadian culture has instilled a steadfast faith in Catholicism and moral values which I treasure. It has also taught me respect for authority, my elders, and teachers. My culture has given me a good work ethic. My Dad used to always encourage us to give every job we had our best effort, assuring us we would succeed accordingly. I remember a letter my Dad wrote to me shortly after I had passed my Real Estate exam in the late sixties. He told me how proud he was of me and that he knew that anything I set out to do, I would succeed. He had that much faith in me!

A special feast day of the Catholic faith that my Acadian French culture has given to me is the feast of All Saints which is celebrated on November 1. This feast commemorates the memory of all martyrs and saints and all of our deceased loved ones and celebrates a special Mass on November 1 for our deceased family members. Families go to the cemetery to clean and decorate the burial sites for the feast. My first remembrance of this occasion was in 1935 after we had returned to Washington where our family burial grounds are located in Cedar Hill Cemetery. We all went to attend to my grandfather's tomb. Two years later in 1937 my father had to purchase a site for our immediate family when my sister Rose, at fifteen years of age, died of complications from pneumonia and pleurisy. In 1939 my grandmother, Josephine Frances Lalanne Boudreau died and was buried next to my grandfather, William Ralph Boudreau, M.D. Since then the sites have been cared for by our family. Even when we lived in New Orleans, my father would order flowers from my great aunt, Aunt Bertha Deci, who lived in Opelousas and raised chrysanthemums of many varieties commercially each year just for this feast day. After my father died, we continued to care for the family burial sites along with my two Aunts, Elaine and Sal. Now that they are gone, my brothers and sister and I care for the cemetery. At present we have eight sites to maintain. Fortunately, the cemetery has perpetual care so it is kept clean and mowed. Next year we are planning to invite all of our children to come and help and have a picnic, thereby passing on the tradition to the younger generation. Cedar Hill Cemetery is a beautiful spot on top of a hill and most pleasant to visit.

My culture has also given me an appreciation of art. As children we listened to music and drama on the radio. When we lived in New Orleans, we had many opportunities to attend concerts, opera, and visit museums of history and art. I am very grateful and blessed to have had a birthright into the French Acadian culture.

POTPOURRI OF EARLY REMEMBERED EXPERIENCES

by

Pat DeLatte

It's four o'clock in the morning and I should be sleeping, tomorrow will be here soon enough. A couple of hours more and I'll be ready to greet a new day. Turning away from the clock, I snuggle down into the comfort and security of my feather pillow, readjust my covers and prepare to enjoy a few more zzzs. Just as I am about to reenter the arms of Morpheus, I remember the assignment given to us by Joan for our first paper this semester-- Earliest Remembered Experience. "Haven't we done this before? Didn't I already write those stories? What else can I remember? Not to worry, I'll think about it tomorrow."

Five minutes later, eyes wide open, all thought of sleep hopelessly lost, I give in to the rush of memories vying for position. "Maybe I can just think about them now and write about them tomorrow." Unfortunately, this is not to be. My thoughts drift like feathers to earth, settling for a moment and then blowing away. I'll have to capture them immediately before they scatter too far to be retrieved and held on to. On goes the light and with pen and paper this potpourri of early memories is haphazardly recorded.

When I was living on Alexander Street and attending Crossman Grammar School, my family went to Mass at St. Anthony's Church on Canal Street. Always dressed in my best "Sunday" clothes, I learned to behave quietly and properly while the priest said Mass in Latin. Holy Communion was distributed to the faithful who were kneeling at the altar rail as the Priest solemnly walked from right to left placing the wafer directly on the tongue of each one. An altar boy preceded the Priest, holding a gleaming metal disc under each chin so as to catch the holy wafer if one was unfortunate enough to drop it. There was absolutely no way it could fall from my mouth once placed on my tongue. The wafer always stuck to the roof of my mouth. I had not been able to eat or drink any liquid from midnight until after receiving the Holy Communion, so my mouth was as dry as the desert and no coaxing with my tongue could budge it! Because I was not allowed to chew it, I waited patiently for it to dissolve, and marveled that it always did!

We walked 10 to 12 blocks to City Park to go swimming. While we swam, our clothes and possessions were left in a big, common changing room and no one ever had anything stolen. The bottom of the pool was rough and always scraped my toes.

The watermelon man passed through our neighborhood in a wagon pulled by a mule. He would put his cupped hand up to his mouth and call out "I gotta gotta ripe watermelon red to the rind! The sweetest you can find!" To back up his claim he would cut out a triangle of the fruit and let us test the "plug." Melon just doesn't taste that good today. The Roman Taffy man came by once a week, his bell clanging and his mule clip clopping along the street, to sell his sweet hand pulled confection for a nickel a stick.

I remember walking eight blocks to school, carrying a schoolbag. I wore starched dresses and hair ribbons. I put on rubber "galoshes" and a raincoat when it was raining. I played through puddles of water testing how waterproof the rubber boots were and having wet feet most of the day. I got 10 cents for lunch at school. It bought me a lettuce and tomato sandwich on French bread, a half pint of milk and two oatmeal cookies.

I entered the talent contest in third grade wearing a long red dress, singing "The Little Red Fox Jumped the Fence and Ran in a Hollow Log." I came in second place and won a half dollar coin. My best friend Dolly Gene won the first place dollar singing "In An Old Dutch Garden By An Old Dutch Mill." I was convinced it was because she was accompanied by music and I wasn't!

I also remember the day I was called on to read in front of the class and had an urgent need to go to the bathroom. The reading took longer than I could wait and I unfortunately wet my pants right there in front of everyone. Just then the lunch bell rang and I ran from the room to the nearest exit and all the way home. I refused to go back to school the rest of the day. The teacher, Mrs. Breaux, was very kind when I returned the following day and none of the students said anything about what had happened. The teacher must have instructed them not to.

The first Mardi Gras Ball I went to was with Roger Kent Battle, the boy who lived down the block. It was a children's ball held at the Jerusalem Temple and I wore a blue taffeta dress that my mother made. Roger Kent gave me a corsage of pink carnations. I was beautiful!

I remember going to the Carrollton Movie Theater with Ennie and Joan and their friends. I was six years younger, but I followed along with them wherever they went. They didn't mind and just accepted it. After the movie we headed to the corner of Canal and Carrollton for Manuel's hot tamales. Ennie was on the football team at Warren Easton, and the players were often at our house where Mom made fried chicken and potato salad for them.

We spent time at the Mid-City Bowling Alley, too. It was a safe place for teenagers to have fun. Joan was the best bowler and usually beat the guys. I was not very good, but I loved the smell of the hardwood alleys and the songs on the juke box, the Andrews Sisters singing "Rum and Coca-Cola" or Bing Crosby's "Don't Fence Me In." A new snack product had just been introduced, too, a corn chip called :"Fritos." I'd go next door to Walgreen's drug store and get the new edition of Calling All Girls, my favorite magazine. Going home we'd walk through a field of buttercups and black eyed Susans and bring a handful to Mother.

After we moved to Monroe Street I took tap dancing, ballet and acrobatics from Miss Hazel. We had our yearly revue at the same Jerusalem Temple where I had experienced my first Carnival Ball. My butterfly costume was lovely watered silk that covered my hands and hooked behind my neck. At the end of the performance, the hook came undone and the front of the costume was falling down. Quick! Think! What to do? I remained in a really low bow until after the curtain descended and then ran, humiliated, from the stage.

One day my girlfriend Shirley Claire and I decided to bring our lunch to school. I checked the leftovers Mom had in the refrigerator. The bowl of Jell-O looked especially good, so I figured I'd include it . I put it with the other delicacies and went to school anticipating a gourmet lunch. When the noon bell rang I went for my brown bag, only to find a soggy mess of sandwich swimming in melted strawberry Jell-O. My first science lesson in the effect temperature has on solids and liquids!

I remember po-boys at Parkway Bakery, Cloverland Dairy Ice Cream that came in small containers with movie star pictures on the inside lid, hot glazed doughnuts from McCarrons Bakery--three for a dime--fruit salad sundaes, fountain Limeades with cherries, and sharing a fourteen cent cheeseburger from the Apple Sweet Shop with my sister, Joan....

What is it with all this food? ... Oh, gee, it's six o'clock, I've been writing for a couple of hours. Hmm, I must be hungry. Might as well get up and start the day. Or...better yet, maybe now I can get back to sleep!

NO, VIRGINIA, IT ISN'T A MARTIAN

by

Betty St. Dizier

My husband who was known as "Blue" completed a Residency in Ophthalmology at Charity Hospital in New Orleans in the fifties. After three years there we moved to Lafayette and purchased a home on Roselawn Boulevard in Magnolia Park. We moved in December on a cold, wet, winter day. We were welcomed into the neighborhood, a quiet area, and soon settled into our new environment.

Several weeks after our move I received a phone call from one of our new neighbors. She began the conversation with this remark, "I haven't known you for very long, but my curiosity is getting the best of me! In the evenings after dark, there is a small red light that moves around on your property. Sometimes it appears in the back yard moving slowly. Other times it is stationary under your carport. My husband and I are mystified by this activity, so I decided to inquire."

After semi controlling my giggles, I explained that smoking was not allowed in my home. Blue had never been a heavy smoker but did enjoy a good cigar in the evening. Blue and his cigar were relegated to the out-of-doors. On inclement nights his smoking was confined to the carport area. On the other hand, when the weather was pleasant, he enjoyed walking in the back yard.

The mystery of the moving red light had been solved and Magnolia Park had not been invaded by Martians!

