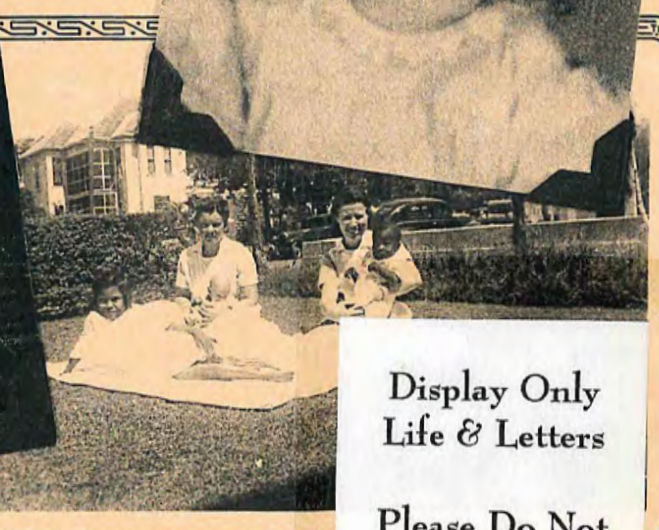




Excerpts from
Our Pages
Of Life



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Of all the lessons I have gleaned from my students' stories, the most recent one is this: *Life offers us the chance to respond to it more than it demands that we define it.* The stories found in this booklet are not blueprints for living so much as they are responses to life. These stories (and their narrators) have helped me to learn that so much of what we do is relevant. When we consider experiences such as growing up, falling in love, bereavement, and parenting, we are reminded that so many of our life experiences are less the answer to a question and more the response to the people involved.

That perspective frees us to walk in conjunction with two simple rules—*Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength AND Love your neighbor as yourself.* Two lessons, one story—and so much living to be done, so much that is relevant. That's my lesson. I hope it's been well learned. Enjoy these stories and learn yours.

Joan Stear
UL—Lafayette
Fall 1999



Thanks to the Horizons Department at Lafayette General Medical Center;
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and the English Department and University College at
the University of Louisiana—Lafayette for their continued support of our efforts
to write for the generations to come. Thanks, also, to each of my students,
for teaching me about their generations.

FRONT COVER: (clockwise, beginning at top right corner) Shirley Comeaux; Jan Baudoin;
Pat O'Brien, (nursing student on right); Martha Sonnier (second row, second from left) and mother and siblings;
Florence Burleigh (second from left) with parents and brother Bob; Jackie Bourgeois



UL LAFAYETTE LIFE WRITING CLASS
Fall 1999 • Thursday Afternoon Session

*Seated, left to right: Pat Hardesty; Shirley Comeaux;
Kat Favrot; Pat O'Brien ••*

*Standing, left to right: Joan Stear, Instructor; Joyce Michel;
Jackie Bourgeois; Jan Baudoin; Martha Sonnier;
Florence Burleigh ••*

Missing from photo: Max Baer; Pat Mouton



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NURSES TRAINING DAYS

by
Pat O'Brien

We had to grab our fun when we could. We dated interns, Texas University students, and went on blind dates. Most nights we had to be in our nurses quarters by 9:00 p.m., occasionally 10:30 p.m., and once a month at 12:00 midnight. It wasn't often we abused the privilege, but sometimes things happened that were out of our control. Time was always a factor when we went out, and we never felt secure until we were back home.

I dated J.C. Thigpin, a journalism student. He was such a nice fellow. He became an editor for the Austin Daily. One of my late nights out (I think it was 10:30 p.m.), we double dated and drove to a hill overlooking Austin to see the lights. We stayed and talked awhile and then backed the car up to leave. The bumper caught the middle of a sawed off tree. There we were, impaled in the car on this tree stump. We tried everything, but we could not budge the car. A man finally came by in a truck. He had a hitch and was able to lift the car off. I was so scared. We were very late getting back to the nurses quarters. One of the nurses was up, and she let us in and we quickly got to bed without the room mother seeing us.

