Excerpts from

Our Pages of Life

SEP · 61

Volume XXIIIc—Thursday Afternoon Session
Spring 1999

We live close together and we live far apart.
We all go through the same things—it's just a different kind of the same thing.
From "Trifles"— a short play by Susan Glaspell—these words
spoken by Mrs. Hale, the wife of the county sheriff
investigating the murder of neighbor Minnie Foster's husband,
express the "oh—I-don't-think-I-knew-that"of our lives.

The experiences that inspired the stories in this XXIII volume collection
of *Excerpts from* **Our Pages of Life** become *a different kind of the same thing.*
The writers themselves, a bit amazed when they say it, often comment
on the sameness of the lives and stories of their peers as compared to their own.
These friends who began as strangers are treated to the ordinary and extraordinary
events of each others' lives. With these narratives, they are also introduced
to one of the most important lessons for us to learn—
We all go through the same things—it's just a different kind of the same thing.

Read. Enjoy. And pass on.

❋ Joan Stear, USL
Lafayette, Louisiana
Spring 1999

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.
Thanks, too, to each of my students—my pages of life.

FRONT COVER: (*clockwise, beginning at top right corner*) Martha L. Sonnier, 1945; Lee Roy Castille, husband of Eula Castille; David Stear with sisters Susan, Freda, and Joan (*in highchair*); Tom Butcher and family (*second from right*); Pat O'Brien; (*center*) Joyce Indest

USL LIFE WRITING CLASS
Spring 1999 • Thursday Afternoon Session

Seated, left to right: **Katherine Favrot; Nada Breaux; Eula Castille; Pat O'Brien; Joan Stear, *Instructor***
Standing, left to right: **Eumaie Kidder; Joyce Indest; Patrick Mouton, Jr.; Verna Patout; Tom Butcher; Martha Sonnier; Pat Hardesty**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

– ❋ ❋ ❋ –

MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

by

Tom Butcher

Annemariea Schmidt's initiation into the realities of life really began in 1938. The Germans invaded her beloved homeland and eventually, her small village in the mountains of Czechoslovakia.

The villagers were strongly religious, and patriotic, and, consequently, it was natural for them to react violently to the occupation of their cherished homeland. They became a strong anti-Nazi resistance group, harassing the enemy in every crag and cranny of their valley. Their resistance resulted in strong action on the part of the Nazi troops, and strict martial law was mandated for what was once a peaceful, loving village.

Annemariea was only twelve years old when the Germans came and she began to learn about forgiveness. "I had to learn *how* to forgive," she explained. "No one ever had hurt me until the Nazi's came."

Her people had lived "in faith and by faith" never doing anything which would cause her to say, "I forgive." But once the German troops arrived, their lives changed. When the SS decreed that villagers were to get off the sidewalk if a German soldier was on it, young Annamariea resisted, because of her strong will. But then, with his pointed-toe boots, one SS man showed her the error of her ways, by kicking her relentlessly, forcing her off of the walkway.

Annamariea awoke in the hospital, peeking through swollen eyelids, with fractures to her arm, leg, and ribs. Anger and resentment churned inside her. For the first time in her life, she had experienced an unwarranted attack.

A priest friend, who was at her bedside holding a prayer vigil, now urged her to forgive the German soldier. She would never be healed, he told her, if she did not forgive.

"Did Jesus look down from the cross and say, 'I can't forgive you'?" he asked her.

Though in her heart she knew Jesus could never do such a thing, she could not forgive, and the anger and resentment churned inside her.

When Annemariea was released from the hospital, her arm had not yet healed. After several weeks, her fingers began to turn black, meaning that her arm may have to be amputated if it did not soon heal soon.

Her priest and the villagers knew the situation and prayed for healing, not only of her hand, but of her heart, as well. She had yet to forgive the soldier who had harmed her.

Then one day as Annemariea was walking into town, she once again encountered the German officer. Surely, she thought, this time I will be beaten to death. Little did she know that, as the soldier approached, the villagers' prayers were being answered. As she looked into the soldier's eyes, she prayed, "Lord Jesus, in your mercy send your power that my heart might be healed."

The soldier's shadow towered over her, his arm raised, prepared to finish the job he had started weeks before. But Annemariea felt suddenly charged with power. "I forgive you!" she cried. "Please forgive me." Then Annemariea gave the soldier a hug. He stood there, stunned, while Annemariea returned home, singing all the way. Her arm, as well as her heart, had begun to heal.