PAPA
by
Jane Ellen Carstens

My Father, Charles John Carstens, Sr., whom we called Papa, was the seventh of eight children born to Ernest John Carstens and Amelia Pauline Kelty, both natives of New Orleans. Early in their marriage they moved to Shreveport, where four of their children were born, and later to New Iberia, where the other four were born. Papa, second to the youngest, was born in 1882.

I don't know much about his early life, other than that he went to LSU, where he lived in what was known as the Pentagon Barracks, and earned his degree in Agriculture.

Papa married our mother, Marie Claudia Blanchet, also from New Iberia, and they had six children. Their names, ranging in age from the oldest to the youngest, were Marie Carolyn (named for Mama's sister); Charles John, Jr.; Anna Henriette (named for another sister and Grandma Blanchet); Mary Margaret; Jane Ellen (me); and Noelie Marie (named for one of Mama's cousins).

As I mentioned in an earlier story, Mama died at the young age of forty. About two years later, Papa married Marie Therese Estorge of Opelousas.

I remember Papa as a rather quiet man. Although he loved all of his children, he was never demonstrative of his love. It fell to our stepmother, Mim, to supply us with all the hugs and kisses that we needed. On the other hand, Papa was quite demonstrative of his affection for Mim, both in action and in words. His favorite name for her was ChouChou, which means "Sweetie" in English.

When Papa married Mim, she was still young enough to bear children. Apparently she was unable to do so, a disappointment that, I think, caused her much pain. On one occasion when Papa went to market in either St. Louis or Chicago, he returned with a beautiful By-lo baby doll, which he presented to her as "their baby." Mim was quite touched by his gesture, and we all loved the doll.

All of us loved Mim and sensed that she and Papa were very much in love. I don't recall their ever having a serious disagreement, but on one occasion they did disagree about something, and a mild argument ensued. Their bickering upset me very much because I think I was afraid that Mim would leave. When she realized how upset I was, she took me into her lap and assured me that there was nothing to worry about. She explained that it was natural for husbands and wives to disagree and argue about things at times, but that she and Papa loved each other very much, and she would never leave. I felt much better after that.

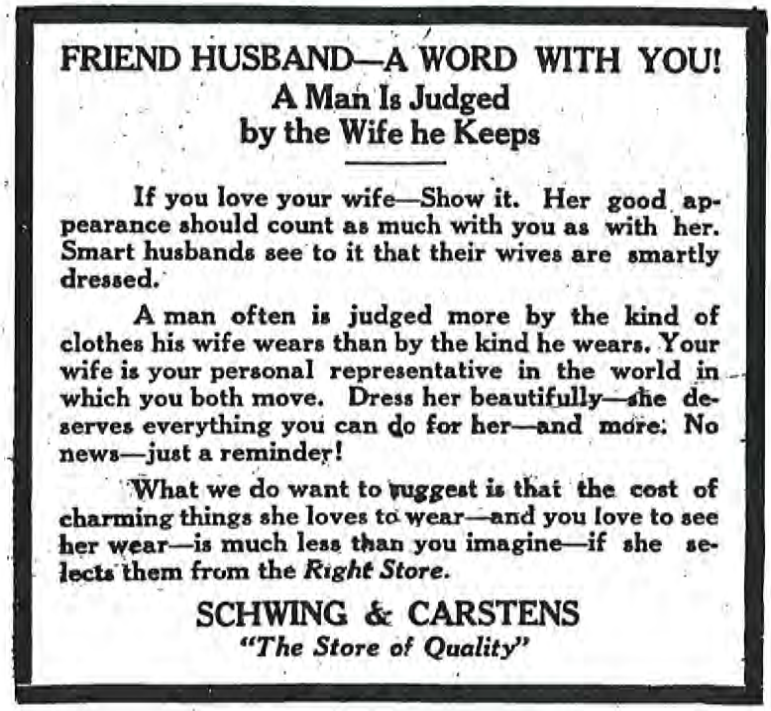
As far as discipline was concerned in our family (at least for Noelie and me,) Mim's solution was to have us sit in a chair and remain still for a period of time. Papa had a different solution if he thought the situation merited it. The one thing that usually brought a correction was when one of us might be sassy to Mim. If Papa heard us, we expected him to open one of their bedroom windows. He would reach toward the beautiful yellow flowering tree and break off a branch to be used as a switch. Our spanking was more embarrassing than hurtful. We loved Mim dearly and were sorry that we had done something which resulted in this punishment.

Papa somehow earned the reputation for playing pranks on people. I learned that before he married our real mother he was engaged to someone else. Apparently he authored a letter involving her, which her father found so disturbing, that he made her break off the engagement.

As I mentioned in an earlier story, Papa was also musically inclined and could sing and play the piano, harmonica, and cornet. He was a member of the New Iberia City Band. He played one or more of these instruments frequently at home in our living room. I have to confess that we children did not always appreciate his talent. Our attitude was something like, "Oh no, not again!" Papa also wrote songs, some of which I remember hearing him sing, but unfortunately, I cannot find them among his things. A heavy smoker, Papa sometimes smoked three packs of Camel cigarettes a day. I recall at some point that he also rolled his own cigarettes. This habit resulted in his having cancer of the larynx in the early 1950s. I accompanied him on the train to New Orleans, where he entered Ochsner Foundation Hospital. The doctors found it necessary to remove his larynx. Papa still managed to retain his sense of humor, and after several liquid diets fed through a tube inserted into his nose, he wrote the nurse a message asking her if she couldn't grind up some steak and feed it through the tube.

While the operation destroyed the cancer, it also destroyed his ability to speak. He was given an electro-larynx which, when held to his throat at the point of his vocal chords, enabled him to speak. The resulting monotone voice bore no resemblance to his original one. Although far better than having to mouth words or write them down, the device made Papa impatient and frustrated at not being able to speak on his own. At one point he threw the electro-larynx against a wall, breaking it. We did not try to replace it, for we knew the same thing would happen again. Instead, by learning to read his lips, we helped to ease his frustration.

Papa died quietly in his sleep in 1958. A number of years later, I discovered some early New Iberia newspapers in our attic which had advertisements for his store. It made me smile as I read them, and I could just imagine his composing them. This was Papa at his best!



FRIEND HUSBAND—A WORD WITH YOU!
A Man Is Judged
by the Wife he Keeps

If you love your wife—Show it. Her good appearance should count as much with you as with her. Smart husbands see to it that their wives are smartly dressed.

A man often is judged more by the kind of clothes his wife wears than by the kind he wears. Your wife is your personal representative in the world in which you both move. Dress her beautifully—she deserves everything you can do for her—and more. No news—just a reminder!

What we do want to suggest is that the cost of charming things she loves to wear—and you love to see her wear—is much less than you imagine—if she selects them from the *Right Store.*

SCHWING & CARSTENS
"The Store of Quality"

Advertisement for Papa's Store
New Iberia
Circa 1929

ONE OF MY EARLIEST REMEMBRANCES
by
Marie Louise LaCaze

Let me preface this memory by stating that I was my parents' fourth child born after my mother had lost three babies, all brought to term but who died following difficult deliveries. To say the least, I was an overly protected child, even I'll admit a spoiled brat.

It was wash day at our home in Church Point. In the summer, the laundry was done in wash tubs that were placed on a bench under the shade of a mulberry tree in our back yard. White clothes and linens were boiled in a large black iron pot a few yards away from the wash tubs. Dress shirts and other clothes had to be starched. For this purpose, powdered starch mixed with water was cooked on the stove in the kitchen until it had the consistency of custard.

On this day, a little metal tub (dish-pan size) was taken out to the laundry site and placed on the grass next to the bench. Sis, the wash woman, had intended to place the little tub on the bench.

Mama went out to speak to Sis and I, a meddlesome, almost-four-year old followed her. Neither Mama nor Sis perceived that I was there. Suddenly, I backed up and toppled into the tub of hot starch, letting out shrieks and cries. Mama and Sis let out yells of surprise and consternation. Mama grabbed me up and began quickly tearing off my dress and little pants that matched my dress as she carried me into the house. She placed me on a bed face down leaving Sis to attend to me as she rushed to telephone Dr. Petitjean. He told her to cover the burned area with vaseline right away and that he was leaving his office immediately to come to our home. He declared the worst burn was on my right thigh where the band of the little pants had been difficult to tear off. He commended Mama for having had the presence of mind to quickly remove my starch-drenched clothes.

I spent much of the summer lying on my stomach with my gown folded above my buttocks. A smelly medication, which Dr. Petitjean had prescribed, covered my

buttocks and upper legs. I can still smell that salve! Over the medicated area was placed a type of parchment paper.

I can remember visits from my little friends and their mothers and the delicious treats that they brought to me. I have no recollection of the pain and discomfort that I must have experienced.

In retrospect, I can imagine how guilty Mama and Sis must have felt and my Daddy's concern. For a long time after this incident, I was absolutely forbidden to even enter the kitchen or work areas. To say that I received attention and watchful supervision is an understatement!

ONLY TEN MILES TO NEW IBERIA

by

Doris B. Bentley

In the Spring of 1927, the Mississippi River overflowed above Baton Rouge, at Melville, and the water filled the Atchafalaya Basin and spilled into Lake Dauterive, flooding the entire area of Loreauville. Our family evacuated to Scott, where all the Broussards were accommodated by Vieux Mom's relatives and the people of Scott. (Remember, Vieux Mom was from Lafayette and her brother, Uncle Luke, had a lumber yard in Scott.) Mama and I spent the summer at the Scott Elementary School along with the Berard Family from Loreauville. Daddy stayed at home to try to take care of the house, its furnishings, and the animals.