Another time, J.C. picked me up to go out to the lake on his new boat. We had such fun for several hours, and then it was time to go back. A large windstorm came up and we finally arrived at the boat dock, but every time we nearly got in the wind blew us back out. So frustrating and time consuming. It was nearly 12:00 midnight when I got home and had to ring the doorbell for the

Room mother Ms. Parker to let me in. I reported to Ms. Sally Trousdale, our chief nurse the next day. She was such a dear. We all loved her. And I also told her about my episode sitting on the tree stump. She laughed and said, "Miss Crocker, that story must be true. I don't believe anyone could have made this up." She told me to be more careful, and to give myself time. I don't remember ever being late again. I do remember being sick.

Bessie Stagner, Edna Floogie, Megden, and I went for a long walk just to get away from the hospital and all its aches and pains. We pooled our money and bought a package of cigarettes. We had never smoked before. We went to a cafe and had coffee and we lit up. We coughed and coughed but we were determined we could learn to smoke. We walked back to our quarters and even smoked in our room. It reeked of smoke, and we knew we'd be reported if our room mother smelled smoke. We decided to flush the rest of the cigarettes down the commode. It was about this time that I began to feel queasy and green in color. I slept very little that night. I swore off cigarettes, and I did not pick up that nasty habit until I went overseas. A vicious addiction, it took me many years before I gave it up.



PICTURE THIS

by

Shirley Comeaux

There we are, the Hall girls on the front porch. For some reason we always sit or stand for a photo, in descending age order. That puts me at the end every time.

It's Sunday afternoon. We've been to Sunday school and church, we've eaten our Sunday dinner, and now we're on the porch, still wearing our Sunday best. That's because Aunt Belle has been here to eat with us, and Mama doesn't want her to think we are ignorant and uncultured heathen.

I don't know why Mama is worried. Aunt Belle hasn't read a book or darkened a church door since I can remember.

Mary Margaret, the oldest, is almost twelve. She's my best sister. I don't tell just anyone that. Mama has to work long days, and Mary Margaret is responsible for looking after us and for running the household. She takes good care of us and especially of me.

Every Saturday night, like clockwork Mary Margaret fills the galvanized tin boiler with buckets of water, and heats it on the gas stove in the kitchen. Then she carries the water a bucket at a time to the bathroom and pours it in the tub. There is no hot water in the house. Just cold water faucets. After several buckets of hot water are in the tub, Mary Margaret takes the first bath. Then she heats more water and adds it to the tub, and Helen and Neva Gene follow. I get the last bath, with a little more hot water added. By

now the water is brackish gray but I am bathed, scrubbed clean, and toweled to a pink glow by the master bather.

Mary Margaret is a happy girl. She loves life and enjoys it to the fullest. Sometimes Mama gets a call from her teacher because Mary Margaret is too full of life. A few threats from Mother, and Mary Margaret is quieted for a time. But only for a time. She is a bubble that cannot be burst.

Helen, second oldest, is just 20 months younger than Mary Margaret. Helen is beautiful. She has hazel eyes, and the rest of us have plain brown eyes. Her hair is soft and light brown and it has waves where ours is very straight. Helen is filled with mischief. Mama says so. Grandpa stays angry with Helen because she does not look like the rest of us. Grandpa says Helen looks like "that damn Oscar." Oscar is our father.

I don't think Helen's mischief is mean. She found out that Grandpa gets mad at her if she does certain things—so she does them. Any one of us could sass Grandpa and he'd ignore her, except Helen. Grandpa chases her; sometimes with the broom.

Last week Grandpa was mad at Helen. Mama was at work and wasn't here to stop him. I don't remember what Helen did or said that made Grandpa start yelling at her. But I do know that Helen stuck her tongue out at him and he saw her. That was when he grabbed the broom and started chasing her. I dropped to my knees in the living room and began to pray out loud and cry at the same time. Neva Jean ran up the stairs in the front hall and sat on the top step.