Indeed, her first lesson in forgiveness was one she would desperately need within the next few years. As the war became more violent and widespread, so did the atrocities perpetrated by the occupiers upon the inhabitants of the village. Of course, they were fueled by the amount of resistance to the invaders by the inhabitants. Each time a German soldier was murdered, ten villagers were lined up in the square and executed. Women and children were not excluded.

Church services were held clandestinely on a regular basis, although strictly forbidden by the authorities, until, one day an informer disclosed the location and hostages were taken and executed. One of Annemariea's brothers was killed by a firing squad for this infraction.

Allied air raids were a fairly regular occurrence in the vicinity and the villagers participated by placing small, blue lights near the castle, invisible to the Germans, indicating a safe place for a downed pilot to parachute.

The castle contained a huge cellar, which was used as a wine cellar in the "better" times. Some of the wine casks were empty and large enough to act as a haven for these Allied airmen, until they could be spirited out of the country.

On one occasion, Annemariea took a wounded American aviator for a walk in the fresh air, which she deemed necessary for his recuperation, by dressing him in a German uniform. His face was completely bandaged with only a small opening at his mouth for the purpose of breathing.

While they were walking about, they came upon an SS officer who asked, "And tell me, who is this soldier all bandaged up?" "He is one of my cousins who has been wounded in combat, and we are caring for him in our home," replied Annemariea. Then the SS officer retorted, "I would like you to compliment his tailor for doing a right smart job on his uniform."

Two weeks later, the airman, Charlie, was a participant in a mock funeral as the corpse, with the "burial" occurring in a neighboring village. Of course, when interred, the coffin was empty and there was one less displaced American airman.

Recently, while on a visit to Dallas, Annemariea was treated to an unexpected surprise...she met Charlie while dining at a restaurant. They had quite a lengthy and happy visit.

During the interim, one of her older brothers, mechanically inclined, built a motorcycle and escaped being deported by the occupying forces of Germans.

When Annemariea was 17, her father wanted her to go to Switzerland to study, but she chose, instead, to go with friends to the famous old school in Prague, Charles University, to enroll in the nursing curriculum.

Only later did she decide that she had not chosen well, as within two years, 1944, the Germans conscripted the entire nursing class from Charles University for service on the Russian front, as nurses were in such short supply.

Auschwitz, that hell-hole of German atrocity and holocaust, was the first stop for these young women. They were not to be victims in the manner of the Jewish prisoners, however. They were there for the purpose of being frightened and broken down to the point where they would be useful to the Third Reich. After several weeks of seeing the horror inflicted on these innocent victims, the young nurses were sent to Treblenka, another concentration camp in southern Poland for a continuation of their "education" on the consequences of non-cooperation. Needless to say, the ploy worked and the girls were hurriedly trained and unwillingly sent to the Eastern Front. While Annemariea was on the Russian/Polish border nursing wounded soldiers, the German outpost was overrun, and she narrowly escaped capture by the Russians. She and another nurse, commandeered a tank which they found abandoned and drove it back into the German rear lines, until it ran out of petrol. Annemariea says, "It was a good thing we did run out of gas, as we did not know how to stop the thing!"

After she returned to the battlefield to care for the wounded, both German and Russian, the lines were overrun, and she was captured by the Russians. Since she was in the German line, albeit against her will, she was sent to a concentration camp in Siberia.

Conditions at the Siberian salt mine were brutal. The work was hard, the cold was bitter, the food was scarce. Terrifying the entire camp was a big, evil-driven Soviet guard.

"He killed three women a week," remembers Annemariea. "Sometimes he just needed to kill. We were always plotting to do him in, somehow."

She became a victim of his brutality herself when she was sentenced to 18 days in an isolation chamber, a dark, damp cubicle in the ground from which she had seen no one emerge alive. And her sentence was the longest of anyone's. Her crime was that she was accused of stealing a piece of bread to give to a very ill fellow prisoner. As she was placed in the hole with only a pitcher of water and a small loaf of bread laced with sawdust, the door closed above Annemariea, blocking out the light. She felt water around her feet and had to curl up on the small wooden shelf to keep dry. She realized the finality of her sentence and began to make her peace with God, with Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and Psalm 91, "You shall not fear the terror of the night..." Even in the blackness of her confinement, a light began to grow in Annemariea's inner being.

Pulled out of the hole more than two weeks later, with twisted limbs, an emaciated body, and temporary blindness, she nevertheless praised the Lord. Her faith was deeper than ever.

Even though the guard continued his persecution of her, she continued to call upon her deep faith for strength. And even though the guard beat to death her friend who had nursed her after her confinement, Schmidt continued to pray.

