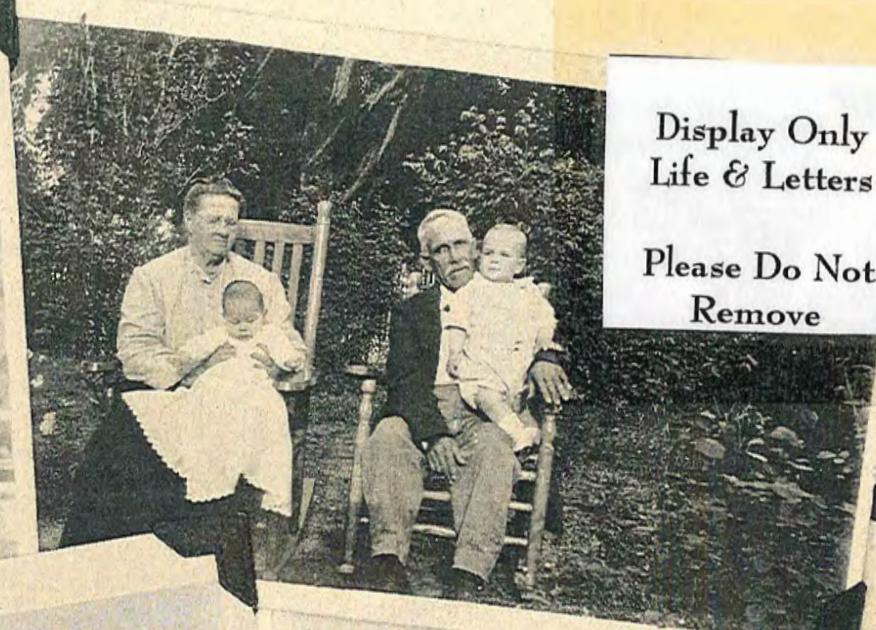
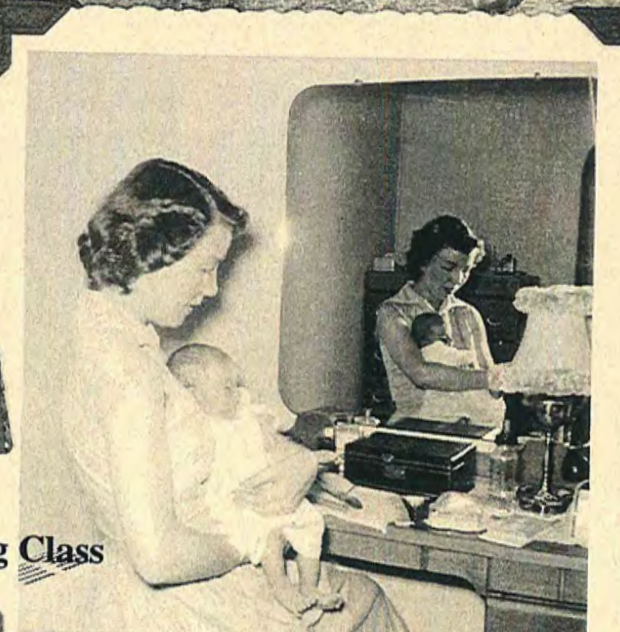


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Excerpts from
**Our Pages
Of Life**





We write lest we forget. That statement, written by one of my writing students, has become the motto of this wonderful group of people who draw from their lives to give—often unbeknownst to themselves!—to others. The members of their audience (you, me, the faces unseen, many not yet born) have been given a special gift.

What a treasure you will discover in this volume (XXII!!) of

Our Pages of Life!

In story we can pass along the legacies too easily lost amidst our hectic lifestyles. Through story we can tell the generations to come of generations past—so that we don't forget.

We write to remember—that there is a past, that that past is a part of us, and that the past can be turned into a stepping stone, forging a link to a future and a hope. I believe that it's for that future that these students write. They write lest they forget.

They also write so that we will remember.

Read, remember, and enjoy the treasures in these stories as you turn the pages of this collection of memoirs.

✦ Joan Stear, USL
Fall 1998

Thanks to the Horizons Department at Lafayette General Medical Center; Life & Letters, an intergenerational company; and University College and the English Department at the University of Southwestern Louisiana for their continued support of our efforts to write for the generations to come. Kudos, too, to each of my students for capitalizing Fun—what a wonderful life, what a wonderful group of friends!

FRONT COVER: (*clockwise, beginning at top right corner*) Antonia Camos, holding grandson J.E. Broussard (brother of Doris B. Bentley), and Joseph Camos, holding Jerome Vloeberghs; Betty Speyrer, age four, standing on Uncle Mark's new Studebaker; Melba Brown Martin and daughter Claire Martin, 1954; Cadet Lucien T. Martin, 1941; (*above Lucien*) friends of Lucien, peasants at Bonnetable, France; Jake Valentine, 15 years old, 1932; Anna Labbé Boudreau (on ostrich) and Aurore Labbé Fournet; (*center*) Pat DeLatte, age 16, junior in high school



USL LIFE WRITING CLASS
Fall 1998 • Thursday Morning Session

***Seated, left to right: Doris B. Bentley; Marge DeVillier; Mary Langford;
Marie Louise LaCaze; Pat DeLatte; Jane Ellen Carstens ••***

***Standing, left to right: Lucien Martin, Melba Martin; Betty Speyrer;
Joan Ireland; Mary Anne Early; Ruth Maher; Jake Valentine;
Joan Stear, Instructor***



Merci Beaucoup

*To present a letter was last week's assignment,
But I just couldn't get my ducks in alignment.
I searched my files for a memorable missile;
I racked my brain for a proper epistle,
But there was none. No note from the past.
Then a thought came, and my spirit's rose fast.*

*I realized that I wanted to write a thank-you letter
To a group of people who've made my life better.
They are people I see only once a week.
My times with them are always a treat.
So I want to thank them for the stories they've told
And for letting me hear their lives unfold.*

*Through Doris I met the dashing George Bentley
Who wooed her from afar and ever so gently.
I cannot think who else we know
Who had a year's honeymoon in Puerto Rico.*

*I've heard Jane Ellen's tales about library studies
And the fun she had with her grad school buddies.
They came from afar for their time in New York
And since then they and Jane Ellen have all made their mark.*

*Pat took me with her and with Bing DeLatte
And their children to Texas and back to Ville Platte.
When she wrote of her illness and shared her fears,
I felt fearful, too, and my eyes stung with tears.*

*Then along comes Marge with her "hang in there" attitude.
She writes of caregivers and expresses her gratitude.
She made it clear that Community Coffee always gets her vote.
From her psych training we heard x-rated quotes.*

*With Mary Anne and her family I took a trip by car
And heard of island experiences as a nurse in the war
And then shared with her the priceless treasure
Of a father's written love, which can't be measured.*

*I enjoyed Joan's tales of her bear collection
And of when there was need of some bathroom direction.
She wrote of her children like any true mother,
And I liked hearing about her talented brother.*

*Although it's been so long ago, Marie has not forgotten
The events of that hot day she earned her pennies picking cotton.
How delightful to hear the stories she can tell
Of her French aunts and cousins, and of Mama and Papa Nell.*

*Then there's Ruth--oh, how I envy her travels!
Of England, Greece, and Mexico her stories unravel.
Her French ancestry also forms quite a maze.
You're related to Ruth if you're of the Moutons or Labbés.*

*And speaking of being related to everyone,
How about Lucien Martin who's so full of fun?
His tale of Brother John's ghost was good, but I'm glad I didn't miss
The story of his confession after that wonderful first kiss.*