Round and round they ran, Helen in the lead and Grandpa yelling and cursing and chasing her. They ran from the kitchen through the

dining room and into the bedroom. Helen took a dive under the big bed she and Mary Margaret and Neva Jean sleep in. Grandpa made a swipe under the bed with the broom but I didn't hear Helen yell. He did it again and again. Mary Margaret ran next door and got our neighbor, Charles Brown. He came and calmed Grandpa down and took the broom from him and put it back in the broom cubby.

When Mr. Brown took Grandpa out of the bedroom, I slid under the bed with Helen. We hugged. I asked her, "How come you didn't cry?" She said, "He didn't hit me. Watch." And she grabbed the wire springs with her fingers and toes and lifted her whole body off the floor. Helen clung to the underside of the bed like a monkey. I laughed. It was a good trick to remember. But I never needed to remember it.

Neva Gene is only 17 months younger than Helen. Mama chose my sister's name to match her own. Mama's name is Neva, and she uses her maiden initial G. She wanted one of us to have the same initials, so she chose Gene for Gene Stratton Porter, a writer whose novels Mama had read and enjoyed. Neva Gene is usually called Gene, but when she gets in high school she'll change the spelling to J-e-a-n. Usually G-e-n-e is a boy's spelling, and she would be teased about it.

Neva Gene is quiet. She's the one who always tries to please. She does her chores and fusses at Helen and me if we skip out. She practices on Grandma's old upright piano, looking forward to the day she'll have real lessons. She combs her hair every morning and washes her face without being told. She sets the table and washes dishes without claiming to have a stomach ache and spend the time in the bathroom, which is what Helen does.

Neva Gene is just about perfect—except for one thing. She smells her food. It drives Mama crazy. She says, "Gene, just eat it. Stop sniffing your food." Neva Gene hasn't stopped. I guess she'll always smell her food.

That brings the list to me, Shirley. I am almost five years younger than Neva Gene. I don't think I was expected or planned for. I just appeared. We were living in Waterloo, Iowa at the time. Before I was six months old Mama packed us all in Father's old Ford and moved 80 miles across Iowa to Grandpa and Grandma's house in Webster City.

Mama wasn't glad to move back to her old home. She just had to. There was no other place to go.

Grandma was glad to see us. She loved us. She hugged us all and took us right in and fed us. Grandpa was glad to see us too. It proved he had been right all along, that Oscar C. Hall was a no good and his daughter had been wrong to marry him. So what if she had been 27 years old and thought life was passing her by? She didn't need to settle for Oscar Hall. But the most important thing to Grandpa was that HE had been right when he told her not to marry that returned soldier boy.

I'm really a happy little girl. I get looked after by a lot of people. Grandma has died, so Grandpa takes care of me sometimes. He doesn't chase me with the broom. But then he's never *seen* me stick my tongue out at him, either.



OBSERVATIONS OF THE INEXPERIENCED SPEAKER

by

Martha L. Sonnier

Listening to a public speaker is something I have always loved. Never did it seem to me to take great effort to speak before an audience. In fact, whenever I heard a poor speaker, I felt repelled rather than sorry for him. Such was the undaunted feeling of a novice on the occasion of being asked to speak before a group of men relative to the service of women during the war.

I had been on a recruiting trip for the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, and my only training had been basic training on the fundamentals of gases used in wartime, how to march in cadence, how to take inoculations without fainting, how to read maps in case I should become lost in enemy territory, and even how to shine my own shoes so that they became mirrors reflecting my own face as well as that of the inspecting officer. But speech making had no part in the curriculum of this training, so when I was sent to the southern part of the country on recruiting duty, no thought ever entered my mind of anything beyond typing papers of recruits and informing them of the wonders of basic training in store for them if they joined the service. All went well until the day I was informed that a men's club in the city had asked for a recruiter to speak at one of their luncheons, and I was told I was the chosen one.

Speaking to women face to face, coffee cup to coffee cup, so to speak, is nothing like standing before an audience of older men, I was soon to find out.