Then, once again, the guard focused his cruelty on Annemariea, using a rubber hose to beat her, inflicting permanent scars. She continued to pray, recalling the lesson of forgiveness she had learned in her Czechoslovakian village.

Just before blacking out, she whispered, "I forgive you and I love you because Jesus loves you."

Days later the guard was at her side, nudging her, as she regained consciousness. She told me that she was very disappointed. Having dreamed that she had gone to heaven, she knew this wasn't heaven because he was there!

The burley guard said, "Tell me about this boyfriend of yours, Jesus." Who could this Jesus be, he wondered, that a prisoner could forgive his tormentor.

The other women in the barracks told her that he had not left her side since she lost consciousness. And, for days he had not killed anyone.

Annemariea recuperated and the guard came to see her and hear more about this man, Jesus, even after she returned to her labor in the salt mine. She continued to teach him about Jesus, Satan, and redemption. She told him that Jesus died on the cross for all men's sins.

"Even for me?" the guard asked.

"Yes," she said.

"More about Jesus," he grunted. And so Annemariea talked some more.

Then one day he came to her wanting to be baptized. She still harbored resentment toward him and told him, "I can't. We have no priest." He put a gun to her side and said, "Baptize me!"

The icy water outside came to mind...what better way to baptize him! Off they went to the river, and when it was reached, she told him to lay down his rifle. He hesitated, but did as he was told.

"Now," she said, "you will have to get into the river." He looked at all that ice and exclaimed, "You can do it no other way?"

"No other way," she answered and commenced to push him into the cold, icy water. Annemariea did not realize that he had hold of her prison uniform with one hand, so, she too plunged into the freezing water.

"God," she told me in retrospect, "would have none of my foolishness."

The guard promptly renounced all of Satan's earthly works, with a loud, "I do" through chattering lips. They got out of the water and walked back to camp, all the while Annemariea was wondering if such an unorthodox baptism would "take." But, even as his wet clothes turned to ice, the guard's heart began to warm. He had filled the vacuum in his heart with a love of Jesus.

Now he became a gentle giant, concerned about his prisoners, and demanded goat's milk and butter from farms in the area to make sure they did not starve. He would often help the inmates make their quota at the salt mine so Annemariea could tell more Jesus stories. As the war neared an end, he gave Annemariea a special token with the number 7 on it, meaning she would be one of the first released to freedom. She never saw or heard of him again.

(NOTE: All events in this narrative are true and were related by Annemariea to Betty and me, however, some descriptions were gleaned from an article which appeared in The Catholic Digest, August, 1991.)

WEATHERING CHANGE
by
Martha L. Sonnier

So many times lately I have wished I could go back to the wonderful days after the war when I first arrived in, what was then, bucolic Louisiana. In those days I had no understanding of the beautiful countryside that I was entering, I was thinking only of the future and the beginning of a new and very different life ahead of me. Lee and I were married at Annapolis, Maryland, on March 2, 1946, after a courtship of about two years. We spent most of the two years separated while we each did our tour of duty with the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps.

Our wedding was attended by friends who were stationed at the U.S. Naval Academy or working in the Navy Department with me, in Washington, D.C. Lee and I traveled by car from Washington, D.C., with a stop in Newton, Massachusetts, to Scott, Louisiana, which was to be our home. I had been in New Orleans during the war for a little while, but had never been to any of the cities or towns surrounding it. I was not quite ready for the pastoral settings I saw when leaving the big city of New Orleans. Travel was difficult because there were no highways as we know them today. We traveled all day until dark (without a stop for food which elicited a rather heated discussion). Lee was determined to get home as soon as possible so that he could start his life where he had left off to go into the service. I, on the other hand, was not in too great a hurry to join his family and friends. I was very nervous as I had not previously met any of his family.

Along the way, Lee pointed out the fields that were being prepared for planting, or harvesting, as the case was at the time. I tried to take it all in, thinking that I would really not need to know any of that in my life. "Show some interest," I told myself. All things considered, I think I did a good job of being interested, but I really was not. Why would I have to know all that? I wasn't going to be near any farms.

We came to a large field being prepared for planting. I saw some women working in the field wearing sun bonnets. Lee saw that I was showing some interest at last, and his comment was, "See, that is what you will have to do when we get settled. You will have to wear a bonnet just like they have on." I couldn't believe it. I had spent my adult life in offices, typing, taking dictation, wearing dresses and suits.

How could this be? If I had been driving, I would have turned the car around and headed back where I came from.