*Then Melba, so quiet, so organized, who remembered every home,
Who sent rhymed instructions for freezing beans from Venice and Rome.
Somehow I know she never does anything helter skelter.
She made a playhouse, then a flowerbed, of their old bomb shelter.*

*Betty told of life and her family on an Iowa farm,
Of work and of play in D.C. where she succumbed to Tony's charm.
She wrote of her sisters and of the mix of sadness and release
When she retired from years of keeping order in the Diocese.*

*Then there's Jake, Danish soldier, student, storyteller,
Who took us to New Guinea and to U of Wisconsin's Rathskeller.
He wrote of tagging 'gators with a mix of stealth and mercy
And of meeting Percy Walker, or was it Walker Percy?!*

*Now last, but not least, our assignment inventor,
Who serves our class as encourager and mentor,
Who corrects our syntax and listens without a groan,
Who wields a gentle pencil, our patient teacher, Joan.*

*At last I come to the end of this clumsy rhyme--
Thanks for making Thursday morning such a special time.
Keep recalling and writing, my classmates, my friends,
And I hope that your stories will never come to an end.*

*P.S. Mary, the venerable poet of this memorable poem,
Will forgive me for the slant rhyme as I join
This verse to her stanzas so that our readers may know
That she, too, is a writer with memory, very much a part of the show
To tell the generations to come of family, of mission, of loss, and of gain,
"That nothing be wasted," is her refrain.
Ours, too, as we examine years of living gone by.
We pick and we choose, adding story on story,
(This time eye rhyme), laugh upon laugh, line upon line.
Never realizing the threads our hearts have entwined.
Once again, to these same friends,
Cheers to their lives and their stories. And yes, may they never come to an end.*

--written by Mary Langford, last stanza by Joan Stear

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THE FIRST YEAR OF MY TEACHING CAREER

by
Doris B. Bentley

The summer following graduation from college, I worked with the legislature at the State Capitol in Baton Rouge as a typist. Several of us young women worked in a typing pool. Our job was to type the bills on manual typewriters--no electric ones. Errors were corrected by erasing on each of the copies--probably three or four. There were no copy machines either; so each legislator could not have had a copy. The bills must have been read to them in the House or Senate. I was paid \$5.00/day for 60 days--\$300!!! And I saved \$200. I guess I was still spending 50 cents a day to eat, and my room was probably \$12 a month.

When the session was over, a friend of mine who worked in the Curriculum Library in Peabody Hall on the LSU campus told me that she was leaving and I might be able to get her job. I applied, and got the position. That insignificant incident was the turning point in my life.

I worked with Miss Grey Hughes, the librarian, who was under Dr. E.B. Roberts, Dean of the College of Education. My job was typing ditto masters for the teachers who were participating in a curriculum study program. After working hours, Miss Hughes and I would type theses for master's degree candidates until very late--sometimes 10 or 11 o'clock. We charged 10 cents a page and 2 cents per carbon copy. Again, we typed on a manual typewriter and had to erase any errors on each of the four copies we had to make--18 cents per page!

One day, Dr. Joe Farrar, with whom I had had a class and who was director of student teaching in my last year, came to my desk. With him was a man whom he introduced as Mr. Gordon Webb, the principal of the Brusly High School. The next day Mr. Webb appeared and asked me if I'd like a Coke. I accepted, and he offered me a teaching job in Brusly, just across the river from Baton Rouge. One had to cross the Mississippi River on a ferry and ride south about six miles or so to Brusly which was right on the river. I was so excited to have a job offer that I accepted the

position on the spot. The salary was \$900/year--\$68 a month after deductions.

Oddly enough, Brusly was where Mama had started her teaching career in 1911, and there were teachers and townspeople who remembered her. I felt welcome and proud to start my career in the same place my mother had started hers.

Everyone was wonderful to the three new teachers who arrived at the beginning of the school year. I arrived at Mrs. Mandart's, where we three first-time teachers were going to live. Mary Gayden Powers, the first-grade teacher, and I shared a room. Eloise Coats from North or Central Louisiana was the Home Economics teacher and had the other room. Mrs. Mandart's daughter and husband and two children also lived in the house.

There was no inside plumbing and no running hot water in the house. Mrs. Mandart would heat a big kettle of water on her kitchen stove for our bath. She made up for those inconveniences by bringing to our bed a cup of strong, hot coffee to wake us up every morning.

The Brusly High School was newly built (with inside plumbing) and was very nice. There were no sidewalks to walk on from Mrs. Mandart's house to the school. The dirt path had wooden planks to protect from dust or mud. (We had sidewalks and inside plumbing in Loreauville when I was born; so I was surprised at the seemingly primitive accommodations in Brusly, just across the river from the State Capitol.)

The school served grades one through eleven. (The twelfth grade had not yet been added to the curriculum.) Some of the teachers lived in Port Allen; so they, too, ate lunch at Mrs. Mandart's with us. She served a nutritious meal of soup and a plate lunch every day. We welcomed the walk and the conversation at midday.

Mary Gayden's folks lived in Chamberlain, a small town north of Port Allen. Every Thursday night her brothers would come to get us, and

we would go to the Chance's house to wash our hair with their nice hot running water. And every Friday, as soon as school was out, we would leave Brusly for the weekend. Mary Gayden was engaged to J.G. Ewing from Baton Rouge; so she usually went home to Chamberlain or to her sister's home in Baton Rouge. I usually went to LSU to spend the weekend with my former roommate, Dot Pecot, or I went home to New Iberia.

I had majored in French and business, but when I arrived at the Brusly High School, I was surprised to find that I was going to teach eighth-grade English, eighth-grade Math, tenth-grade English, and two classes of bookkeeping.

"I am not prepared to teach English and Math," I said to Mr. Webb.

"Oh, yes, you are," he replied. "You are certified in both of those subjects in addition to your French and business. You'll be fine."

What a revelation! No one had informed me that I might expect to teach subjects other than those in which I had majored.

While I taught bookkeeping, students were learning to type in the adjoining room. Two large windows between my classroom and the typing room enabled me to observe the typing students. In those days, students were seated at the typewriters and told to follow the instructions in the textbook, and they would learn to type. Can you imagine that happening today? This was not a surprise, as that's the way I had learned to type from Mrs. Delcambre at the New Iberia High School.

I soon realized that I was not prepared for such a teaching load—four preparations! Forget about lesson plans. No way could I adequately prepare to teach four different subjects! And no way would I forfeit my weekends!

In the spring semester we taught English literature. How sad for those poor kids and me! At the end of the year I told Mr. Webb that I

THAT WAS THEN AND THIS IS NOW

by
Pat DeLatte

“Oh, man, there's the sound of that car horn, again. It must be 6:30. That's Tara's ride picking her up for school,” I mumbled to myself, half asleep, unwilling to wake up. I didn't have to get up until 7:00 and really wanted that other half hour. I punched up my pillow, turned over, and made a deliberate attempt to retrieve the dream I was having. I had to know if I got the luggage ready, and would I make it to the plane? I had been packing and repacking, but never seemed to be finished. Every time I thought the suitcase was ready, I found something wrong and would have to start all over again. I couldn't miss that plane! Okay, back to sleep....

The horn sounded again, ending any chance to discover the outcome of my dream. I heard girlish voices greeting each other, the car door closing, the engine revving, then fading as off they went. My sleep was ended, the dream lost, and morning sunlight began infiltrating the quiet, peaceful bedroom. I decided to linger in bed awhile and appreciate the fact that, even though I didn't finish the dream, I had made it through the night. In my reverie, I began to think how different it was when, at 16, I left for school every morning.