With speech staunchly impressed in my mind and with unfaltering steps made brave by the ignorance of experience, (and feeling impressed with myself by the affirmations of approval for a well-written and well-rehearsed speech, as voiced by my superior officer), I made my way to the lectern utterly unprepared for what was to happen. What could happen to a girl totally unexposed to the art of public speaking in her debut before these mundane men? What but that the oft repeated speech, practiced before a few obliging friends and my own familiar face in the mirror, should be wiped clean from my mind like the swish of a windshield wiper during a rainstorm, leaving dulled senses to dwell only upon the conglomeration of disembodied faces before glasses of water floating like ships to the sway of the floor?

What good the teaching of the instructor in marching, shoe-shining, poison gas, and map reading? What was needed now was for the gas to seep through the room and obliterate the person of one woman Marine who would forget what she had learned about combating the gas. Let it overtake her—let this misery of jumbled words be finished by a wisp of poison gas.

Something came forth from stiff lips falsely smiling toward the far corners of the room, senseless words spoken as though through a fog of recollection of something before said or heard. The speech was finished, completely or not I was never quite sure. However, the experience is one that I will suffer again and again whenever I hear an inexperienced speaker make his first attempt at public speaking.



EARLIEST REMEMBERED EXPERIENCE

by

Jacqueline C. Bourgeois

Clankety, clankety, clank—a sound I have remembered as far back as I can remember. I can still hear it in my mind. It brings back images of a small girl, as if I am an observer of her and not really a part of her.

Clankety, clankety, clank—there it is again. What makes those noises?

I have been told what a drastic change it was for my parents and family to move in the late 1930's from the small resort town of Covington, Louisiana, where the older children had friends, classmates, and activities all within walking distance. Our new home was located in a rural area of southern Mississippi. No city life here.

Our new house was built by a Northerner, or "Yankee," as they were sometimes referred to. The structure of the house was more typical of northern architecture than of southern Mississippi. It was two stories with a large screened front porch—lots of room for Mom, Dad, and the five of us.

Off to the right of the back porch was an elevated walkway leading to a large, wooden water cistern. However, the most unique feature of the house was the cellar. It was earthen with walkways cut into the hardened red clay of Mississippi. To a small child, the walkways seemed like canyons, dark and scary, but filled with all sorts of intrigue.

These walkways led to a big wood burning furnace, the source of heat in the winter for the house. It was fed with wood by my father and my three older brothers. The heat entered the house through a grate that was in the floor between the living room and the dining room.

Each winter morning my brothers would come down from upstairs, enter a closet in the hall and go down a stairway leading to the cellar. They would stoke up the embers from the night before and put more wood in the furnace before leaving for school. What a secret passageway that closet held for me. But, then, I was not the one getting up in the cold and having to go down and put more wood in the furnace.

Clankety, clankety, clank.

There's that sound again. And there I go. Pigtails of red, a little green plaid dress with red smocking, brown boots with scuffed toes, peddling my tricycle as fast as those little skinny legs could go. Skinny legs? Yes, I once had them.

Down the dark hall, past the closet door with its secret passageway, a bedroom on my right, I'm rounding the curve by the bathroom, cutting through a corner of the kitchen, passing through the large wooden swinging door propped open by a wooden doorstop whittled by my youngest brother, Al. I'm heading into the home stretch now. Through the dining room, and—*clankety, clankety, clank*—over the scary grate with heat rising through the hot metal vents. I have made it to the living room. Only to begin my journey again. Around and around I would go on my tricycle.

As I look back, it amazes not only me but also my children that Mother, their Grandmother, would allow tricycle riding in her

house. I'd like to think it was because I was the favored child. But being the youngest of five and having since raised four children of my own, I know now that Mom was probably too busy and too tired to object. My tricycle fun certainly kept me occupied and within her watchful eye.