We continued on toward our destination and were around the Carencro area when we were slowed down by a buggy. Now, I had never seen a buggy although I believe I knew about them from reading, but this was real. It was on a heavily traveled road which I thought of as a thoroughfare. We stayed behind it until the opportunity came for us to pass. I almost fell out of the car's window trying to see who occupied the buggy.

We arrived in Scott about 7 p.m. and went directly to Lee's brother Bobby's house where all the family and many of Lee's friends were waiting for our arrival. Leta, Lee's oldest sister, had prepared a wonderful supper for us. Everyone was very congenial and tried to make me feel at home.

Much conversation ensued at the table with lots of teasing about the Yankee accent and the marriage of their bachelor friend and brother. I had to repeat "I park my car" many times to please Lee's friends. The main difference came when I found the conversations changing to French. We would be in a general discussion about something, when one person spoke to another, and the language changed. It was utterly frustrating, and until I showed my ignorance of the conversation, they would continue to converse in French. Through the years I tried to learn French, but everyone spoke so fast that I couldn't catch on. I finally understood what the conversations were about, and was able to join in, but only in English.

The second evening after our arrival, Lee and I drove to Lafayette for supper at Don's Seafood and Steak House. Lee talked about crawfish which he hadn't had for some time. My wildest imagination could not have conjured up what was to come to the table at the restaurant. The waiter piled (or was it dumped?) a large amount of awful looking bugs on the table, and if my memory is reliable, it was piled on a newspaper tablecloth. However, maybe not at that time, but from then on, when we were invited to private homes, it was on newspaper that the crawfish was piled. I could not believe what was seeing. Lee was delighted and started eating voraciously, peeling and throwing these nasty things into his mouth. The shells were being piled up alongside of the ones he was eating, and I was appalled. I looked over at other customers to see if they were noticing because I really thought that this was not right.

However, I soon found out it was normal. I wondered, for a time, who in the world had I married for I had not noticed such weird manners exhibited before.

The first six months proved to be a challenge, but the people around me were so compassionate, I could hardly feel isolated. I saw the dirt roads being oiled to allow the dust to settle so as not invade the lovely homes with their antique furniture and heavily waxed floors. I learned that church and funerals were very important to the people. I saw that the priest, who was considered a member of each family, was invited to dinner very often. I saw cakes being made for the child who received first communion saw the neighbors and friends of a graduating senior going to the graduating exercise, bringing presents and congratulations. I saw old people die and everyone in the town attending the wakes and funerals, with sincere hugs and kisses abounding.

I became aware that when anyone visited a home, coffee was the order of the day no matter what time it was. Coffee! It took some time before I was able to drink the coffee. Everyone served it in little cups, really tiny cups. No wonder. They would have been drunk from the caffeine if they had large cups of the syrupy stuff. The coffee pot was very small. Coffee was made by boiling the water in a saucepan then dripping it into the coffee grounds, one tablespoon at a time. I started trying to drink it by putting more sugar in the cup than I had coffee, but that didn't really solve the problem, so the hostess finally diluted it with hot water.

In Scott, my brother-in-law, Bobby, ran a cotton gin. I saw the cotton growers bringing their raw products to the gin. Bobby brought me some cotton to see for the first time. I sent some home for my sister's children to take to school to show in class.

I experienced the segregation of the black people. I also experienced how much love and respect there was between the people who lived in the same town but were segregated by color. I saw the trust that neighbors had for each other. I saw how all the people knew who was sick or suffering, and how quickly they rallied around to help out. I knew that I would love the people in my new home town and hoped that they would like me.

I had traveled throughout the country during the war, so my arrival in Louisiana didn't prove insurmountable. The differences were mostly in the superficial facets of environment and not in the way they lived their lives. The houses in Louisiana were

raised on piers. The houses in Massachusetts had basements and were deep in the ground. In Massachusetts the people ate food with no spice or seasoning, while in Louisiana spices are important to cooking and eating. Both areas are noted for their seafood, but the taste in Louisiana is so much better because of the seasoning. People oiled the dusty roads in Scott and Lafayette when I arrived here. In Newton paved streets were salted or sanded when it snowed. In Scott, they ginned the cotton and grew yams. In Newton there were factories where corrugated boxes were made. A rubber factory existed there, as did a factory where fire alarms were made. In South Louisiana the people planted rice and ate rice and gravy. In Massachusetts, the people ate potatoes with their gravy and made pudding with the rice. I was very lucky in my new life. I had the best of both worlds.

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CHRISTMAS AT HOME
by
Joyce Indest

From the time I can remember, Christmas was always the most exciting celebration of the year at home. Santa's arrival started off our celebration. I recall getting sets of jacks, always a rubber ball, and beautiful, delicious oranges, apples and bananas. What more could we possibly have asked for?