When I was a junior in high school, very few students had cars. I could probably count on one hand, and not use my thumb, how many of my friends had use of their parents' cars. We had no special school bus, either. Public transportation was our means of getting to school. It took me an hour to get to Holy Angels. The morning bell rang at 8:15, so in order for me to arrive on time I had to catch the 7:15 bus. The bus stop was only a half block from my house, a five minute walk. Ten minutes were enough time between alarm clock and rushing out the door. We didn't wear makeup, and hair style was simple, just brush and go. There was no problem deciding what to wear. My navy blue skirt, white blouse, and blue ribbon bow tie were waiting every morning. The regulation navy blue cap with the letters AHA was folded and in my purse. I'd pull on my

was not proud of the job I had done. I was NOT a good teacher!!! Mr. Webb assured me that I was and expected me to return the next year.

I found out as the years went by that my situation was not unique. New teachers were always assigned whatever was left over after the more experienced teachers had their preferences assigned to them. This is true even today!

The year in Brusly, however, was a pleasant experience. There was fun, too. The Blanchard family had horses, and we would go horseback riding on the levee. The people were kind and friendly. One of my students was Raymond Mooch, whose sister, Mrs. Ard, lives in Dr. Kapsono's house behind 222 Amelia Street.

At the end of the year Mary Gayden and J. G. were married, and they went to New Orleans to live. I went back to type at the Curriculum Library at LSU with Grey Hughes, and Eloise Coats went back to North Louisiana.

I felt fortunate that I had spent the year in such a pleasant community with wonderful teachers and a fine principal who gave me encouragement instead of criticism.



bobby socks and saddle shoes, tie on my bandana, and head for the bus stop. Mom and Dad would still be sleeping, so I'd make sure the screen door didn't slam behind me.

The school day ended at three o'clock and it took an hour to ride the two streetcars and one bus that eventually brought me back home. Fay and I usually stopped in the K&B drugstore on Canal Street before transferring from the St. Claude to the Tulane streetcar. We would meet some of our classmates and have a "small, plain nectar soda." That is, if I had saved the nickel cost of the soda from my thirty cents lunch allowance. I then would buy a daily copy of the *Item* newspaper from "Mr. Joe" at his corner newsstand. He was a vendor whom I had befriended and spoke to every day. (An elderly gentleman, he had no family and enjoyed talking with Fay and me. We became close enough that I invited him to our graduation night. He arrived that night dressed in a neatly pressed suit, sat with my parents, and beamed with pride, to be sharing such an occasion. Mr. Joe gave me a graduation gift of a lovely, gold tone wristwatch, my first watch, ever. I knew it was difficult for him to afford such a gift, and I was really touched. During my freshman year at LSU, Mr. Joe disappeared from his newsstand and I was told he had passed away. He was a dear man, and I remember him fondly.)

Fay and I rode the streetcar together until she got off at the Leonidas bus stop and I continued on to South Claiborne to catch the Jefferson bus. It was usually 4:30 or 5:00 o'clock by the time I arrived home, hot and tired. The heat in the non air-conditioned class rooms and the open windows on the public transportation, combined with the wool skirt and jacket uniform, created a challenge to my personal hygiene. The morning application of "Sub Rosa" had evaporated and I was in need of a shower!

I knew that when I walked through the door of home Mom would be there. Her apron would be stained, perhaps, with chocolate from the three layered cake she had baked, or flour from the roux stirred to make the shrimp stew, or whatever else was on the menu for the evening meal... a meal the family would sit down and eat together.

Now, in 1998, Tara, my neighbor's daughter, a high school junior, when not using her own car, has a friend drive her to school. She is picked up at her door and delivered in sports car luxury directly to school. Tara's classrooms are all air-conditioned, no windows open to the Louisiana heat and humidity. She wears the fashion, or fad, of the day. Her hair is carefully groomed and sprayed, her makeup delicately applied. At the end of the school day, she zooms back home, CD player at full volume, a Taco Bell or MacDonald's soda cup in one hand, and a sophisticated cigarette in the other. Tara's mother is not home. Recently divorced, she's now a single mom working outside the home trying her best to take care of the kids, Tara and a younger brother. There's no one there to greet Tara or to ask her how her day went. Tara and her brother are "latch key kids." They take care of themselves until Mom gets home. Fast foods or frozen entrees are the menu for the evening, eaten in front of the TV set. Visits with Dad are every other weekend and holidays.

The sound of my alarm clock brought me suddenly back to the reality of the morning. Time to slide out of bed and start my day. Tara would be at school with the other teenagers of her generation. Her daily routine is as normal to her as mine was to me at age sixteen. Times have changed. I just have to remember "that was then and this is now."



I DON'T BELIEVE IN DULL TRIPS!

by

Jane Ellen Carstens

I had always wanted to go to Alaska. I had read several books set in various parts of that state, and I had listened to accounts of Alaskan trips by several friends. Finally, in June, 1996, I took my long-awaited trip. I had received a brochure from Columbia University describing a proposed trip, and, after comparing their description of the trip with that offered by the American Library Association and the USL Alumni Association, I chose the Columbia one. It had more appeal because (1) it included travel on both land and sea, by train, bus and ship; (2) it was longer—twelve days, and (3) I thought some of my former Columbia Library School buddies might be on the trip.

I had to assess my wardrobe to see whether or not I had the proper clothes. As I do for most trips, after reading through the brochure and learning what we would be doing each day, I made a detailed list of all items to take with me. Only a few purchases were necessary. My cousin loaned me three pieces of her brand new luggage, all of which had wheels and a pullout handle, and were much lighter than my old Samsonite leather luggage.

Although I had taken many trips before, I had never taken out trip insurance. For some unknown reason (at least at the time), I decided to invest in insurance for this trip.

On June 19 I flew from Dallas to Seattle to Fairbanks, which is where our trip began. At our opening dinner, the travelers met one another. In addition to Columbia alumni, there were alumni from the University of Illinois and the University of California. I was delighted to find out that one of the Columbia Alumni was a graduate of the Library School. Gretchen Haupt was a librarian with a law firm in New York, which had more than seventy lawyers. We became friends immediately. Little did we know that her part of the friendship would be put to the test a few days down the road.

On day six of the trip (June 24) we cruised the Portage Glacier and visited the Begich-Bogg Visitor Center, just below the Chugach Mountains in Chugach National Forest. It was a beautiful center, but its name did not ring a bell with me until I walked into the entryway and saw two large portraits, one of Senator Begich, an Alaskan, and the other of Senator Hale Bogg, from Louisiana. Hanging beside the portraits was an explanation as to why the Center was named for them. Senator Boggs and Senator Begich had flown over the Portage Valley on a mission trip for building support for the latter's reelection to the Senate. Their plane disappeared and was never found. Hale Bogg's wife, Lindy, has recounted a very moving account of this sad event in her life in her very delightful book: Washington Through a Purple Veil: Memoirs of a Southern Woman.

After our visit to the Center, we boarded the two buses outside. I got on the first bus, and then one of the guides came and told me that the Columbia group was on the other bus. I got off the first bus and boarded the other. About ten minutes later we were ready to depart when, suddenly, the bus ahead erupted into flames. We gasped with horror, afraid that the occupants (and I had just been one!) were still on the bus. Huge black clouds and flames shot into the sky. Traffic was jammed behind. After waiting about forty-five very tense minutes, we were relieved to hear that the passengers had gotten off safely. As might be expected, they were shaken up, but no one was hurt. At some point we began to wonder about luggage. Were our bags on the bus on which we were riding or were they on the burning bus? The bus driver took all the luggage off the fire-free bus so that we could search for ours. After several minutes of searching, I realized that mine was not there! Before this discovery, I had prayed that it would be, but I also told the Lord if it were more important for someone else to have theirs, then mine could be missing. Apparently, He listened to my prayer!