The water rose up to the porch at Mamite's, but no further. Our furniture was not damaged, but Daddy's farm crop was destroyed, as were all the other farmers' crops in the area. Having lost everything and unable to meet the mortgage on the farm, Daddy got a job in New Iberia selling Chevrolet cars for Mr. Joe Davis. We moved to Duperier Avenue in New Iberia at the end of the summer.

Mama had a "porch sale" at Mamite's before moving. She put everything that she could not take with us on the porches and let the neighbors take what they wanted. (I used the term "sale," but it was "give-away.") Even so, there were many truckloads of stuff to move to New Iberia.

When school started in the Fall, Mama and I rode the Teche Bus from New Iberia to school in Loreauville every day. Mama wanted me to finish the fourth grade there, so that I would start fifth grade in the new school in New Iberia in the Spring of 1928.

My teacher in fifth grade at Central School was Mrs. Hall, and there I met the kids who would be my classmates for the rest of my school days in New Iberia. (There was only one section of the fifth grade.) Although I had some uneasy moments, and it was a long time before I felt that I "belonged" to the group, I eventually adjusted to the new school environment and enjoyed my middle and high school years in New Iberia.

Moving from "the country" to "town" was quite an adjustment that I had not anticipated. Three doors from us on Duperier lived the Vuillemots. Mr. Emile Vuillemot was Mama's first cousin and the District Attorney. There were nine children in that family, four girls and five boys. The three younger boys, who were older than I, and the two Girard boys who lived across the street often sat on the cement ledge of the sidewalk. When I would walk past, they would taunt me with, "Hi, Cajun! Hi, Loreauville!" I would come crying home to Daddy.

Wise man that he was, Daddy finally asked, "Well, are you a Cajun?"

"Yeah," I answered with tears still in my eyes.

"Are you from Loreauville?" he queried.

"Yeah, but so are their parents," I argued.

"Well," he said, "Just say to them, 'That's right, I am a Cajun and I am from Loreauville, and I'm proud of it.'"

"If they see it doesn't get your goat, it will take all the fun out of teasing you," he continued. (I supposed he had learned that from his eleven brothers and sisters. Having none myself, I had not learned some of those defensive skills.)

I can't for the life of me remember doing what he told me, but I must have because I lived through the boys' teasing and learned a good lesson in the process: People can't tease you unless you let them.

MY BICYCLE EXPERIENCES
by
Lois Diehl

Owning and learning how to ride a bicycle was a big step in growing up in the little town of Mt. Holly. A shiny bright blue Schwinn, my first bicycle was a gift for my eighth birthday. Attached to the handle bars were a white basket and a silver bell. A long bright chrome book rack was fitted over the rear bumper. I no longer walked anywhere, now I could ride.

I had no training wheels. Dad held on to the bookrack to help me balance as I practiced riding in the alley behind the barn and then on the sidewalk in front of the house. He would run behind as I pedaled until I was able to go by myself for a ways. Before long I could start by pedaling forward and balancing myself without Dad's steadying hand. To stop I simply had to backpedal. Finally, I thought I was ready to ride in the street by myself. Mom and Dad watched as I began to ride down Chestnut Street towards the schoolhouse half a block away. I had not anticipated riding beside two cars as they passed each other. I remember my first ride ended less than half a block from home when I lost my balance and wobbled into a parked car in front of Mrs. Gleckner's house. My new bicycle now had its first scratches and my knees burned from scraping the hard surface of the street.

My friends, Susie and Dodie on their green bicycles, and I spent many summers riding up and down the hills of Mountain Street and Pine Street. Those bicycles took us to the ball field for the summer home town baseball games and to Snyder's at the other end of Holly for cones of frozen custard. Sometimes we pedaled to Upper Holly over the railroad tracks and along the stream in Holly Park to the dam. I read a lot during those early summers. Often I rode to the red rock castle, known as the Holly Library. With library books placed in my basket, I set out for the wooded banks along the small creek behind Mrs. Stayer's house. I spent many afternoons reading my library books in the cool shade of the trees there . Sometimes I read the books so quickly that Mrs. Morehouse, the librarian, did not believe that I had read each book in its entirety. I read the whole Nancy Drew series in one summer.

Susie, Dodie, and I decided one August day to bicycle to the Boiling Springs swimming pool six miles away. The road was very hilly and had lots of curves. I don't

remember how long it took us, but it was quite a ride for three young girls on bicycles before gears. After I got my driver's license my blue bicycle was parked in the out kitchen most of the time, and when I left for college it was stored in the barn.

Several years ago, in January 1990, my friend Celia told me about her weekend riding adventures throughout the Acadiana area. I remembered the fun I had riding as a young girl and thought bicycle riding was a skill that 'once learned was not forgotten.' When my kids were growing up, their bicycles had three gears. Now the bicycles had several more gears--all unfamiliar to me. I was sure I would have no problem with the transition to gears. Celia informed me Pack and Paddle offered safe bicycle riding lessons. I signed up for the lessons given the four Saturdays in May before the weather became unbearably hot. Pack and Paddle measured me for the rental bicycle to be used during the lessons. I purchased a helmet and made sure I had the proper shoes to fit the pedals. I was eager to begin bicycle riding again.

At 8 a.m. the first Saturday I met Steve, the instructor, and several other riders in a large parking area off East Kaliste Saloom. Since I was the shortest adult, I was assigned the smallest bicycle. I had never ridden one with a bar before and had some difficulty getting on. We were to practice riding around the parking lot before we rode onto the road. I had ridden an unsteady twenty feet when Steve, our instructor, rode alongside and suggested that I stop so he could lower my seat. I tried to back pedal and then remembered the brake on the handlebar. As the bicycle came to a stop I realized, with a sinking feeling in my stomach and with panic, that my left foot was stuck on the pedal. There was no way I could halt the bicycle with me on it tilting to the left. At first I thought Steve's bicycle had broken my fall until I saw the look of horror on his face and then saw the blood gushing from a deep open slash in my forearm. My forearm had landed across all Steve's gears. I had seven red wavy lines from my elbow to my wrist. The lines ranged from a scratch to about one and a quarter inches deep into the tissues. Steve gave me a towel and told me to hold it with pressure over the wound. After instructions to the others to keep practicing, he rushed me to Lafayette General Emergency Room. I was still there waiting when he returned after the class three hours later. When the doctor finished putting about ten stitches in my forearm and wrapping it in voluminous white bandages, he told me I should be able to rejoin the others the next Saturday. Steve was so sure I was finished riding that he assigned my bicycle to another short lady in the class. While waiting to be stitched I had been reading a Pack and Paddle newsletter about other activities offered. Steve turned a little pale when I asked, "Do you give lessons in rollerblading?...Just kidding!"

The next Saturday I was requested to arrive about an hour before the others. Steve told me that the bicycle assigned to me had been too big and he promised he would find one this time that fit my leg measurements. Also I was given instructions how to get on the bicycle and begin riding and also how to stop safely and get off. Steve had assumed that I knew these steps even though I had told him over and over I had only ridden a bicycle in the 40's and 50's.

The second Saturday was the ten mile ride on Highway 90 towards Broussard. I had made up my mind I was going on this ride. I soon felt comfortable with starting and stopping and was eager for the ride to begin. The cars whizzing by made me a little nervous as we had to ride near the edge of the road. About three miles down Highway 90 I felt my helmet slip a little. I gingerly took one hand off the handlebar to adjust it, but I was not watching the road closely. Just as my left hand touched my helmet, my front wheel rolled into a large pothole. The bicycle went out of control and off the road. I flew over the front wheel into the ditch along the road. My head hit the ground first, and for the first time in my life (that I can remember) I saw star bursts. I was disoriented for a while, but soon heard the unmistakable wail of a police siren approaching in my direction. Two officers had been traveling in the opposite direction on Highway 90 when they saw my spill. They were coming to take me to the hospital. I looked up at them and the instructor and said, "I don't think that's necessary this week. I want to continue the ride." I did finish the ten mile ride without further incident. At the end I was relieved and pleased that I had completed the ride.

That bicycle ride was my last. Gears and those hard seats made for fifty pounders are not for me. Instead I will travel Acadiana in my air-conditioned auto. Last summer my nephew Ashley asked if I wanted my first shiny blue bicycle restored. He had discovered it in the loft of the barn covered with dust and spider webs--the beautiful blue hidden by rust and its tires dry rotted. I said, "No! My last bicycle experience has taught me better. The only bicycle I will attempt to ride in the future is one that is stationary."

TEACHING THE ANGELS CATECHISM
by
Louise deBeus

At the time of my mother's death in January 1961, Co and I were living in Canberra, Australia, where we had been posted since 1960. Our January in the southern hemisphere gave us a warm and beautiful sunshiny day on the eighth of January, with the drone of the bees, the smell of newly cut grass, birds chirping--ideal weather for sun bathing.

I sat in a big wicker chair reading, at peace with the world. The breeze was cool and refreshing. Jimbo, our black English cocker spaniel, lay at my feet. I stooped to pet him, and it was then that I heard Co's car coming up the driveway. Before I could call out to say I was on the library terrace, he appeared. Immediately I sensed that something was not right. He did not give me the usual peck on the cheek, but instead placed an arm around my shoulders and drew me to him as he said in a low voice, "I've received sad news today."

I drew away from the protection of my husband's arm and looked at him, my eyes questioning what I could not put into words. A cable had come from my father, stating, *Mom passed away 4 January from massive heart attack. Funeral following day. Letter follows.* It was all so final. I melted in Co's arms and sobbed my heart out. It was so like Daddy; the funeral had already taken place before he sent the message, knowing full well I'd have done all possible to be with my family at this heart breaking time. Daddy was aware I was not yet up to traveling as I had been released from the hospital just the day before where I had undergone minor surgery. Dear, thoughtful Daddy had realized Australia was not quite next door and knowing headstrong me, he knew I'd try to hop the first plane to America, either via the Pacific or the Atlantic.