There I go again. *Clankety, clankety, clank.*



GENERATIONS

by
Jan Baudoin

DADDY

My daddy rolled his own cigarettes from a white drawstring tobacco pouch. This was loose tobacco that he shook out onto thin white paper which he licked to seal. Where he licked, the paper became translucent. There was an art to rolling and packing a full, tight cigarette. If the little brown curls of tobacco hung out on one end, they would flash and burn up when he lit it. If they hung out of the other end, he'd have to spit and sputter to get them off of his tongue. Watching Daddy go through his cigarette ritual was as natural and pleasant as watching him shave using a white handled brush and a bowl of shaving lotion. Later he switched to Camels. He explained that the "I'd walk a mile for a Camel" slogan meant that a man would walk all the way from home into town just to get a Camel cigarette. They were that good! I was impressed. That was a long, long way!

Daddy had different habits than Mother, and I observed him carefully. I was always looking for clues. He wore a felt hat whenever he went out of the house. He drove an old pickup truck and a tractor. He never cooked or washed clothes or read me stories. He did let me ride in the pick-up truck with him sometimes.

One of those times turned out to be one of my most embarrassing experiences. Daddy was leaving in the truck to go to town. I begged to go. Mama told me to run inside and wash my face and put on a clean dress. I pulled a sundress over my head

and jumped in the truck—just me and Daddy on our way to town. It was wonderful. We went to Miss Mary Speegs General Store. Daddy hung around smoking and talking with the men sitting on benches in front of the store for a long time. I ran around with the kids showing off my cartwheels. Daddy wasn't paying much attention. When we got home I was still excited, showing off my cartwheels to Mother and Daddy. They gasped, "Where are your underpants?"

All afternoon I had been literally "showing my behind" all over town. Mother was embarrassed, angry at me for not putting on my underwear, and irritated with Daddy for not watching me more closely. That was my first experience with shame.

JENNIFER

I was teaching in my second grade classroom in Norman, Oklahoma, on May 15, 1972, when the call came from the Home of Redeeming Love in Oklahoma City. Could we pick up our baby girl before 5:00 p.m.? It was 2:30 p.m. now. I called Wayne, and somehow we made it to Oklahoma City and found the small house in a quiet neighborhood. Ruby, the social worker, explained that they used this house so there was no chance of birth mothers and adoptive parents running into each other.

The baby was tiny and delicate and truly beautiful—dark eyes and pretty features—little bird legs. She was 11 days old and weighed less than 6 pounds. I held her in the car going home. (This was long before the age of seatbelts and car seats.) She slept and slept. I wanted to see her eyes.

Adoption is such a strange process. You fill out papers and then you wait and wait. The teachers had given me a shower

months ago. I'd kept everything out for a while. I'd called the agency but they had no idea how long. It could be weeks, months, maybe next year. Finally, I put everything away. There's nothing biological about adoption. No due date. No body changes to prepare me. Only a phone call and a frantic drive to an anonymous location.

When we got home, the first thing I did was unwrap her and examine every little inch of her—her tiny little toes and fingers, the way the little wisps of hair lay on her head, her thin little legs that seemed to curve in around her body. She was just so sweet and patient with us.

I didn't know how to fold a diaper small enough to fit her. Just as we finally got settled down to sleep, she woke up screaming. She had her days and nights mixed up. For weeks she'd be practically unconscious all day and wide awake all night. It was a quick transition from an only child with no experience with babies to a full time mother. For the rest of my life my heart has been wrapped around her.

MOTHERS

As a single mother I enjoyed my friends and their children as our extended family. One summer several of us rented a van and loaded up the kids for a trip to Destin. It was long after dark when we finally go to the beach. The mothers waded out into the dark water getting our clothes wet. Our clothes were heavy and in the way, so we took them off and went skinny dipping in the ocean—an absolutely forbidden delight! Our children disapproved of their mothers.

SURPRISE

The happiest surprise of my life was falling in love at 38. After eight years as a single mother following a hard marriage, I didn't expect magic. I had a daughter to raise, a sick mother in Baton Rouge, a demanding new job, and graduate school at night. He had sparking, playful eyes and he loved me. My heart never had a chance.

GIFT

The best gift was being invited to watch the births of my grandchildren. Since I'd never given birth, Michael's birth was my first experience with this miracle. It was a long hard delivery. At first it was a little awkward standing with my son in law looking at my daughter's behind. The embarrassment quickly passed as Dr. Kennedy poked and prodded and stretched and squirted iodine everywhere. I felt panicky. It seemed to go on for too long. I could not imagine that we would ever have a real baby.