I was a bit overwhelmed at the thought of what I had lost: two of my favorite dresses, a rose quartz ring that I had bought in Switzerland, and my rhodocrosite ring, which I loved dearly. I thought about all of the other things in my bags, but there were some that I could not remember.

The tour guide called a store in downtown Seward where we were to board the ship and asked them to remain open so that we could secure necessary items (i.e., toothbrush, toothpaste, etc.) Some people had to be taken to a hospital to have medical prescriptions filled. I bought a nightshirt which was perfect for the cool nights in the cabin on the ship. We were late boarding The Dynasty, and did not have dinner until ten o'clock that evening.

Those of us who lost everything learned that people can be very generous. Those fortunate ones with clothes sized up those of us with none and offered us some of their clothes. Three women were kind enough to supply me with jackets, pants, tops and even jewelry. Although I am not usually a wearer of pants, I welcomed the loans.

On Wednesday, we arrived in Juneau, and were given time to shop, of all places, at Penney's! The manager of the store had read the account of the bus burning in the Anchorage newspaper, and when this busload of individuals descended upon his store, he offered us a 25% discount, in addition to any sale price that might already be on an item. A clerk was assigned to each of us to help with our shopping. I later purchased additional items in Skagway, Ketchikan, and on board the ship.

At some point, two representatives of the company handling the tour came and spoke to us. (They had flown all the way from New York.) We were asked to provide as much detail as possible about lost items, with age and estimated value of each. Thank goodness I had my detailed list with me! I could only approximate how long I had had something and what it cost, but I made an effort to do so. My overall estimate came to \$1,877.50. Although I also listed items purchased at Penney's and other places and gave cost, I did not ask for reimbursement for these.

Grayline, the bus company, told me that ordinarily they restricted reimbursements to \$100 per person, but in the light of the severity of our losses, they were giving me \$1200. The Travel Insurance Co. gave me \$391.50. At one point I was told that my house insurance policy might pay something. Indeed they did, and the amount was \$250. Adding all of these reimbursements left me with only \$36 unreimbursed. I

considered myself to be very lucky. In addition to clothing and luggage, some passengers lost passports, traveler's checks, airline tickets, and other items. We were provided with letters to show border officials in Vancouver why some of us did not have these items.

And so, you see, this trip to Alaska was definitely not dull, but the excitement that it provided was not anything I would care to repeat.

May I offer several words of advice for trips:

- (1) Do not take your favorite clothes and jewelry.
- (2) Make a list of items packed in luggage, together with their estimated value.
- (3) Take out travel insurance!!



J.G. AND ME
by
Mary Langford

In February of 1962 Don and I lived in Lafayette on St. Francis Street in a rented frame house. He was in his last year of surgery training, and I was enjoying my first year of staying at home with John, who was almost three. I was twenty-seven years old and six months pregnant with our second child. It was a happy time, but not filled with an undue amount of activity. I read to John and wrote free verse. I learned to make seafood gumbo from my neighbor Janice Pratt. John and I stayed up late watching TV, waiting for Don to come home from the hospital.

February of '62 was, on the other hand, one of the most memorable times in astronaut John Glenn's life. On the twentieth of that month he blasted off in space shuttle Mercury for a solo flight which lasted for five hours and which circled the earth three times. Glenn could barely move in the cramped Friendship 7 capsule. It had one window, no computer, and only eight push buttons. Along with the rest of the nation, I watched as the "clean Marine" lifted off on that historic flight and we heard the words, "Godspeed, John Glenn." And speed he did—over 160 miles high and more than 75,000 miles in those three orbits around our planet. His descent was so rapid that the heat shield of the capsule burned up on re-entry.

Don and I joined millions of other Americans who hailed John Glenn as a hero. President Kennedy thought he was too valuable to be allowed in another shuttle, so NASA refused to let him fly again. After only a few hours of space flight, he was grounded, and he had to watch others walk on the moon. Glenn dealt with his disappointment and went into the world of politics. He became Senator Glenn. But he never stopped dreaming of a second chance.

More than thirty-six years have passed since Friendship 7 took its lone passenger into space. John Glenn is seventy-seven years old and a grandfather. My daughter, who celebrated her fifth birthday while

watching the first moon walk, has made me a grandmother. After many years away, Don and I are once again living in Lafayette. Once again John Glenn is in the news. And I am struck by, dare I say it, the links between us.

Senator Glenn is becoming Astronaut Glenn once more. He's been given that second chance he hoped for. One big factor in his favor was his excellent physical condition. He eats healthily and power-walks near his home. I eat generally a low fat/low sugar diet and I walk a regular two-mile loop in my neighborhood. Within the last month I have (with help) learned to send, retrieve, read, print, forward, and reply to e-mail. I have also successfully entered documents into the computer, proofread, corrected, and printed them. While I've been thus occupied, my buddy J.G. has been mastering the 800 switches that control the most complicated vehicle ever built. His re-education has required exhausting twelve-hour days. He doesn't always get it right the first time, but Grandpa Glenn stays with it till it's his.

When John Glenn blasts into space on October 29, 1998, in the Discovery shuttle with its two decks, ten windows, and a multi-national crew of six, he will be going as a human test subject. He will be doing in a controlled, monitored, and intensified way what I am doing every day in my own way—exploring the secrets of aging. And although he doesn't really know me or dream that I call him J.G., it is very likely that the information he brings back will be of direct benefit to me—one of a growing group of earthbound elders. Glenn will participate in balance tests which may shed light on the chronic equilibrium disturbances suffered by 12.5 million older Americans. While I'm taking my calcium pills and walking as preventive measures, the oldest astronaut will be the subject of experiments which compare a spaceman's bone and muscle loss with that of osteoporosis. Glenn's heart rhythms and blood pressure will be tracked before, during, and after the flight, to compare the effect of weightlessness on those functions with that of aging. He will sleep wearing an electrode harness to detect brain waves, body motion, and air flow. Through all of these experiments and more, information may be obtained which will help me to live a longer, healthier life. If that happens, John Glenn will be the one, in part, to thank for that gift. And

if it does not happen, he still will have given us a model of how to grow old. I'm glad he got his second chance at space flight. I admire his determination and his courage. I resonated with his reply to the question of how he wants to be remembered. He said, "I haven't really sat back and thought about that. I'm not done yet." And so next Thursday when Discovery blasts off, I'll be saying, "Godspeed, John Glenn. And thanks, J.G."



MORE THAN ANTS CAN SPOIL A PICNIC

by
Betty Speyrer

It was Labor Day in 1975. Although it was early in September, there was a touch of Fall in the air, perfect weather for an outing. A group of my friends at the Diocese where we were employed, always ready for some fun, decided to go on a picnic. A priest of our acquaintance owned a camp on the Mermentau River and had offered us the use of it. We pooled our resources, got food and drinks together, and took off for a fun day on the Mermentau River. When we arrived, we saw that it was a beautiful wooded area right on the river. There was a large dock built on the river, so we unfolded our lawn chairs, took them out to the dock, soaked up the sun, enjoyed the crisp air and good conversation. Naturally, we had brought along beer and soft drinks, and one couple had towed their motor boat, so we took turns riding up and down the river. We were in high spirits and having a wonderful time.

Not far away was another camp which seemed to be unoccupied. Before long, a very pleasant-looking gentleman drove up and went inside. When he came outside, emboldened by spirits, we beckoned to him to come and join us. He did just that and as a group we told him we worked at the Diocese and introduced ourselves. When the introductions were over, he introduced himself.

He said, "I am the Assistant District Attorney of Jeff Davis Parish, and you are trespassing on my property. The dock you are sitting on belongs to me." There was total silence.