The preparation of the Christmas meal started the day before with Fame, the lady who helped Mama on such occasions. She would spend the night at our house, (a treat in itself—all on its own). I remember Mama opening up a cot in the dining room near the kitchen for her to sleep. We could smell the aroma of the food being cooked all night. A hog or two, depending on the size, was butchered a couple of days before. Chickens were plucked and readied for roasting. Always, *les petits cotes de cochon* (small pork ribs) were used to make a stew because Mama said that was Uncle Andrew's favorite. Fame also cooked rice dressing, potato salad, yams and different vegetables from Papa's garden. Christmas Day was the only time I remember that liquor was served at home, and it flowed. Mama drank red wine, but always added at least two teaspoons of sugar to her glass of wine. Yuck!

The men moved furniture out of our large living room and set up big u-shaped tables. We sat at the tables most of the day and ate and sang songs and sang songs and ate (and I'm sure, drank). On such occasions we probably numbered about thirty or forty people.

Mama and Papa usually invited some friends and, of course, the parish priest. For many years Father Albert Bacqué served as pastor of Our Lady of Prompt Succor church, which was just a short distance from our home in Coteau. He was considered a member of our family, always with us during celebrations. He also ate with us almost every Sunday and many times during the week. Father Bacqué played a big part in our lives, not only as our spiritual director, but also as our friend. We spent many, many good times with him. Of all the special events that took place at our home in Coteau, Christmas, as I recall, was always the best.

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SCHOOL DAYS
by
Verna Patout

I must have been about ten years old at the time that my oldest sister, Angelle, had a house built not far from ours—about five city blocks. We loved going there; she was like a second mother to us. One day, my sister Joyce and I (she was three years younger than I) were at Angelle's house. All of a sudden, Angelle said, "The first one of you who goes home, packs your clothes, and comes back here, can live with me." Joyce and I took off running as fast as we could, but about three quarters of the way home, Joyce was ahead of me, and I realized she would beat me there. Instead of trying harder, I just gave up and cried all the way home. I was devastated; it seemed like my world had almost come to an end. How long did Joyce live with Angelle? About three days.

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MY WAR CONTINUED
by
Pat O'Brien

Besides my friendships with the nurses, I enjoyed the company of my male friends in the 130th Station Hospital stationed in England in Burdrop Park. We worked together closely and felt like family.

Captain Beavers lived in the quonset hut with three other officers. He was always receiving packages from home full of goodies but inside the packages were also cans of tomato juice his wife had sent. Captain Beavers stacked the unopened cans along the wall. He would fuss and say, "She knows I don't like tomato juice! Why does she do this?" One day one of his hutmates had a classic hangover and Captain Beavers gave him a can of tomato juice thinking it might help his friend. When lo, and behold, he opened the can and it was scotch. Our liquor rations were scarce. We received one bottle a month of whatever they had to dispense. Captain Beavers was able to give some parties, and we were glad to be included.

I also remember Captain Blumenthal, one of our dentists. My friend, Josephine Kearney, had a terrible toothache and she went to him. The tooth was infected but the doctor pulled it anyway. As she cried out in pain, he threw the dictionary at her and said, "Look up the word 'sympathy.'"

[We lost Josephine Kearney later. She went with several others on the bus to a Shakespearean play, and when she walked down the step, she fell and hit her head and died not long after this accident. She was a sweet, kind person. I'm sure heaven is a richer place because of her.]

Then there was a Captain Vic Inserillo, a psychiatrist. I dated him some. He was an odd ball—crazy things always happened to him or around him. I think this happens to lots of people in this field of medicine. On one of our days off a few of us decided to go horseback riding. The stables were not very far from us. We each picked a horse, and Vic begged the man to give him a gentle, slow horse. The man agreed, and I don't know if the man did it to be ornery or if the horse was out of character that day, but as soon as Vic was on the horse's back, he took off lickety split, and we all pulled up the rear. Poor Vic was so upset, but he did manage to pull up at

a tavern. All of us refreshed ourselves before riding the horses home. Vic never went horseback riding with us again.