The promised letter arrived within a few days, giving details of what had transpired. The massive heart attack had held Mom in its grip for a good many hours which gave Daddy sufficient time to gather in the rest of the family to be at her side when the end came.

Co said I should go home immediately--at least as soon as the doctor would give me permission to travel. So within two weeks I was on a plane heading for Louisiana.

My eldest sister, Lucille, and her husband, Bill, and Daddy met me at the Lafayette airport and we drove directly to our house on Jefferson Island which Daddy was now occupying all alone.

He was doing his best to be brave and strong; I, likewise, but conversation was difficult and sparse, neither wanting to broach the subject of a conversation we knew we'd have to face sooner or later. Lucille and Bill had stayed with us just a few minutes and then gone home several miles away. Daddy and I were like total strangers. Later, knowing how Daddy loved cornbread, I suggested I get busy in the kitchen and make some, I who had not cooked a meal, much less cornbread, in years.

I found myself in a kitchen completely strange to me. Not knowing where anything was, I opened and shut cupboards, unable to find what I was looking for, and had to ask Daddy where things were. Eventually I had all the makings of cornbread when, to my dismay, I realized the oven had yet to be lit. I tried my best but nothing came of my efforts except burnt matches and burnt finger tips. Again I called on Daddy, who walked in with a look of amusement on his face. He showed me how to light the oven and then with a warm, tear-stung smile, said, "I learned just last week. So can you." Widower and bereaved daughter fell into each other's arms, now laughing hysterically. We missed Mom, but still, we knew she'd have gotten a great kick out of the amusing situation we were in.

Mom had been a pillar of the church, and years before had taken it upon herself to teach the little ones on Jefferson Island catechism. Most came from homes where the parents could not read or write, so the children came, barely able to read, but happy to be with Mom whom they dearly loved. These kids came from extremely poor homes; sometimes their parents were divorced, had found other live-in companions, or their parents were constantly bickering and often fought. They came from homes so poor that the children never had enough to eat; homes where there was no such thing as an embrace, a kiss, or warm love.

Every weekday morning around 6:30, a timid knock came at the kitchen door, and in they would troop, usually eight or ten, to recite the catechism. They would seat themselves on a long bench at the kitchen table, and as the bench could not hold them all, there was a scurry for chairs closest to Mom. Her greetings were always warm and loving and she always questioned who had not had breakfast, knowing so well the answer to her question. Without giving the children a chance to reply, she would

continue and ask, "What about a huge pile of pancakes drowning in syrup? I think you need something in your tummies before we start our lesson." Replies were usually long sighs and giggles. Big glasses of milk, mounds of country butter, and a pitcher of cane syrup were set on the table. Then came the huge pile of pancakes. With their breakfast these little ones received very necessary lessons in table manners. They were so eager to please. They had to struggle to learn the complicated catechism, the difficult and unusual words, but learn they did. As they'd leave for school, each got a warm hug from Mom, and quite frequently several would go back to the end of the queue to get another hug and perhaps a kiss, something they never got at home.

A week after Mom's funeral, Daddy was busy outside the kitchen talking to his squirrels who clung to the kitchen screen door waiting for the nuts he usually handed out. Just about finished, he saw coming toward him Mom's last catechism class. Ill clad and partially frozen, the group approached Daddy, who was fighting back the tears. He looked at the little faces and wondered if they had come for breakfast or for catechism, or both, having forgotten that Miz Brouss was no longer there. He smiled and greeted them with a "Well, look who's here!" to preface the question, "Have you come for catechism?" No reply, just sad little faces turned up toward him. Sad thoughts were racing through his head. Perhaps they had forgotten what had happened, so he said, "Oh, but surely you know Mrs. Brouss is no longer here. Jesus took her a week ago." Silence. Then, Ella Mae, who had been Mom's favorite, walked up to Daddy, slipped her small, frozen hand into his and said, "Oh, we know that, Mr. Brouss, but we just stopped to say 'hello.' We miss her but we know she is busy in heaven teaching Jesus' little angels their catechism."

Daddy gulped. The huge lump in his throat seemed to take an eternity to disappear. Little faces looked up at him, waiting. "Yes, she's very busy with the angels," he was finally able to reply. Satisfied with his response and as quietly as they had come, Mom's little earth angels disappeared around the corner of the house on their way to school.

THE BATTLE AT SAIDOR, PAPUA, NEW GUINEA

by

Jacob M. Valentine, Jr.

General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral William Halsey, with the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had divided the South Pacific into two battle zones. MacArthur would take New Guinea as the approach to the Philippines and the Navy would strike Japan through the central islands of the Pacific. Rabaul, the Japanese stronghold, off the coast of New Guinea would be by-passed but rendered ineffective through bombings.

General MacArthur decided to move west to take Saidor on the north coast of the Huon Peninsula. The occupation of Saidor would cut the Japanese 18th Army in two: Madang-Wewsk on the west and Sio-Gali on the east. On 17 December, 1943, MacArthur ordered General Walter Krueger to take the area and construct an air and naval base.

The Saidor Task Force was under Brig. General Clarence Martin, assistant commander of the 32nd Division. His landing force included the 126th field artillery battalions, several other artillery units, and boat and aviation engineer units.

Three beaches on DeKays Bay were chosen because they had steep stony slopes that allowed landing craft to shove onto a dry beachhead. Admiral Daniel E. Barbey and General Clarence E. Martin observed the bombardment from the destroyer "Conyngham." H-hour was postponed about an hour as rain and overcast hid the shore. Six bombardment destroyers fired shells and two rocket LCIs fired at the beaches and inland as the assault waves assembled and headed for the beaches. Four assault waves from nine APDs in thirty-six LCP(R)s roared to shore and landed 1,440 troops. Sixteen LCIs in three waves put ashore an additional 3,000 troops. Six LSTs each towed an LCM of the 2nd Engineer Special Brigade that ran to shore to prepare the beach for LST landings. By noon all LSTs were unloaded and backed off.

There were few defenders, so casualties on both sides were light. Engineers promptly began building or repairing roads, fuel storage tanks, docks, a PT boat base, and a hospital. Amphibian engineers unloaded ships and built roads with difficulty because of incessant rains. ANGAU (Australian New Guinea Administration Unit)

supervised hundreds of natives in labor jobs. Work on the airfield was started immediately and within nine days C-47s were landing.

More like an over-kill training mission, landings and construction went like clockwork. Admiral Crutchley's task force stood by to protect against an attack by Japanese warships stationed at Rabaul. Rain and fog kept fighters and bombers based on Rabaul unable to launch an attack until late afternoon. By then, Barbey's ships were well off to sea. Supplies on shore were dispersed and hidden so little damage was done.

Martin positioned an infantry battalion at each end of a fourteen-mile stretch of coastline. A third battalion patrolled at the edge of the Finisterre Mountains to the south. Soon after the invasion, General Krueger warned that Japanese troops near Sio-Kiari were heading for Madang and that an attack on Saidor could be expected. Warnings were repeated on 7-9 January, 1944. At Martin's request for more troops, the lst and 3rd Battalions, 128th Regimental Combat Team, 32nd Division, were dispatched on 16-19 January.

In an interview made long after he retired, General Gill recalled the Saidor invasion as ". . . a minor operation as far as the 32nd Division was concerned. You know, we had a great many changes of ideas. At first, we operated without a clear-cut idea. The War Department and the General Staff were trying to get back to the Philippines the best way."

Gill continued: the invasion was ". . . the stepping stone for an advance along the New Guinea shoreline. General MacArthur's idea, as I finally got hold of it. . . was to follow along through New Guinea. My concern. . . was to protect the landing fields that the Australians made for us." Gill complained of ". . . little surprises. . . you were to land at one place; when you got to get off your landing boats and got ashore, it was a different place, a different scheme, a different show. It was hard to keep up to, but that was perfectly normal; it went on all the time."

After the landing, General Gill sent the rest of the division from Goodenough Island to Saidor and assumed command of the task force. When asked what his feelings were in battle, he said, "Well, it's hard to describe what you do when you run into enemy fire. They do drop bombs on you. . . and you get into a foxhole to keep from getting killed until the bombing is over, and then you advance."

"I sent patrols down the coast toward the west end of the line to see what Japs were there and what trouble we were having there. There was some fighting, but we were involved in a defensive setup, really, with General Martin and his outpost line out in front of the Division and the airbase there. Once he got caught and got pushed back a little bit. . . and since I was in command I took over and directed him to counter-attack with some reinforcements we were able to get our hands on. We drove the Japanese out, but the fighting kept on, and we kept losing men because the patrols didn't know where they were going. They had no maps of that area and they had to feel their way through. It was a defensive thing and not a very important one."

"In the jungle, we didn't have fixed lines. The Japanese were experts at getting behind our lines on the front, behind, and the side of us. Organized operations in the jungle were almost impossible. The only way you could do anything was to do it in small units--scouts and platoons, sometimes a company."

After the landing beach was secure, General Martin sent out patrols towards the east, west, and south. Scattered contacts occurred, but the main Japanese body had not yet reached Saidor. Martin wanted to attack east to hem in the Japanese between his force and the advancing Australians, but because of faulty transmission of messages, an attack would be too late.

JAPANESE PLANS

When word of the Saidor landings reached Rabaul, General Imamura sent orders to General Hatazo Adachi to slip by Saidor and go to Madang to join the remainder of the 18th Army in defense of Wewak. On 2 January, 1944, Adachi had already decided to retreat his troops from Sio-Gali, hoping he could get to Madang without a fight. General Nakano, in charge of the retreat, sent his forces inland along the Finisterre Range and others up the Markham/Ramu River valleys.