I was the first to recover my voice. A can of beer had loosened my tongue and I told him, "Well, join us anyway. Here, have a beer!"

Luckily he fell into the holiday spirit and joined us. He indeed took the beer that had been offered and seemed to enjoy himself.

Later in the week, when we were all back at work, a thick letter arrived addressed to me. It was from my so-called friend, the Assistant District Attorney. In parentheses under my name, it said, "The Ring Leader." The contents of the letter outlined the penalties for trespassing, bribery and public intoxication. I thought for sure I, as the ring leader, was about to be taken to court. However, at the end of the letter, he said that he had a wonderful time and to thank those who had expropriated his property. He also said that we were welcome to use his dock at any time.



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF MARDI GRAS IN CHURCH POINT

by
Marie Louise LaCaze

As I was growing up in Church Point (in the middle 20's and early 30's), we little girls who lived in the area between Main Street, Eby Street, and the street that bordered the school, had our own unique way of celebrating Mardi Gras. The idea must have been conceived by one of our mothers—probably my own. (Mama was both creative and ambitious.)

On the Saturday preceding Mardi Gras, we would mask and dress in whatever our mothers could rig up. After gathering at one of the homes, we would go house to house, knocking on doors demanding “cinq sous!” “cinq sous!” (A couple of mothers accompanied us from a distance.)

Neighbors always greeted us pleasantly, with admiring glances. The person or persons answering the door would invariably attempt to identify each one of us. Our group would lapse into giggles. Those mothers or fathers who answered the door would give us either a nickel or an egg (which could be turned into cash.)

After we had completed our visits, we would go to Mr. Alsace Sonnier's small grocery store on Main Street to invest our treasury of nickels and eggs in cookies and treats. Mr. Sonnier would give us a generous lagniappe. Following the tradeoff, we would gather in one of our homes for a party to enjoy our treats with hot chocolate. It was always a happy occasion.

Among those neighborhood friends whom I recall participating in our activity were Barbara Gardiner (Mrs. Frank Resweber, now deceased), Joyce Guidry (Mrs. Wilbur LeBlanc), Dorothy Richard (Mrs. Percy Baronet), Narcille Beagh (Mrs. Mortimer Cain), Mercedes David (Mrs. Charles Black, now deceased), and I.

I was never aware that our early childhood custom of observing Mardi Gras in our own little neighborhood was ever continued. In retrospect, I realize that it would be thought of as the forerunner of Trick or Treat. But that celebration never came to Church Point until some years after World War II.



MAGNACOCLEAREPHOBIA

by
Melba Martin

As I get older, I feel less inclined to make an effort to conceal my eccentricities. After all, my quirks don't hurt anybody, so why shouldn't I give in to them if it makes life a bit more pleasant for me?

Although much of my finickiness is food related, I have one peculiarity that stems not from food, but from a series of unpleasant experiences with medicine. When I was growing up, many people believed that a regular purging of the system was necessary for maintaining good health. Much to my chagrin, my mother was among those who supported this notion. Almost as far back as I can remember, she insisted on giving me a dose of Castor Oil periodically. How I hated that viscous, foul-tasting, oily gunk! The mere anticipation of the dose of it that Mamma had made an almost regular prelude to my Friday night bedtime, was enough to put a damper on my whole afternoon.

When I was only three or four years old, I could recognize the Castor Oil bottle by its oval shape and the black letters that curved across the top of the white label. Mamma kept it in a special place on the side of the kitchen table that was next to the wall. As long as the bottle was in its place, I relaxed. But when I found that Mamma had moved it to the middle of the table, I knew what lay ahead for me. First, Mamma would raise the worn oilcloth that concealed the shallow single drawer in the kitchen table. Then she would open the drawer and take out a tablespoon. She would always shake the bottle before she opened it--although I don't know why. The oil always seemed to be thoroughly homogenized as well as too thick for shaking it to have any further effect of mixing it. I used to watch Mamma unscrew the bottle cap, hoping she would turn it slowly thus putting off my misery a few more seconds. Holding the bottle in her left hand, she would carefully tilt it over the seemingly gigantic spoon in her right hand. The thick stream of oil oozed out of the bottle into the big spoon, gradually filling it.

As soon as Mamma had put the bottle down on the table, she would turn the spoon toward my face. The pungent odor of the unctuous slime that invaded my nostrils was only a prelude to what would follow shortly.

"Hurry," Mamma would say. "Open your mouth and swallow quick." As my lips parted, the huge spoon slid in between them. It reached from one cheek to the other as its sticky contents spread over the entire inside of my child-size oral cavity. No nook or cranny was spared the horrible stuff. The only way to get rid of it was to swallow.

As I tried to swallow, the tip of the spoon pressed against my throat causing me to gag. Then, as Mamma withdrew the spoon, I could feel it sliding over my tongue as its tip scraped the roof of my mouth. This scraping caused me to continue gagging.

After my ordeal, Mamma always gave me something pleasant-tasting to drink to lessen the after-taste of the Castor Oil. The drink helped only a little. The strong taste of the oil lingered for a long time.

After a few years, the popularity of Castor Oil waned. It was deemed too harsh for the system by some of those in the medical profession. I was, of course, elated to see the last bottle go. However, my happiness was short-lived. The ever-present bottle of Castor Oil was soon replaced by a bottle of Syrup Pepsin.

I do admit that Syrup Pepsin was an improvement over Castor Oil. Even though it didn't taste good, it didn't taste quite as bad as Castor Oil, and it wasn't oily.

I haven't lived at my childhood home since I was seventeen. Even so, I have managed quite well to get through the past fifty-three years without Castor Oil, Syrup Pepsin, or any other related concoction. But the old memories persist. The legacy left me by my Friday night medication is that I do not enjoy eating anything with a big spoon. Every time a tablespoon of food gets near my face, vivid memories of what it was like to have a big spoonful of Castor Oil in my mouth come flooding back.

When I order soup or gumbo at a restaurant, I always ask the waitress to bring me a teaspoon. Never mind what Emily Post says.

One day many years ago, when my sister-in-law Paulette Martin and I were having lunch together at her house, she served gumbo. When I asked her for a teaspoon, she quickly complied. However, I could see that she was puzzled, so I related the tale of my aversion to eating with a big spoon. She was quite amused at my little quirk, and said that it needed a name. Paulette was a brilliant linguist who was fluent in several languages besides her native French. Putting together a bit of Latin and Greek, she came up with "Magnacoclearephobia." Translated, it means "big spoon disease."

I suppose Magnacoclearephobia will be with me for the rest of my life. Actually, I think I have learned to cope with it quite well, and if nothing worse than chronic Magnacoclearephobia ever befalls me, I will consider myself lucky.



JESSIE
by
Mary Anne Early

My earliest recollections of Jessie Pearce is of her as a professor in a college health course. I'm not sure of its name; however the class was required of all students.

Jessie was a lady of medium stature, grey hair and blue eyes. She always wore glasses and an endearing smile. Her smile reflected the person she was in spite of disinterested football players in her class. They didn't pay attention and often fell asleep in class. The players soon learned that Jessie's class was not a "snap course." They had to meet the requirements, and cheating was a "no-no." The attitude of these boys must have been exasperating to her, but we could never tell.

It was not long until most students were inspired by Jessie. She was a kind and compassionate listener. One day, she reminded us, "From Wednesday to Friday, you are contemplating going home for the weekend. Monday to Wednesday you are recovering."

In the spring semester of my sophomore year, I did my student teaching. I decided to double my experience and combine second grade and the kindergarten level. Second grade with Janelle Davis would be no problem; Kindergarten with Mrs Golden was another story. I thought the goldfish and I would never survive.