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DALLAS 1950
by
Nada Breaux

We left New York for Dallas in 1950, Roy, Susannah and I, to join Roy's brother, Wilbert, and his family. Wilbert lived in a little house in Dallas and had arranged for us to buy a small home across the alley from his. The real estate agent was the wife of the president of the Mercantile National Bank in Dallas. His name was Bailey Malone, and he interviewed us regarding a down payment and mortgage loan on the house which was priced at $8,000.00. Roy's earnings were low as he had transferred to Dallas as a salesman of Encyclopaedia Brittanica. In addition, we each had a small income. "What collateral do you have to offer for a down payment?" asked Mr. Malone. "Well, we have a car," I replied. "I'm afraid that will not do. Do you have any stocks, bonds, jewelry or silver?" he asked. "I have a silver tray that was my grandmother's", I replied. "My mother had it valued and said it has seven pounds of silver in it. Would that do?" "Well it might," he said. "Bring it in and we will see." We took the heavy silver tray to the bank for him to see. "That will do," he said. "My wife will use it, and when you pay off the down payment we will return it to you." I had never heard of such a casual arrangement, but since I was expecting a check from England in the near future, we agreed to the deal.

Roy and I were so proud of our little white frame house. It had two bedrooms, one bathroom, a tiny kitchen and a small living-dining room. The back yard was fenced and across the alley was Wilbert and Maggie's house. It was a joy to have them there. Maggie was like the sister I never had and had two children, Kenny, who was about six, and Kathy, who was two. We babysat for each other when necessary, and Maggie, so very knowledgeable about child care, helped me in many ways.

I have many amusing memories of our life at 200 Olden Drive. We wanted to grow some tomatoes and bought some seedlings which we planted outside the back door. The washing machine was in the kitchen, and the hose drained out into the flower bed. Whenever they needed more water, Roy would religiously water them. The plants grew and grew, but the bigger they got, the less they looked like tomato plants. I finally decided that they were giant marigolds, a great disappointment to us.

Another incident occurred when one Sunday Roy bought a box of a dozen donuts. Wilbert was at times a moody man, and this particular day he must have been in one of his moods. He walked across the alley with Kenny into our kitchen and ate eight of our donuts without saying a word. Then he and Kenny walked back home again. Strange!

Roy found a better job selling mutual funds which was much more to his liking than selling books. From there he moved to a firm which sold unlisted stocks and then on to a very fine brokerage firm where he stayed until we left Dallas. Soon after we arrived in Dallas I found that I was pregnant and expecting in September.

Susannah was a very active child. There were times when she would be in the backyard but when I went out to get her she was not there. She found out how to open the gate and toddled up the alley. We fixed the gate but then she disappeared again and we found that she had learned how to climb the hurricane fence. Another time I found her standing on the top rung of the swing set ladder waving to the dog next door. Our daughter was totally fearless. We used to go to a little fun fair where she loved to ride the ponies. She would hit the pony with her heels and say, "Go, go, go!" Fortunately the pony did not obey. There was also a little roller coaster she loved to ride until one day her finger caught in the machinery and made her nail bleed.

Dallas was incredibly hot in the summer. I remember one Sunday when the three of us spent the day in our bedroom. We had no air conditioning, only a water-cooled window fan, and to leave that room for the kitchen or the bathroom was unbearable. There was a picture in Life magazine showing an egg being fried on the street and another showing a wavy white line in the street.

One day in August of 1950 I held Susannah up to wave goodbye to Roy as he drove off to work and my water broke. I was scared. I hurried in to Maggie and asked her what to do. It was three weeks before my baby was due. "Well," she said, "We will call the doctor and then we will call Roy and tell him to come straight home." Roy was back in about half an hour and then we sent him off to find Janie, the black lady who worked for me twice a week. She had no phone so I prayed that she would be home. I began to feel very uncomfortable so I sat on the back steps so that nothing would happen. Finally Roy drove up with Janie. "Don't get out," I called. I was doing my best not to have a baby on the spot. "I will get in right away." Fortunately, on the way into Dallas Roy spotted a very large motorcycle cop giving someone a ticket.

"Officer," called Roy, "My wife is about to have a baby. Can you get us to the hospital?" "Right away!" shouted the cop. "Follow me!" and he roared off on his motorbike, siren screaming. It seemed to me like going through the Red Sea with the traffic parting to let us through. We arrived at the hospital. Roy went to fill out forms, and a doctor attended to me. "Why are you shaking?" he asked. "Well, I was afraid I would not get here in time." "Well, you're here now, aren't you?" he said. Twenty minutes later our son was born.

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LITTLE BROTHER, *TE FRÉRE*
by
Eumaie Kidder

In a small hamlet called Prairie Basse near Leonville, Louisiana, a son was born to a sharecropper named Edwin and his wife Marie. After the birth of two girls, a son was his father's wish come true. He was affectionately named "Te Frére." In French the name means "Little Brother." His given name was Olen Joseph Kidder. Although, unknown to Olen, who as a happy little boy, he was destined for a life of heartache with a tragic ending. Olen's father died when he was 3 1/2 years old, and growing up was very tough. His mother, Marie was forced to move back to her parents' home with all three children. With so many people around and the hard work of farming, young Olen got caught up in the shuffle.