To slow westward advance by American troops, Nakano sent eight companies from Ramu Valley to Bogadjim. There they turned south down the coast to harass troops at Saidor. These were the troops that later confronted our patrols and on 19 February attacked our beachhead on the Mot River.

As a buck sergeant in charge of a liaison section, the officer I had most contact with was Lt. Herbert Jackson. Liaison sections maintain radio and telephone

communication between the infantry and the artillery. Jackson was an enlisted man in a National Guard gun battery from Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, when the 32nd Division was called into federal service in October 1940. Jackson was smart, a natural soldier who worked hard, made friends easily, and liked Army life.

After exemplary duty as a noncom, he was given a promotion to Second Lieutenant. With Captain Kobs and a gun crew of eight enlisted men, Jackson directed fire at the Japanese fortifications at Gona-Sananda-Buna. After a rest in Australia, Jackson returned to the 129th Field Artillery. He became a liaison and survey officer with Headquarters Battery.

On the evening of 18 January, 1944, the 129th Field Artillery boarded LSTs at Cape Cretin arriving at Saidor the next morning. My diary indicates that my liaison crew and I drove around looking for the Headquarters Battery. Herb Jackson remembered the area as a mud hole, *Rains most of the time. The only vehicle that gets thru without getting stuck is the amphibian tractor.* On 21 January he wrote: *Went to the 128 Inf. CP with Col. Beyer, Lt. Hilton, and my survey section. Got there by amphibious tractor via the ocean. A nice trip. Looked for GPs (gun positions) for the BN.*

My diary reads: *Saidor, 20 Jan. Went up to the Inf. GP with Capt. Givens by barge. . . nothing much doing. Moved to A Btry. . . set up hammock right next to beach. Swim anytime of day. . . books to read. 21 Jan. Mur. Started for the fwd gun and OP in a jeep. . . Givens foundered us in a stream so we turned back. . . lazed around in aft. . . read. . . sun bath. 22 Jan. Mur. Went by barge to Sel. the fwd outpost of the Inf. and F.A. . . Col. Bradley, Col. Dixon, Givens, et al.*

On 22 January I went to Sel by barge with the officers listed in my diary but walked back alone. I wrote: *. . . a pretty but perhaps dangerous trail thru the jungle. . . one bad ford.* I remember this walk as very pleasant, cool, with the ocean on one side and jungle and palm trees overhead, but I recognized that Japanese could lay in ambush anywhere. I was given a lot of freedom by these officers who, within reason, let me do most everything I wanted to do, and I took risks having little adventures. I felt invulnerable but sometimes regretted the fix I got into.

On 29 January, 1944, Jackson led the trucks and equipment of Headquarters Battery closer to the Mot River. He wrote, *Slept on the road last nite. Had to winch*

all of the vehicles over the mountain. Did some surveying in the P.M. Got C Btry. registered. Lt. Col. Clarkson of the lst Bn. 128 was KIA yesterday. An excellent C.O.

During the intense fighting at Buna-Gona, on 13 December, 1943, General Eichelberger gave then-Major Gordon Clarkson, a newly arrived staff officer, command of the lst Battalion, 128th infantry. He told MacArthur's headquarters: "Young Clarkson, who only left the military academy in 1938, is going to take one of the battalions. . . I know Clarkson well, for I raised him from a pup. . . he is full of fight and will do what I tell him."

In a letter to his wife, Eichelberger wrote with sadness that his close personal friend, *Gordon Clarkson, at the head of a chain formation of American soldiers, was killed crossing a chest-deep tropical river (Mot River). A Jap bullet killed him instantly. War is a heart-breaking profession. So often the brave go first.*

Jackson wrote: *31 Jan. Went up to the OP. A tough climb. Lt. Dowd is here too. Registered C Btry. A good view from up here. 1 Feb. Did more registering. Two men with me are Frank Skik and Paul Ponthriend. 2 Feb. Nothing to shoot at yet. Lt. Carmichael is up here. Fired some concentrations today. Service practice. 3 Feb. Watched as the Aussie airmen put on a show right in front of the OP. They bombed and strafed several villages below us, setting them on fire.*

On 6 February large numbers of Japanese troops were seen on a trail that ran through the foothills of the Finisterre Range south of Saidor giving credence to the Japanese bypass plans.

I wrote: *4 February. Galeck. Not much doing. It rains quite a bit making it miserable. We wash every evening in the creek. Read some during the day. Kinda blue. 7 February. Galeck. Nothing much happens. . . I go down to the battery almost every day just to shoot the shit. . . the Japs that are coming around us--about 4,000--are pretty much done up. . . they've climbed mountains up to 13,000 feet.. . about 8 POWs have given themselves up; all in poor shape--"I like Americans" one said as he gave himself up. . . the others to the east are more aggressive as our patrols have found out. . . a captain and four men failed to return. . . but it won't be too long before we get them all trapped. . . I bathe every day at the Yauri River and sometimes hit the ocean. . . dentist this morning--about an hour drilling!!*

During this time Jackson tied in the batteries and worked in the Fire Direction Center during the night shift. On 11 February he hiked to the OP carrying rations. On 12 February he wrote, *A Btry moved to our end of the beachhead today. Registered A Btry and the 120 FA Bn on the Terterie Villages. P-39s did some strafing.* On 13 February he wrote, *The Navy shelled the coast; the Air Force did some strafing and dropped some bombs. We laid down a big artillery barrage--on nobody. One Jap plane came over and dropped a bomb on the Piper Cub strip.*

My notes: *13 Feb. Galleck. Start of the push on Gabumi by the 3rd Bn. . . 1,600 rds. of artillery in about 15 min. . . planes, our own, bombed Yamai, on our side of the tracks. . . nobody hurt tho. . . our first real air-raid. . . two daisy-cutters on the Cub airstrip. . . heard the plane but did not get out of my hammock.*

On 14 February Jackson was on the OP overlooking the Mot River. He wrote, *Getting a nice tan. Lt. Molasgar came up and took my place. Swam in the Yauri on the way back to the CP. An advance party from B Btry came in today. Nite duty at the FDC (fire direction center) again.*

My notes: *14 Feb. Galeck. Went to the dentist again. . . pretty much hurt. . . chow is very good, fresh meat, and egg occ. 15 Feb. Galeck. Note many natives with elephantiasis. . . huge lower legs, one or both. . . skin diseases, ringworm, scaly skin. . . elephantiasis is caused by a pin worm filaria, which has for its hosts the mosquito and man. . . the women are not more than beasts of burden doing the carrying for the family. Their hair is cropped short. Some of the children are cute, however, and always ready to smile.*

On 17 February Jackson went with Col. Beyers, Capt. Givens, and Capt. Ketchum (HQ Btry) to look for gun positions for the Bn. Jackson noted they got stuck in the mud several times. My notes indicate I was on this same trip: *17 Feb. Galek. Went out with Col. et al to look for gun positions on the other side of the Yauri. . . saw porpoises jumping in a big school.*

The next day Herb came down with dengue fever and went to the 107th Field Hospital until 21 February. He mentions that the infantry moved across the Mot River on 21 February and that Capt. Givens got nicked by a short round while directing fire. My diary records this incident as occurring on 19 February. *19 Feb., 1944. In the Field. Mot River Op. Went out to the OP with Givens. . . laid wire down to Mot. . .*

machine gun firing over our heads on the OP. . . patrol returns to river crossing. . . Givens and I helped men cross on rope. . . Jap machine gun opens up. . . we hit the dirt. Givens calls for fire and gets it right close, in fact, wounds three men and breaks the rope. . . machine gun ceases fire. . . new rope across. . . wounded and others dragged across.. . some men lost down the river. . . finally got everyone across.