Jessie was again a great listener. I shared the episode of the goldfish and being trapped into a date with Mrs. Golden's son, Donald, with Jessie.

Donald Golden was a nice young man, but we both rejected Mrs. Golden's attempt to match-mate. Jessie wanted to talk with Mrs. Golden about her demands on students, but I asked that she not do that because it could well result in an "F." Jessie respected my desire to deal with Mrs. Golden on my own. Jessie saw me through this horrible experience.

I was off to teach school for the next six years. Jessie and I didn't see much of each other except during the summer sessions. My enthusiasm for teaching elementary students was waning. Jessie recognized that I was looking for something else. We began talking about a new profession. I knew nothing about nursing, and none of my immediate family had ever been hospitalized. Still, the idea was intriguing. It sounded like a real challenge.

Summer came, and I sent in my application to enter Washington University in St Louis where Jessie had graduated. Mother and Dad suggested I attend Kansas University. I insisted on going to Jessie's school. I replayed the things Jessie shared with me, such as accreditation status, association with a leading medical school, quality of the education, and experience provided in multiple hospitals. I convinced my parents, but my Uncle Clarence was another hurdle. He had become President of Fort Hays State Teachers College. Uncle Clarence called Jessie into his office and told her, "I will hold you responsible for seeing Mary Anne complete her college degree." My parents supported my decision, and I was off to Nursing School for the next three years.

Jessie visited me over the Christmas holidays, my second year. Her niece had entered the school in the fall. Jessie took Mary Carswell and me to dinner and stage shows at the Jefferson Hotel which we enjoyed very much.

It was time to consider completing my degree after nursing school, the Detroit V N A experience and the Army Nurse Corps. Jessie had wisely advised me to have the registrar place into writing the courses I would need to take in one semester to complete my college degree. I called Jessie in early August to tell her I would be returning to college. She was excited. I asked her if she could find me a room at the dormitory. A call came back, "There are no rooms anywhere, but you can stay with me. I don't know how it will work out."

Jessie and I had a great time that semester. We got along fabulously. I learned to love her spoon bread, but I can't say the same for her breaded mushrooms. Thank goodness, my parents brought me some

meat from the recent butchering. I successfully passed the courses in Ancient and Greek Literature in spite of the nightly mysteries Jessie enjoyed on her radio.

Occasionally we had an “Alexander” together. I had to hide them in the cupboard when her faculty friends, Mary Carroll and Jannelle Davis, arrived. I was very careful not to infringe on her faculty position. The day I learned I passed all the required courses, was celebrated with an “Alexander.” Jessie said, “I have completed my obligation to your Uncle.”

Jessie referred me to her friend, Josephine Daniel, Diplomat of Public Health Nursing, in Oklahoma. I was employed as the Public Health Nurse in Cherokee County located in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

The time with Jessie was limited after I went to Oklahoma. She retired and she and her sister, Laura, moved to Arkansas. Recently I learned from Jessie’s niece, Mary Carswell Reed, that Jessie and Laura both had passed away.

Jessie, from all alumni and students of F H S T C, you were the best. Words do not appropriately convey our feelings. You made such a difference in our lives. Thank you so much for all you did for me. I found the profession I truly love.



A LUMP OF COAL

by
Joan Ireland

Santa came to Texas City, Texas, on December 25, 1997, and left Chris a lump of coal in a small round metal box with the inscription, "Chris has been naughty this year and can only have a lump of coal." Santa further stated in his note that all names of gifts designated for Chris be crossed out and the name of his big brother, David, be written on the name tag. *Of course, this was the big joke of the Christmas Season perpetuated by me, his loving devious mother.*

Poor Chris, the next gift was for him, but before he could open the box, his big brother grabbed it and a fight (not blows but a lot of tugging back and forth) ensued as they each fought for the gift. It all ended peacefully, however, as a vote was taken by the Arnold/Ireland clan decreeing that Chris be given another chance and be eligible to keep his Christmas gifts.

Why did I conceive such a dastardly plan—especially for my adored, younger son who is attending Mississippi College with a heavy schedule of classes? The roots for this odd behavior began in Zachary when the boys were still attending school, Chris in Middle School and David in his second year in High School.

David came into the house one day and saw Chris lounging on the couch with his dirty feet on the book he had been reading. Although David knew he shouldn't have left it there, David got mad when he saw Chris had his feet on the book and promptly punched him.

Chris immediately got up, ran to the Christmas tree and grabbed the gift he had chosen for his brother, scratched off David's name and inserted his own name in bold black strokes on the tag. No way was he going to give a gift to his big, bad brother! Later in the day, after peace had been restored, Chris retrieved his gift, scratched off his name and wrote in David's name.

Unfortunately it was only December 15–Christmas was ten days away. The poor name card was the scene of many scratches and rewritten names as David entered the fray and changed the name on the name tag which read from “Chris to Chris,” changing it to “Chris to David.” Sometimes a mere look would trigger a name change on the tag until finally, a new name tag had to be found as the names were changed almost hourly as Christmas drew nearer. Before Santa made his appearance late on Christmas Eve, I was sure happy to see the words, “From Chris to David” appear on the tag.

A Lump of Coal—a symbolic gift from Santa for a naughty boy!

I believe in the light of recent events, the lump of coal with its unique message should have stayed with the boy’s mother, Joan Ireland, who had received the lump of coal as a gag gift at a Pre-Christmas party and couldn’t resist adding a bit of fun to the 1997 Christmas festivities.



LOUISIANA COFFEE

by
Marge DeVillier

I was introduced to the famous, strong brew I call Louisiana coffee in 1949 shortly after my marriage to my husband, Joe, when we took a trip to Port Barre, Louisiana, to visit his family. As we made the rounds of this large DeVillier family, we were served coffee at each stop.

I was impressed by the beautiful, dainty demitasse cups used to serve this strong brew which looked and tasted like it could be cut with a knife instead of stirred with a tiny teaspoon. The coffee was quite different from what I was used to in North Carolina such Maxwell house (good to the last drop) and Folgers, (first in your cup) or Luzianne which was the strongest I had ever tasted.

However, I wasn't prepared for the strong dripped types served in Port Barre. There were so many relatives, with coffee served at each home, and, as I wanted to make a good impression, I drank coffee whenever it was served. I soon became nauseated, but, still wanting to make a good impression, I continued to drink the coffee.

I was curious about the unique, antique little white coffee pots sitting in a pan of water on the stove to keep the coffee hot. I also was curious about the drip method of making coffee which I had never seen before. One of the DeVillier family members showed me how she took hot water from another container on the stove and then poured it over the coffee grounds in the little white coffee pot. This ritual seemed rather time consuming and monotonous to me, but I learned to do the same thing after I moved to Louisiana years later. I then abandoned the electric percolator and all those weak coffees I used to use in North Carolina.

I gradually developed a taste for robust Community Coffee after going through all the grades by using the different roasts produced by Community Coffee from Mild, Medium, Between Roast to Dark Roast.

Community Dark Roast is my preferred brand now. Joan tries to fool me and use a cheaper brand, but I can always tell when it isn't Community. I am so addicted to Community now that I have to take Community Dark Roast with me whenever I travel. I realize I was addicted to Community Coffee when I took my sister-in-law, Myrtle Daspit, to St Mary's Hospital in Galveston, Texas, a few years ago when I had to use coffee vending machines which dispensed Texas Tea which looked like colored water.

I knew I was hooked on Community Coffee when another sister-in-law from Houma came to visit and pulled out a large thermos of the best coffee I ever drank- -good old Louisiana Dark Roast Community Coffee.