Finally, finally, finally he came—purple—turning red as he cried. I absolutely couldn't get enough of that baby. I hadn't known how much I would love him.

Demi's delivery was easier. She was like a soft little kitten. Where Michael is hard and wiry, she is round and juicy. I cannot imagine the world without these two little people.

MICHAEL AND DEMI

Demi was two, and it seemed time for her to make the transition from a diaper to the toilet. After a few applauded

successes, Demi quit cooperating. She'd arch her back and proclaim, "Don't want that!"

Michael watched her willful display from his four-year-old perspective. He explained, "Gam, she can't. Her doesn't have a pee pee yet." Then he turned and reassured Demi, "Don't worry, Little Sister, it'll grow."



A LETTER TO MY DAD

by

Florence Burleigh

One of my earliest memories is of the Christmas Eve I fell asleep under the Christmas tree, waiting for Santa. We didn't have a fireplace, and I was worried that Santa would go down our chimney and land in the furnace in the basement. You understood my concern, and told me you would write Santa a note asking him to please use the back door. Later that night you and Mom found me asleep under the tree. You gently picked me up and put me back to bed. The next day, when I wondered who put me back in my own bed, you just smiled and said, "Why, it must have been Santa."

I remember the walks we used to take through the woods, you, Mom Bob and I, to visit friends who lived about three miles away—three miles if we went through the woods, or a good five miles if we followed the road. Do you remember the evenings we walked up the hill to our friends, the Tizzards, and Mr. Tizzard would give Bob and me haircuts? I liked his haircuts better than the ones Nick the Barber gave me. Whenever I went to Nick, Mom always told him to give me a "shingle," and I always walked out of there looking like a Cocker Spaniel, with short hair in the back, and long hair over my ears. How I hated those "store-bought" haircuts!

My favorite walks always ended at Grammy's house. Grammy was the best cook in the world, though she never used a recipe—never even owned a cookbook. She never measured anything, either. Sunday dinner with her was so special. I remember sitting in her sunny living room after dinner on a cold

winter day, watching her knit mittens or scarves for Bob and me. I was so intrigued by her hands as the knitting needles clicked away, and she chatted on and on with you and Mom, without ever, as far as I ever noticed, looking at her work. She never made a mistake, either.

Dad, you taught me so many things. You taught me how to twirl spaghetti on my fork, and how to crack and peel the top off of a soft-boiled egg, so I could eat the egg right out of the shell. You taught me how to row a boat, how to swim, and how to sit ever-so-still in the boat when we went fishing. I can still hear you whispering to me, "Don't talk, or the fish will hear you and swim away." You even taught me how to bait my own hook with those dirty, wiggly worms. You taught me how to plant a garden, how to roast potatoes in the bonfires we had in the fall, and how to dig dandelions in the summer and pick the tender inner leaves for your salad. You laughed when I screwed up my face after my first bite of your salad, declaring it too bitter for me, and you laughed again when I made another face when you gave in to my begging and let me take a taste of the lemon you were eating.

Remember those cold winter evenings when you and Mom taught Bob and me how to play the game "500" and cribbage? You taught me patience and how to enjoy quiet times, the pleasure of reading and dreaming of things to come. You taught me how to enjoy sunsets and the evening sounds of katydids, and frogs, the splash of fish jumping in the lake, the wail of the steam whistle of a train passing in the night, and the mournful sound of the fog horn on Lake Superior. You helped me catch fireflies and ladybugs and taught me how to let them go home to their mamas when I had finished looking at them. And you taught me so very much more.

I remember watching you put together our first radio. At first it was just a box with wires going in and out every which way. We heard mostly static, but an occasional word would come through, and I thought you were an absolute genius to get a box of wires to talk! You soon brought home a radio from the store, but I don't remember that one as well as I remember the one you made.