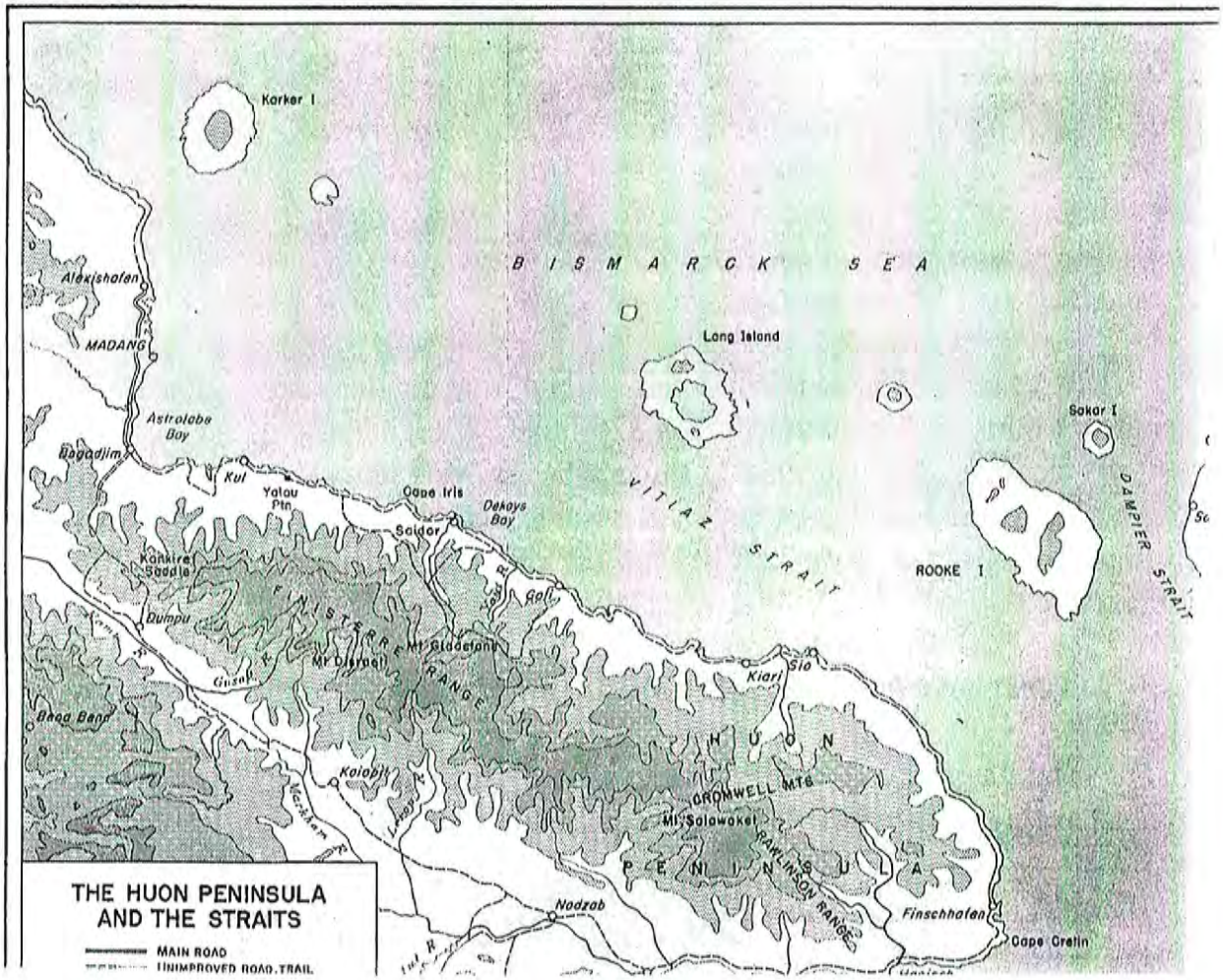
My memory of the incident differs slightly from my diary notes. On 19 February a patrol of thirty to fifty men from the 126 Infantry Regiment crossed the Mot River. To ford the river, the patrol had strung a heavy rope across a wide section of the stream. The patrol hadn't gone far when it was attacked by the Japanese. After a brief fire-fight the Americans backed off and the platoon leader radioed (or phoned) for artillery fire.

Meanwhile, Captain John O. Givens and I sat in a jeep at the observation post on the hill overlooking the Mot River. As far as we could see to the west was jungle. On our right, the river entered the Bismarck Sea forming a delta we called "The Island." Long Island lay a few miles off shore. Behind us the dark Finisterre Range loomed in the distance.

Earlier that day, I had run a telephone line down to the infantry patrol. Looking down at the river without seeing or hearing any action, I left Captain Givens and walked down a grassy slope and followed a trail that went a short way through the trees to a ford used by the natives. There I saw a heavy rope loosely stretched from a tree on my side to a tree on the opposite side. Here is where the infantry had crossed and walked into the jungle.

I laid my carbine and helmet on the ground and waded to the middle of the stream where the water was about three feet deep. The air was hot and muggy, the water fast and cool. I hung on the rope and let my legs and body dangle downstream. Having a great time, I ducked and bobbed. Savoring the rushing cool water, I spent about fifteen minutes playing. If the Japanese were watching, what I did would have been an example of battlefield dumbness. If you saw this episode in a war movie, you'd have said, "How stupid!" It was not smart to play out in the river with a battle only a few hundred feet away.

When I heard cannon fire I got out of the water, grabbed my helmet and carbine and ran up the hill. I can't explain the terror that came over me. An impulse to run to



In the Field

FEBRUARY 19

Mt Disraeli OP

1944 Went out to OP with Givens. Laid wire down to Mt. attached to 1st Bn 136. patrol out on other side of Mt. machine gun firing over our head on the OP. 19 patrol returns to river crossing. Givens & I helped men cross on rope. 2 machine guns open up. we hit the first. Givens calls for fire and gets 19 it close, infact wounds three men himself, and breaks the rope. machine gun recrossing. new rope across. wounded & others dragged across. 19 some men lost down the river. finally got everyone across

In the Field

FEBRUARY 20

Mt Bowendale

1944 Down on the island on the Mat. the infantry has only a small bridge-head. machine gunning like mad. men shot 19 on both sides of the river. laid more wire to island. slept on stretcher with fox holes for O & Panels

19

19

our headquarters flashed through my mind. *Should I say, "We need help?"* The desire to flee was quickly dispelled. How could I be a coward when my life-style was based on hundreds of adventure books?

Back at the jeep, Captain Givens got a message that the patrol wanted artillery fire to cover their withdrawal. He relayed this to our fire control section. While heading up the hill, I saw an explosion in the water. The blast cut the rope, stranding most of the patrol on the enemy side. I went back to the crossing, untied the rope, now too short to reach the other side, coiled it, and carried it downstream where the river was narrow and swift. I tied one end of the rope to a tree and threw the other end to the infantry guys who were gathering on the beach.

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

I actually can't recall how we helped the GIs, but Captain Givens and I crossed back and forth. The official account says that a sling was improvised and that Givens and I took the rope sling back and forth. As good soldiers, the GIs wore their steel helmets and their rifles slung across their backs making it hard to hang on. Six or seven soldiers let go. I hollered for others to catch them as they floated down, but I think most drowned. Rifle fire came from the Japanese, but I didn't hear it. I can't remember how many times Givins and I went across and back. Except for the drownings, I wasn't concerned; I was naked in an element where I had no fear.

Finally everyone was back on our side of the river, and we went our separate way. I slept that night behind a boulder farther down stream on "The Island." Adrenalin and the vision of infantrymen with rifles across their backs bobbing downstream kept me awake; so I took a couple of aspirins.

During a ceremony at Aitape on 11 September, 1944, Captain John O. Givens and I each received the Silver Star from General William Gill, commander, 32nd Division.

GOOD OLD DAYS REMEMBERED
by
Mildred L. Joy

A streetcar ran in front of the Old Habersham Homestead, and, if the drivers stayed for any length of time, I always got to know them. I would listen for the clanging of the cars' bell, and no matter what I was doing I'd turn around and wave. There would be smiles all around. Summer was the best time of the year for riding the two open air streetcars in Savannah. One ran from downtown Broughton Street to Isle of Hope, the other from Broughton Street to Thunderbolt. I would often hitch a ride with the drivers and go out to Isle of Hope. There was nothing in the whole wide world as great as riding the open air streetcars.

By the time we got out of town, going through the edge of the salty marsh leading to the island, the speed was pretty fast. Even then I'd get into all of the beauty God has given us. What more could you ask for than to be able to see the sun setting behind the old oaks draped with the Spanish moss and to feel the bucking and swaying of the streetcar on the track with the breeze blowing on your skin and the wonderful salt air flowing into your nostrils? Salt air has always served as a tranquilizer for me. Off in the distance I could hear the marsh hens squawking.

After we got to the end of the line, we had about fifteen minutes before we headed back toward Savannah. Just enough time to walk through Barbee's Pavilion and go out on the dock to watch the fishermen and the swimmers. On Saturday nights, entire families would gather and eat crab and boiled shrimp. Naturally, they had a live band and everybody would dance. The little children, especially, loved dancing around. There was never any rough housing or drunks causing fights, as you hear in today's living.

Granny moved down to Isle of Hope and that was my favorite place to go. Her house was right across the street from the river and a boat repair shop. My Granny was a very special lady to me. Granddaddy died when my Mama was twelve years old, so Granny had to rear six children of her own. Their names were: Lewis, the only son; Eleanora; Lucy; Winnie; Miriam; and Virginia. She lost a couple more, too! Granny held down three jobs. She was a nurse, a seamstress, and sold, of all things, corsets. In case you don't know what a corset is, it is worse than any girdle any woman has ever tried on. It had material just like a girdle, but was fashioned in two pieces.

Strings were attached to tie the wearer in, so tight she couldn't breathe properly. To hold her in even better, the hooks and eyes would fasten for miles.

At the news of my first pregnancy, Granny fitted me for a corset immediately. When Robbie, my firstborn, arrived, I wore that contraption for so long I felt it had become a part of me. Wearing it was supposed to help strengthen the stomach muscles. With my other four, I refused to wear one. I didn't have time for those lacings, hooks, and eyes. My goodness, I am certainly glad I wasn't born in the era when corsets were popular.

After Granny raised her children, she turned around and raised three of her grandchildren. It takes a very, very special person to remain sweet and loving through the years just as Granny did--in spite of the difficulties around her. She was the sweetest person I have ever known--never said anything bad about anyone, or perhaps I was just spoiled by her. To me, Granny was a living breathing angel!

AGING AND GROWING OLD:
THE ONLY WAY TO GO TO GET THERE--82 AND STILL KICKING!

by

Charlotte McConnell

Getting Old! I enjoy, and even have had fun, growing older. At times while hearing your life experiences, I've envied you. We *are all* different. Our lives *are all* different. It would have been wonderful added knowledge to my own life to have walked in your shoes.

Country living has always appealed to me, and I believe I missed that as a child. Baton Rouge was a small city during my days of living there, where I was to remain from the second grade until I would graduate from LSU. After my siblings moved on in their lives and they had left home, I found myself alone with my older mother. I was 17; she was 57. Mother was to be *the* inspiration of my life.