I became addicted to cigarettes and had to attend Smokers Anonymous. Then I became addicted to alcohol and had to attend Alcoholics Anonymous. Now I guess I'll have to attend Louisiana Community Coffee Anonymous.

What Next?



BROTHERS AND SISTERS ARE WE!

**by
Ruth Maher**

All of my brothers and my sister have reached the SSS age. We continue to be very active and love getting together once a year.

Rita, the eldest, retains a part-time sales position at a unique gift shop, cares for a grandchild one day a week, and takes care of her home and yard with some help. She has raised her family of three children alone, her husband, Calvin, having died before their third child was born. Rita was a twin for the first fifteen years of her life until our sister Rose died.

I was widowed in 1969 after twenty years of marriage and four children. I have completed raising and educating all four children. I retired in 1989 from the Louisiana Bishops Conference and am now remarried. I volunteer with Meals on Wheels and the Catholic Church, proofreading the monthly publication of the Catholic Diocesan newspaper. After retiring, I learned a new hobby, the art of basket weaving with pine needles and raffia. This craft has enabled me to express a lifelong desire to work in one of the art media.

Bill, our oldest brother, is next in age. He also is retired. He is no longer married; he has helped raise four children. Bill has a degree in Biology and was employed throughout his working career by several drug manufacturers as a detail man, introducing and selling drugs to doctors and druggists. He now spends most of his time planning trips and traveling to far away places around the globe.

Our next brothers, Edward and Tom, are now deceased. Ed and his wife, Nancy, had five children. Ed, a born salesman who never met a stranger, owned a hardware-lumber company in Slidell. Tom and his wife, Margaret, had four children. Tom was an Electrical Engineer. He worked for Louisiana Power & Light Company throughout his working years. He took early retirement and organized some significant volunteer

work, training handicapped and unskilled workers, then finding jobs that they could handle.

Our youngest brother, Jerry, married Eva, and had no children. He retired from the El Paso Electric Company where he worked all of his life. He and his wife still live in El Paso.

In 1980, before the deaths of our brothers, we decided it would be fun to get together with spouses for a week each summer on the Florida coast. Ed had rented a house on Santa Rosa Island for his family the previous year, so he inquired for the summer of '81 and made the reservation for us. We had a great time together.

We have continued this gathering of brothers and sisters each year since then, although our brother Jerry has never been with us for these gatherings. He lives so far away, and though he visits us in Lafayette every few years, he has not been able to join us in Florida. Each year before we return home, we make plans to return the following summer. Brother Ed made the arrangements while alive, and after his death, brother Bill took over the arrangement.

As the time draws near each year, we talk to each other on the telephone and decide what we will bring. Each member is committed to bring or plan at least one dinner meal. A kitty is collected after arriving to purchase items for breakfast, lunch, and snacks at the local store. We have fun playing games, making jigsaw puzzles, collecting sea shells, fish watching, swimming in the surf, and walking the beach. We also never miss an opportunity to shop in the unique shops of the area. This gathering provides us with an ideal occasion to visit with each other.

During the earlier trips before brother Tom died, Tom and I would walk together for several miles on the beach each day, discussing volunteer work, investments and other business matters. I really looked forward to this visit with Tom each year. I miss him and his wonderful help and the reassurance that he gave me.

Brother Ed's wife, Nancy, continues to gather with us each year, and we are able to visit with one of their sons, and his two precious children who live on the Florida coast at Destin. Just prior to Ed's death, two of his sons took over the hardware-lumber business from him and continue to enjoy a very prosperous business founded by their father.

We have all developed a closeness with each other through this yearly gathering which continues to this day.



THE PEASANTS OF BONNETABLE (A HOME AWAY FROM HOME)

by
Lucien T. Martin

Three months after D-Day during WWII, we moved from England to an airfield close to Bonnetable, France. My pilot, Mike Kelly and I immediately befriended the Favrie family, peasants living close to the base. They had three children, Claude, Claudette and Bernadette. It was my knowledge of the French language and the friendly nature of Mike that would insure a friendship that would last until our move from Bonnetable.

Eight days after we got acquainted with the family, Mike and I went back to the Favries. We could smell fresh bread baking in the oven. We waited outside for the family to come in from the field. Mr. Favrie arrived in first. Mike handed him some salt and flour (the Mess Sergeant had given us the salt and flour in exchange for the fresh eggs we gave the sergeant the week before). In response, the old Frenchman grabbed Mike and gave him a kiss on each cheek. I stayed by the door and got away with just a handshake.

Mike then said to me, "Lucien, next time we bring old Pop here something, you give it to him," wiping his cheeks on his sleeves.

Pop Favrie called Claude and told him to catch a couple of pigeons for our supper. Claude went to the pigeon coop and brought back two live ones for his father's approval. It was obvious who was in charge. Soon afterwards Mom Favrie came in to cook the supper.

The children's job was to take care of the farm animals. Claude unhitched and fed the horse. Bernadette's job was to milk the cow. She soon came into the house with a bucket of milk. Claudette took care of the pigeons, chickens, and other small animals in the cages. She came in with a basket of eggs, freshly picked from the nests. Claude was the last

one to come in. By the time the children got cleaned up after doing their chores, supper was ready.

The Favries served everyone wine with the meal, except Bernadette, who was too young. During the meal, Mike suddenly got up from his chair and pointed to the wall and said "Spider! There's a spider on the wall!" Everyone turned around to see what Mike was pointing at. He quickly poured wine from his glass into Bernadette's glass. After feeling the effects of the wine, the mischievous Bernadette excused herself from the table. She came back with a rope, crawled under the table and tied Mike to his chair, cowboy fashion. Pop and Mom Favrie apologized for their daughter's behavior, but I assured them that Mike had brought that on himself.

One day Mike and I went to the farm early while everyone was still in the field. The door was unlocked, so we went in. Mike took his shoes off and pretended to be Pop Favrie. He sat in Pop's chair at the left corner of the fireplace. There was straw and kindling in the wood box, so Mike started the fire. Smoke pouring from the chimney caught Pop Favrie's attention in the field and he came running toward the house, thinking the house was on fire. I explained to him that "Le Petit Michael," as Mike was called, had never had a fireplace at home and wanted to start the fire. Soon afterwards, the whole family was home, and the evening chores began. Mom Favrie went straight to the kitchen. Claude had cleaned two pigeons for us.

Mike and I went outside to watch Bernadette milk the cow. Bernadette was already milking, and I encouraged Mike to get a lesson on milking. I borrowed the milk bucket from Bernadette and showed Mike how easy it was. He observed me for a while and decided that he would try. He had never been close to a cow before, much less close enough to milk one. The cow kept swishing its tail, hitting Mike in the face each time. Bernadette grabbed the cow's tail and held it while Mike was attempting to get milk from the udder, with no success. I looked at Bernadette still holding the tail. With both of her hands on the tail, she began to twist it, whereupon the cow kicked Mike. He fell off the stool and onto the barnyard dirt. I helped Mike up and Bernadette's tickle box

got turned upside-down. She laughed so loud that Mom Favrie came to see what the commotion was about. "From now on your name will be 'Dipsy Doodle'," Mike told Bernadette.

By then Mom Favrie was there wondering what had happened. I explained to her that Mike, trying to get milk from the cow, had squeezed too hard, causing the cow to kick. That got Bernadette off the hook. We went back to the house. Mike was led inside to clean up while Bernadette finished the milking. Mom Favrie and I got Mike's clothes cleaned with a brush. Soon afterwards, everyone was in the house and things settled down.