Olen always felt inferior to his first cousins who had a father and a stable home life. He was orphaned at such an early age, and he had no one to look up to as a mentor. Marie remarried 2 years later, and his stepfather did not help make him feel loved or wanted. Chap, as he was called, was a very cold and self indulgent person.

We are not sure when his drinking started, but as Olen grew older, his desire to prove to the world that he was as good as everyone else inhibited his ability to understand that just being the person God created was enough. His insecurities were his downfall. He was always trying to prove himself.

In 1959 he entered the Army, and after basic training he served as a military policeman. He felt good about himself for a while. He was stationed in Massachusetts where he met a girl named Kay. They were married and came back to Louisiana to live. Both were very ambitious, hard working, and seemed to be on the road to success. That lasted a while, but reality set in when they realized no children would come of the union. This devastated Olen and not long after that we saw a great change in his personality. The problem kept getting progressively worse, and he and Kay divorced. It was not long after that he met his second wife, Jeanette. She was not like Kay, and enjoyed the fruit of Olen's labor. Jeanette helped Olen adopt a baby girl, but his aggressiveness and personality continued to worsen. He insisted on having bourbon with his coffee and started drinking throughout the day. When things got too bad for

Jeanette she took their child and left for Arkansas—another devastation for Olen, and he went downhill from then on.

He became aggressive and unpredictable, and being around him was unbearable. He and I came to a parting of the ways as he was in denial that he was an alcoholic. Unless he stopped drinking, his life would be shortened by each drink. He met his third wife, Shirley, who took care of him, and he seemed content.

One Mardi Gras, I was getting an item out of the back of my van when a overwhelming feeling came over me that someone was standing behind me. I quickly turned around to find no one there. Call it what you may, but I believe that I was being prepared for the phone call I received that afternoon. Shirley called saying Olen was very ill and that he refused to seek treatment. I went to see him to convince him to see my family doctor. Not only was he surprised to see me, but he, in turn, surprised me by agreeing to seek medical treatment. My doctor immediately checked him into the hospital where he was treated for hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver.

Olen stayed in the hospital for three weeks. After that he stayed sober for one year. Eventually he went back to drinking, trying to convince himself and his family that he could control his drinking. He did, however, stop drinking when our mother, Marie, who had been diagnosed with cancer, asked him to. After our Mother died in May of 1986, he went back to drinking and became a recluse. His relationship with Shirley dissolved, and we seldom heard from or saw Olen. Then on Sunday, July 14, 1996, my sister Eula called me and told me of our brother's death. He died alone in a run down apartment that he had fixed up. The coroner's report said he died of hemorrhaging caused by acute alcoholism. I have grieved for the brother I could not show affection to or share my life with. I miss the person he could have been and pray that he has finally found the peace he searched for all his life.

WAR
by
Eula Castille

The war that I remember most clearly was the Korean War, maybe because I was more involved in it. Lee Roy and I had been married only three months when he received his Greetings—report to New Orleans for examination on Monday. Results: I-A. Saying goodbye to a bridegroom is very hard, especially for a young bride who is familiar with the hardships of war. Of course, this was only a conflict, nothing major: The North Koreans had crossed the 38th parallel and had to be pushed back. It was not expected to be a lengthy war. To me it was almost forever. Lee Roy, who had never left the state of Louisiana, told us goodbye, squared his shoulders, and walked away on that cold January morning in 1952. He was stationed at Camp Pendleton in California for basic training.

One quiet evening the phone rang. That phone call became the highest phone bill I have ever paid—one hundred and twenty-two dollars. Lee Roy had called to say he was crossing over to Korea the next morning. He said he would write, and he did. At first his letters were regular but then two weeks went by. I received a phone call from Bruce's mother. Bruce was a close friend of Lee Roy's. He told his mother that they were advancing and that Lee Roy went down. What news, especially since I was expecting our first child in early September. Bruce then called a few days later to tell us that Lee Roy had been wounded but that he was all right. Finally, the first week of September, we heard a knock on the door. We received a yellow envelope with a letter that read, *sorry to inform you*. I never heard from the War Department after that, so I knew that my husband was safe in spite of the anxious days in between. Our daughter, Janet Lee, a name we chose during our courtship, was born to us on September 13, 1952. She was ten months old when Lee Roy first saw her, and sixteen months old when he came home to live with us.