Left a widow at 46 with eight children (most were almost grown up), she carried on with a wonderful, positive outlook on life. I recall that Mother bought the first edition of Norman Vincent Peale's book, The Power of Positive Thinking, and she recommended it to everyone. She remained a modern thinker, a younger appearing lady until her death at the age of 80. My mother encouraged me in every way. She set an example for us all, trying hard to make me the lady she expected all her daughters to be. She taught each of her three sons to be "the Southern gentleman." Times had changed since her older children were grown and had gone away. It must have been difficult for her at times, and I'm sure she compromised with these changes in certain ways.

Those years and her inspiration are part of my life. I, too, found a difference with my own small family of four--not like her eight. Our two oldest, born in 1939 and 1941, were certainly under my wing during a different era from our two sons who were born in 1950 and 1955. As growing young adults and as mature adults, the four of them all lived in a fast changing world, and I found myself also compromising because of these changes.

With an older mother whom I dearly loved, it has always been easy for me to be friends with the older people whom I have known. I am *so* thankful for this upbringing as I have had four sisters and two brothers in their 80's and 90's. Today I care for two

sisters, Olga, 93, and Elaine, 89. Even though they are residents of the Cornerstone Retirement Village, I see them often. We have lunch together, and we can still talk and laugh a lot. Cornerstone! A place where you experience *seeing* old age. However, there have been younger residents who come as early stroke victims or as terminal cancer patients.

Aging is NOT simply a downward spiral of health problems. Getting there! That is what has been interesting, exciting, and sometimes frightening. There have been wars and winning them; depressions and surviving them; medical horrors, cures for them; geographical disasters, surviving them; and economical booms and busts. Home entertainment has been from Victrolas to Compact Discs. The phone, the wireless telegraph, radios, TVS, and computers. Men and women have gone into space; man has walked on the moon. I can remember as a small child when folks would point at the moon and say, "See the man on the moon?!"

Life and living it. Aging really begins at birth. We must all remember that life is full of joys, sadness, and ups and downs. Just like the stock market, with its highs and lows, we must not panic. We must stay calm AND the experiences will pay us dividends. We must plan for <u>our</u> aging! We must program ourselves to accept and make the most of whatever fate hands our way. Kindness begets kindness, and a sweet smile and a kind heart will get you equal kindness and good care.

Some of us have the privilege of living longer than others. Genes play a big part and often account for the number of years with which we are blessed. Personalities, too, can make a difference in life and can make life more interesting for us, more enjoyable, and more acceptable. However, old age should <u>not</u> give us the privilege of saying whatever we think, no matter what the consequences would be.

All 82 years of my life have been a wonderful mixture of happiness, sadness, fullness, emptiness, health (though I have been accident prone), joy (that's different from being happy), and fear (and I have had lots of worries). *But notice*, HAPPINESS leads the list. All of these experiences are what life and aging are made of. We do allow some things to happen that should have been avoided. "Other things" just seem to happen. I call these "other things" the surprises we have during our lifetime.

In aging we watch others age. I have sat, during their last days and hours, with my mother when she was 80, with both of Mac's parents at 88, with one of our sons

when he was 33, my husband at 77, and with one of my sisters who was 91. I refer to death as the "circle of life," the complete fullness of life. After a death, I think of the peace it must bring.

Even today, I can see the aging process that has already begun with my children and my grandchildren, through the experiences that they are having. The story begins all over again. There have been, and are, problems, hardships, sorrows, worries, but also joys for them. Those hardships and problems for them all seem to be more of a concern to me and more of a worry for me than those I have experienced myself. Age plays its part in that also. With our experiences of life, we seem to THINK we know so much, BUT times have changed, and if in growing older *we* have *not* changed, then we *cannot* understand the situations that our own young people have to encounter.

HOWEVER! the morals, the ethical standards, and fairness and honesty that most of us have been taught and have all tried to live by ALL seem to have taken on a different meaning today. Even if *we* did NOT, in our youth, live up to all the teachings we were given in growing up, growing older often improves the most of us and we become better people. Surely it will be the same for the young people--the experience of aging will ripen their lives and their lives will be great!

Wrinkles, a few extra pounds, creaking-stiff joints, even a few broken bones, do not have to make old folks of us. We must all keep a good, happy, and positive attitude. And so it goes...may you, too, grow older and more comfortable with the years. Enjoy! Be happy! Keep both feet on the ground! --and God bless you all.

*P.S. This a.m. as I was getting ready for the day and thanking the Lord for all His benefits and my seemingly good health, I remembered a thought that I had passed on to a few friends who seemed to be giving up and allowing their families to do what I perceived as being "too much" for them. I told them, and I'll say to you also--**When your age seems to be creeping up on you, don't let your children make old folks out of you!** So far, my own have not made me feel old, and they allow me to enjoy my independence. HOWEVER, I do hope that when I t act old and should be aware of my incapabilities but am not aware, I do hope I gracefully accept the situation and respond joyfully when they restrict my activities.*

A CHINESE ANNIVERSARY
by
Mary Langford

I dressed carefully and with some excitement that Saturday night, June 3, 1989. It was our 33rd wedding anniversary and we were going out to dinner at one of Hong Kong's most elegant restaurants. The first anniversary we celebrated in Hong Kong had been in June 1964, four months after our first arrival there and six weeks before the birth of Donna, our third child. Looking back across the years, I could recall various venues where Don and I had marked our special day. That first time we had gone to the top of Victoria Peak just at twilight and watched the lights gradually come on in buildings on both sides of one of the world's most beautiful harbors. We had stood in awe gazing at the splendor below us, like so many precious stones thrown sparkling onto green velvet. Another time we accompanied a group of tourists on a dinner cruise around the harbor, eating a multi-course meal while weaving our way among the junks, sampans, ferries, freighters, barges, yachts, and ocean liners. A few anniversaries had been spent in the high-ceilinged, brocade-draped rooms of the Repulse Bay Hotel, one of Hong Kong's proud historic landmarks. There I had strawberries Romanoff for the first time.

This 1989 anniversary would be celebrated in one of our favorite places of all, the Verandah Room of the old Peninsula Hotel which sits grandly at the harbor's edge, her fountain spraying colored plumes into the air. Don parked our Toyota station wagon alongside the hotel's Rolls Royce limousines and young doormen in crisp white jackets and caps bowed as they opened great glass doors for us. We entered the Peninsula's fabulous lobby--two stories high, giant columns topped with heavy gold leaf, huge fresh flower arrangements, linen-covered tables where people met for before-dinner drinks, business lunches, afternoon tea or the most expensive coffee in town.

Don and I ascended the wide central staircase which led to the Verandah Room. Our table for two was waiting, perfectly situated for us to see the harbor lights and to hear the lovely music being played by a string ensemble from Korea. Hearing them in that setting reminded us of our son's friend Dale (he of the holey Jeans and T-shirts) who for a time played piano in an ensemble in the Verandah Room. Loathe to spend money for the requisite tuxedo, he wore a black coat and black jeans, the side seams of which I had covered with satin ribbon. He wore no socks, but thought no one would notice. We laughed recalling that one night a guest approached Dale while he was

playing piano to ask him where he could go to hear some good music. Dale's reply: "Wait just a minute till I finish typing this letter."

The Peninsula lived up to its reputation that night in terms of food, atmosphere, and service. We sat at our candlelit table and reviewed our thirty-three years together. We talked, of course, of our children--the two little ones we had brought with us by ship in 1964 and the three who had been born in the five years after that. They had all finished high school in Hong Kong and one by one had gone on to the Sates for college. We discussed the many changes which had taken place in the colony since our arrival more than twenty-five years before.

One of the main differences was the amount of news we were now able to receive from mainland China. In those early years, China was closed and mysterious. Now reports of activities in the central kingdom were plentiful in Hong Kong's newspapers and TV broadcasts. Don and I had even been able to make two trips to visit our fascinating neighbor to the north. In recent weeks the people of Hong Kong had followed with much interest the news of student demonstrations in Beijing. In April they had begun--Chinese students gathering by the hundreds in the great Tiananmen Square, which for three centuries had served as a stage for Chinese politics. Since Nixon's visit and opening of China in 1972, news and first hand examples of western lifestyle and thinking had been filtering into the mainland's cities and universities. China's young people had gotten a glimpse of the kinds of freedom they had not known existed. They were now doing what had previously been unthinkable. For seven weeks they had made steady, but non-violent demands, to China's leadership which traditionally was to be obeyed without questionn. The students were calling for more freedom for China's people and a purging of corruption within the government.

Along with all of Hong Kong we had watched television coverage by news crews from major United States' networks. We were aware that in May three thousand students had begun a hunger strike in the time-honored way of making a political point. They were staging their fast to coincide with Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing as they knew the eyes of the world would be on his meeting with China's leader, 84-year-old Den Xiaoping.

As the original three thousand demonstrators had swelled to over one million people, Deng had called in troops and stationed them in and around the square to

forestall an actual rebellion. He and his cabinet were old men. They had come to power by force and they would use force to keep it.

It was not an easy thing for the soldiers of the People's Liberation Army to obey Deng's command. They could not travel by subway as the system had been shut down in support of the protestors. Many of Beijing's ordinary people were very much in sympathy with the students' demands. As the troop carriers made their way through the streets of the capitol city, they were stopped over and over again by housewives, laborers, and tradesmen who linked arms to prevent their passing and who shouted pleas and warnings and threw rocks and bottles. Eyewitnesses told of seeing the soldiers, some of whom were only boys, weep as they realized their orders would set them against their own people.

As the troops moved into position, the hunger strikers began to drop from lack of food and water and from the heat. Many of them were taken to makeshift clinics which had been set up near the square. Deng Xiaoping appeared on television, calling the protest a "counterrevolutionary rebellion." By Saturday noon all live TV broadcasts had ceased--an ominous sign.