After we finished supper, we all retired to the kitchen around the stove where Mom Favrie was roasting chestnuts. In the course of the conversation, Pop Favrie told Mike and me how he hunted rabbits with his ferret. Claude immediately got up and went to the barn to fetch the ferret, a small, active animal of the weasel family, and placed it on the kitchen floor. The sleeping cat immediately woke up and jumped on a small table behind the stove to get away from the ferret. Pop Favrie took a net made of string, much like a hand net used in fishing, which was hanging on a nail in the wall, to explain how to catch the rabbit. After he found the rabbit hole, he placed the net at one end of the hole and the ferret at the other. The ferret bit the rabbit and it would come out and get caught in the net. To demonstrate how the net would hold the rabbit, Pop Favrie grabbed the cat off the small table and placed it in the net. The cat didn't like the idea one bit and started to find a way to get out of the net. The poor cat finally got his head through one of the squares of the net. Both Claude and Pop Favrie tried to free the cat from the net but to no avail. Finally, Mom Favrie got her scissors, cut one of the strings, and freed the poor cat, but not before the cat had soiled Pop Favrie's clothes and the kitchen floor. The roasted chestnuts would have to wait for another day.



HUCK FINN AT THE CIRCUS

by

Jacob M. Valentine, Jr.

I was fourteen when Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus came to Racine. The Racine Journal Times announced that the circus would come to town next week, Saturday. I hoped I could get a job to earn a ticket to the Big Show. On that exciting day I woke early, got dressed in bib overalls, and a tattered shirt. Wearing Pop's old black fedora, I walked the three miles to city-owned grounds on Racine's Southside near Lake Michigan.

Reaching the grounds just as the glow of the sun was peeking above the lake, I saw brightly colored railroad cars pulled up on the railroad spur that comes out of Cases Tractor Works. Roustabouts were already unloading the circus wagons from the flat cars. The elephants, trumpeting for their morning hay and water, stood rocking as they strained at the chains on their legs. Lions in their cages roared in anticipation as the trainers walked by carrying buckets filled with huge chunks of meat.

There was chaos everywhere but everyone seemed to know what to do. A Special Attraction tent was first put up so the monkeys, bears, brightly colored macaws and parrots and other animals would be shaded. Once fed, elephants, camels, dromedaries, horses and their riders lined up for the parade.

While watching the Big Top as it was laid out, I saw a tall man wearing a huge white cowboy hat who seemed to be in charge. After directing the men straightening the folded tent, he stood looking at the elephants. In a flash I ran over to him and asked, "Do you need someone?" Quickly, I added excitedly, "I'll do anything you want." Without hesitation, he said, "Yeah. See the elephants? See that hose over there? See that bucket? Fill that bucket with water and take it to the first elephant. Then get another bucket of water and take it to the second elephant. Then get another bucket and fill it with water. Keep filling and carrying 'till them Packy Derms don't want any more water. Get it?"

“Yes, sir,” I said. For a kid Yankee, it was hard to say, “Sir.” It seemed servile or militaristic, but it paid to be polite at the circus where all the roustabouts seemed to be Southern. Captain White Hat said, “When you’re through come and see me.” Then I took off.

I followed the boss’s instructions. Got the bucket, found the hose, filled the bucket, and carried it to the first elephant. Before I watered the second elephant, the first one was ready for more, but he’d have to wait until the last one was watered. There were nine in a row and all rocked back and forth, pulling on their chains. It was back and forth, back and forth.

I didn’t think I’d ever finish the job. I drank more water from the hose than the elephants did. When they started playing in the water and squirting their backs. I knew they weren’t thirsty. They knew the routine better than I did. They didn’t care who had to carry the buckets.

In about an hour, Captain White Hat came by to see what I was doing. “Okay, you did good. Now see them bales of hay? Pull a couple close to the elephant line and break ‘em open. See that pitch fork over there? Take it and give each elephant about a quarter of the bale. When you’re through, come see me.” I shouted, “Yes, sir!” and started to work.

Pitching hay was easier than lugging buckets of water to nine thirsty elephants but every time I opened a bale I had to go back to the water hose and get a drink. The circus must have gotten a big water bill, what with the elephants and me. Once the hay was piled in front of the elephants they settled down and just stomped their big feet.

When the hay job was finished, I sat on a bale and watched four men in unison pound in the stakes at the sides of the Big Top canvas which was spread out on the ground. Then they slid in the huge center pole, hooking it at the top of the tent with ropes. The crew anchored the pole in a boxed-in hole in the ground. Pretty soon everyone quit working at their own jobs and came over and pulled on the ropes. Guys under the tent pushed the pole up while the outside guys on the ropes pulled.

I ran over and there was Captain White Hat. When he saw me he motioned with his head and said, "Get in there, Hopalong." I did so in short order. It was fun feeling the power surge of all those guys chanting and pulling at the same time. Soon the tent pole was balanced. Then the crew started stretching out the tent and hooking the stakes that men with sledges had pounded into the ground. It didn't take long to get the Big Top up.

The next job was to put up the stands and the seats. A huge pile of long heavy planks lay off to the side. It was all I could do to carry one, so another kid and I doubled up and carried one between us. Captain White Hat watched us for a couple of minutes. Then he walked away shaking his head.

After about a half hour hauling planks, I told my working buddy that I had to go to the john. He shrugged his shoulders and sat down, then he wandered down to join another bunch of benchers. I couldn't find a latrine but I found a secluded spot behind some cars on the railroad tracks. Then I wandered around looking at the sights. There was a Freak Show attached to the circus so I meandered my way down there. Big signs showed: "HALF MAN, HALF WOMAN," "FATTEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD," "See TOM THUMB, SMALLEST MAN IN THE WORLD," "THE GEEK, EATS LIVE CHICKENS," "ATLAS, STRONGEST MAN IN THE WORLD," and "LIVE CALF WITH TWO HEADS." Where did they find them all? On the outside platform near the ticket stand, there was FAT LADY sunning herself on a huge rocking chair. She asked me, "How you doing, Sonny?" Sonny was my family name which I hated. How did she know?

Another tent sign showed: "CUSTER'S LAST STAND, LIVE." Later in the afternoon, I heard the barker shouting, "See the great massacre and the 'Siuxxes' that done it."

My "Packy Derms" were off parading, but "CAT MAN" was in the cage shouting and snapping his whip trying to get a big male lion through a hoop onto a platform. "SIMBA" just lay there making a great roaring yawn as if in pain.

By now I was overwhelmed by the need to sleep. I had been up over ten hours. I was hungry, tired, and sleepy. I went over to the hay bales and lay down on one. In the warm sun, I was soon out of it. I woke up when I heard somebody holler at me. It must have been about an hour after I had fallen asleep. "SABU, THE ELEPHANT MAN" had returned from the parade. "Hey, kid, *heraus!*" Sabu wasn't an Indian at all but Heiney, the Dutchman. Obviously he knew elephants. During the show, except for a pair of baggy shorts and one of those funny hats the Indian swamis wear, he was naked and his skin was painted with yellow grease paint.

"Hey, kid, wait a minute. You're the kid that watered my sweethearts, ain't you?" I nodded my head in a sleepy daze. "Gutt, well, do it again. That's a good boy." So it was back to the buckets, and the hose, and the water. Those "Packy Derms" were sure thirsty after their long walk, but I got through that chore just as Captain White Hat came up. "Where you been, kid?"

I said, "I finished the seat job and came over here to give Sabu a hand with the elephants. How about my ticket to the show?" He said, "Okay, kid, I guess you earned it." Then he opened up his wallet that hung by a chain on his belt and handed me a general admission ticket to the afternoon show.

The matinee began at two o'clock. When I handed my ticket to the taker, he asked, "How you doin' Huck?" The show was great but the best part of that day was when the ticket taker called me "Huck." It must have been Pop's old black fedora that did it.