Lee Roy speaks very little about this time in out lives but I don't question him anyway because through the years we have had several men in our family in uniform. My Uncle Thedose Lagrange fought in World War I. I was not born then but he lived next door to us when I was a young child, and I knew him later. We had three uncles in World War II, Charles, Daniel (an ex-prisoner of war), and Leon. Our brother Olen served during the Cold War (on secret missions), Lee Roy in Korea, and our brother

Roland in Vietnam. Yes, no war is ever an easy "Conflict" to many people, especially those very close to the service men involved.

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SWEET MAMA
by
Pat Hardesty

My earliest memories are framed within the years before I turned seven. At that age my family moved from Second Street in Gulfport to East Beach creating a distinct memory mark. Most children are born, but I was found—under a rock in the woods, or so my Dad had informed me. For several years I was afraid of being returned to the woods, at least until two closely related incidents reassured me that I was indeed born into my family. The first incident that comforted me was when Mom rocked me all night on the screen porch of our little Second Street brick house when I was having trouble breathing from no apparent reason. The following day "Sweet Mama," my feisty little grandmother, took care of me in her little frame house next door. Evidently I began to feel better.

"Sweet Mama, I want cream cheese," I demanded childishly.

"O.K., dear."

"More. Sweet Mama, how do you make cream cheese, like butter? Can I churn, too? Sweet Mama, your long pigtail."

"Do you mean my braid?"

"Braid, yes. Make me one."

Before Sweet Mama could start the braid we heard a noise at the door.

"Sweet Mama, the door. Is it Granddaddy?"

"No," then startled, "How did you get in?" Sweet Mama demanded as a grimy, tall, ugly, bearded man lunged into her living room. "I want your money and your rings!" the man growled.

"I'll have to get my purse. It's in the kitchen." Sweet Mama returned with her purse. In the pocket of her bathrobe she pointed a gun at the stranger and shouted, "Now get out of here or I'll blow your head off!" The robber fled the house.

Relieved, Sweet Mama began to sit down to rest her wobbling knees. With trembling hands she pulled a banana (not a gun) out of her bathrobe pocket. I watched with admiration. "Wow! Sweet Mama! How did you do that?" and "Sweet Mama, how did you get your name?"

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CHRISTA MCAULIFFE, AMERICAN HEROINE
by
Katherine Favrot

Where were you at noon, January 28, 1986, a very historic day? Why?

My day started as any other day driving fifteen miles through bumper to bumper New Orleans city traffic from seven to eight A.M. to get to school in Chalmette. In the teachers' lounge I saw Mrs. Long, the other third-grade teacher. I asked her, "Did you bring your T.V. so we can see Christa?"

She replied, "Oh, yes, you can bring your class to my room about 11:45. The ladies in the lunchroom will serve our classes at eleven today."

"That's a good break," I replied.

After lunch and excuses, we were ready to go next door. I said, "Children, form a line. When you get to Mrs. Long's room, sit with a friend or stand by the windows so you can see the T.V. Be very quiet so we can see and hear." Finding a friend did take a litfle while, but the children did settle down to view and listen.

Mrs. Long turned on the T.V. The announcer said, "This is a very historic day! Christa McAuliffe, the first social studies teacher in space is from Concord High School in New Hampshire. She and six other astronauts will lift off shortly. Christa, herself, has taken many chances in her own life. Of the 11,000 applicants, narrowed to 123, she was the one chosen. She hopes to help people learn about new frontiers. With this kind of spirit, many discoveries have been made to improve the world. Her husband and children are completely supportive of her. Listen to what she told a reporter at her home in Concord. Christa said, "This is a once in a lifetime chance to give my students and the world the perspective of an ordinary person." Later, when asked why she wants to be here, she said, "I believe I can be a good symbol for all American teachers. Our profession needs this and I think I can do the job." Christa is no ordinary teacher. She is a wonderful heroine. Now here's countdown for Challenger at Cape Canaveral: *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Blast Off!* Only 74 seconds and eight miles above the earth, the Challenger exploded, and our brave Christa and crew lost their lives in a fiery descent.

Mrs. Long and I had our hands full comforting stunned, crying, heartbroken children. Fifteen minutes later, Sister Teresa, our principal, rang a bell and we all went into the church to pray for Sharon Christa McAuliffe, first astronaut teacher in space; Francis Scobee, commander pilot; Michael Smith, pilot; Ronald E. McNair, physicist; Edison S. Onizuka, engineer; Gregory D. Jarvis, engineer; and Judith A. Resnik, engineer—all courageous adventurers, dauntless, heroic, bold astronauts.

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