Don and I were home from the Peninsula by ten o'clock. We wanted to be well prepared for Sunday which was always a full day for us. About a thousand miles to the north of us at just about that time protestors pelted troops with chunks of paving and set a military bus aflame. The troops opened fire and pushed their way through to the square. Students and their supporters continued to shout and to throw rocks and even fire bombs. Don and I were sound asleep when just after midnight an armored personnel carrier roared into the demonstaration area, followed by tanks and other carriers and trucks full of troops, all spitting gunfire. The unarmed protestors stood their ground. At least five hundred of them died, maybe a thousand; no one knows how many. What is known is that the square of the Gate of Heavenly Peace became a place of unholy horror, turning the encampment of the students into the bloodiest killling ground in Communist Chinese history. Hope died that awful night; fear and distrust were born. The world looked on in shocked disbelief.

When Don and I woke up on Sunday morning, we were greeted with the incredible reports of the massacre that had occurred when Deng Xiaoping had ordered the army to shoot unarmed citizens. With heavy hearts we drove the miles out into Shatin, the suburb where each Sunday we taught Bible to a class of young Chinese

professionals. There was no Bible lesson that day. Everyone needed to talk about the unbelieveable event which had occurred. They were angry, disillusioned and afraid. They had looked forward to becoming a part of China again in a few years. What did this terrible happening portend for the future of Hong Kong and its people?

At the end of the morning service a group of young men asked us to join them in a time of prayer for the mainland. We were honored to do so. We sat with heads bowed as those fine young men wept and prayed God's blessing and mercy on the land whose border was just a few miles away. Their discussion had been in English but they prayed in Mandarin and Cantonese, and I was reminded that God is fluent in all languages. I wondered as I sat there if I would ever hear young Americans plead with such passion for their country.

Before we left the school building where the church met, I went to the window and was greeted with a sight I will never forget. As far as my eyes could see up and down the wide roadway leading into the city, people were walking. Most of them were dressed in white, the Chinese symbol of mourning. They walked in silence, filling the thoroughfare--children, old people, young and middle aged. They had already walked for miles, gathering numbers as they went. Later I would learn that they were on their way to the center of Hong Kong island where more than a million people would gather from all over the colony later that day. I wept as I looked at their faces. I was not Chinese, of course, it was not my countrymen who had died nor my government who had killed them. I had, however, lived among these people for twenty-five years. I had learned their language, shared friendships with them, eaten their food and adopted many of their customs. Now as I stood watching this white river of grief flow by, I shared their sorrow. And somehow I knew that they would survive and overcome even this shameful event as they had survived so many other disasters in their long history. But I knew they would always remember it with great pain, and I knew that it was a day I would never forget.

CULTURE SHOCK
by
Betty Speyrer

I suppose one could say that the marriage of two young people from two diverse cultures who met in Washington, D.C., in October of 1941 and married in March of 1942 during a war was doomed to failure. Our marriage did not fail, but lasted nearly fifty years, until death did we part.

I was born and raised on a farm in Iowa and grew up in the Methodist faith. Most Iowans in those days were very conservative, hard working people. Imbibing in alcoholic beverages was frowned upon, not only for religious reasons, but because Iowa was considered "dry," the sale of liquor was strictly controlled by the State. Even dancing wa frowned upon by most people in our community, but, luckily, Mother and Dad did not forbid us that pleasure. We were encouraged to be conservative and modest in our dress. The food, although wholesome and plentiful, was mostly boiled and seasoned only with salt and black pepper. The climate consisted of four distinct seasons. Summers were very hot and winters were very cold. Any language but English was quite foreign to me.

Tony, on the other hand, was born and raised in the small town of Leonville, Louisiana. His family consisted of his mother and father, six brothers and five sisters, twelve children in all. They were devout Catholics, but the religious issue was not a problem with me. Although I had never known a Catholic until I met Tony, I was always very curious about the Catholic religion and was interested in learning about Catholic doctrine.

Tony's family had never known anyone with my background, and I am certain that they looked on me as somewhat of an oddity. The first language spoken in their home wa French. I did not understand a word of French, but I was very interested and eager to learn the language.

Tony had been stationed in Washington, D.C., since his enlistment in the Navy in 1942. He learned during the summer of 1944 that his tour of duty in the States would end at the beginning of 1945. His father had died shortly before we met, and his widowed mother invited me to come and live with her during Tony's absence. Mommo, as we called her, had two young sons, James and Oscar, ages 10 and 12,

living at home. Three of her daughters, Mildred, Amy and Marie, were married. Mildred lived in Washington, and Marie and Amy lived in Opelousas. The two youngest girls, Rita and Alice, had just graduated from nursing school at Hotel Dieu in New Orleans. Rita, the older of the two, was considering joining the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, the Order of Nuns who were instructors at Hotel Dieu. She took her vows shortly before I came to live in Louisiana. Three older sons, Daniel, Paul, and Nick, were in the Army and were stationed in the Pacific Islands. Another son, Jude, was just 15 and was enrolled at St. Joseph's Seminary at St. Benedict, Louisiana, with the intention of becoming a priest. Jude persevered, was ordained to the priesthood in August of 1954, and today is the Bishop in Lake Charles.

And so, in January 1945, our happy days in Washington ended, and a new era began. I came to live in Louisiana with our firstborn little girl, Carole, who was 16 months old. I was expecting our second baby due to be born in May. Tony was sent to San Francisco and from there to Honolulu where he continued his work of decoding Japanese messages intercepted by his unit.

My stay in Louisiana was a whole new life for me. I found myself in a situation different from anything I had ever know. The people, the language, the religion, the climate, the food--everything had changed. I had received a very cordial welcome to the home of my mother-in-law, but it was quite different living in someone else's house, especially with a little child. Luckily, I had always had a very resilient nature and recalled the words of wisdom I learned from my mother: "For every evil under the sun, there is a remedy or there is none. If there is one, try to find it. If there is none, never mind it." With these thoughts in mind, I set out to adjust to my new life.

I had arrived in Louisiana in the middle of January, and it was quite enjoyable to find that most days were pleasingly warm and comfortable--nothing like the cold bleak January days in Iowa. I enjoyed getting to know my new sisters-in-law, Marie, Amy, and Mildred, and their families. They were all very kind to me and welcomed me into their homes. They were wonderful cooks and introduced me to all sorts of Cajun food, such as gumbo. I enjoyed it immensely and contributed the indigestion which came later to my pregnancy. My nephews were delighted with their new cousin, Carole. I emphasize *nephews* as Carole was the first girl born into the Speyrer family in over twenty years.

My life settled into a routine. I was fascinated with the history of the area, as well as the people. It was an easy going way of life and everyone was friendly. Even though I had a completely different background, I was heartily accepted into the community. I loved to help Maisie, the African-American woman who came daily to clean, cook, do the laundry, or any other task which befell her. She was determined to teach me how to cook Cajun foods for Tony when he returned. She was horrified to hear that upon learning that Tony liked rice, I had made rice pudding for him.

Mommo was a pleasant lady, but since she was recently widowed, she had a tendency to feel sorry for herself. When I met her, she was just 52 years old. She vowed that she was in such poor health that she had only a few more years to live. I was not quite 21 years old, and 52 seemed very old to me. Still, I wanted to encourage her and said that I was sure she would live to be at least 70. She did live to be 70 plus 25 more years, enjoying "ill health" until she died at age 95. I do not mean for these last remarks to sound unkind but rather to be considered humorous. I learned to love Mommo and considered her to be not only my mother-in-law, but my friend. She was anxious for me to learn about the Catholic faith and I was anxious to learn. Her command of the English language was poor, having spoken French for most of her life, but she spent many long hours talking to me about the Catholic faith. She related to me the miracles that were alleged to have happened at the Convent in Grand Coteau. I had always believed in miracles, and I was fascinated by her stories.

The war officially ended in August of 1945, and Tony returned home at the end of October. Our first son, Richard, was 5 months old, so Tony's return was quite a happy reunion. After applying for on-the-job training under the G.I. Bill of Rights, Tony was accepted and trained with an insurance company in New Orleans. His salary was $250.00 a month. Carole, Dick, and I joined him, and after renting a three room apartment for a few months, and on that meager salary, we bought a house in Metairie where we lived for ten years. After Tony completed his training, he accepted a position with a large insurance company in New Orleans.

In the Spring of 1951, just before our 10th wedding anniversary, after much study and prayer, I decided to become a Catholic. I was baptized and confirmed in the Catholic faith at St. Catherine of Sienna Church in Metairie. In 1956, Tony bought an insurance agency in Lafayette, we sold our home in Metairie, and moved to this city. I became involved in church activities which led to a thirty year career as a secretary at the Diocese of Lafayette. In 1965, I accepted a part time position as secretary to

Monsignor Alexandre Larroque who was Chancellor. Thus began very happy and busy years. Not only did I have a large family to care for, but after a few months, I was asked to work full time as secretary to Bishop Maurice Schexnayder. This position also entailed doing secretarial work for Auxiliary Bishop Warren Boudreaux who came to the Chancery two days a week (he was also Pastor at St. Peter's Church in New Iberia), as well as continuing to work for Monsignor Larroque on a limited basis. When Bishop Schexnayder retired at age 75, I stayed on as a secretary to Bishop Gerard Frey, his successor.

I began my work at the Diocese as a very scared convert to Catholicism. As the years went by, I became more secure and made lasting friendships with many interesting people, both among the clergy and the laity. I was not only a convert to Catholicism, but a Yankee converted to life in the South and to my beloved Acadiana. It has truly been a culture shock, but I have enjoyed every minute. And I am proud to be considered a Cajun!