We didn't take many trips. One of the places I remember most vividly is Big Sandy Lake, about sixty miles or so from where we lived. Since we had no car, your friend, Fred Ethier, drove us up to the lake and came back to get us a week later. We spent lazy days fishing, swimming, and occasionally boating over to the main building of the resort to visit the owner, an Indian friend of yours. It was there where Mom put a nickel into the slot machine he had in his lunch room and won the jackpot.

The other trips I remember are those we took to visit Gramma and Grampa Behnke and all of Mom's siblings and their families in Indiana and Illinois. On the first of those trips, Bob and I took our first airplane ride, remember? Our pilot was a good looking fellow who, you felt, paid a bit too much attention to Mom. We all teased you about the nasty looks you gave him. When Bob and I got home after that trip, we took out our savings books, added up our savings, and decided we had almost enough for a down payment on a Piper Cub airplane. Of course, that is as far as that dream went. Bob was crazy about airplanes and always seemed to be working on one model airplane after another.

We had so many plans—so many dreams for the future. All of those plans and dreams were shattered one Sunday afternoon in early June, 1940, when a terrible storm came up on Clearwater Lake, near the Canadian border, where you and two of your friends had gone on a weekend fishing trip. Your boat was overturned,

and you gave your life trying to save the life of one of your friends.
It was the blackest day of my life.

I have often wondered, over the years, what might have been if you had lived to see Bob and me grow into adulthood. If only you could have been there to give me away at my wedding. If only you could have been there to enjoy your grandchildren. How they would have adored you. I love you, Dad, and have missed you more than you could ever know.

Your loving daughter,

Sis



THE MOM
by
Pat Hardesty

Mom, I am afraid that the Dean will take offense or think that we are terribly overbearing if you inform him that I am to finish all requirements and graduate in May. Just because you have marked all of the completed basic two-year courses and prerequisites that will transfer and have highlighted the courses that I need to take, does not mean that he will accept the plan. Then, when he knows that I have been in college for two years and have credits from four different universities he is going to think that something is terribly wrong with me."

"Don't worry about it." Mom explained. "I have looked into the matter thoroughly, and we already have the appointment for two o'clock this afternoon. That is why we drove into Dallas last night."

I knew that there was no way to change her intentions. I was dealing with a Mom who had the strength of character of a self-ordained disciple, a personality that could have defined the word "eccentric," and determination matched only by Napoleon.

This was my Mom, the lady who had sent me to that burping kindergarten teacher at the age of four, and the Mom who had defied the principal of East Ward when she tried to insist on putting me back in the first grade for social adjustment reasons, rather than letting me stay in the second grade at the age of 6. This was my Mom, the one who made me give the grocery store owner all of the money from the slot machine jackpot, when I had found a nickel in the slot and not used my own to work it. This was my

Mom who took our crowd of teenagers on trips when other moms were not brave enough to undertake such a feat. The same Mom said at each school as she dropped me off for a summer or semester, "Don't worry about making anything but C's, but don't make anything less. It won't transfer. Have a wonderful time."

With those memories of events, I knew what I was facing when we walked into the Dean's office. My feelings ranged from pure dread to respect. After a cordial greeting, the Dean, Dr. Allport, innocently asked, "How can I help you?" That was the opening. *How was shy Mom even going to make the first statement, when she had played hooky from school on the day she was to introduce the guest speaker to her zoology class?* I thought. Determination was her driving force. She stated in an easy manner, "Dr. Allport, I am here to make a major request of you. I am anxious for my husband to see our daughter graduate from college before he dies. He has been seriously ill, and I am under emotional and financial stress to see her through. Although she has attended other colleges, I have chosen SMU because of its outstanding scholastic record, its leading football team, and its interest in a relatively new speech field, speech therapy. If I may take just five minutes of your time, I would like to summarize the courses my daughter has already completed for the basic requirements and prerequisites to her senior year. I have a copy of transcripts that I have had sent to the registrar's office. I have highlighted in the catalog the necessary courses and noted a time of possible enrollment for each. If I have not made mistakes, I hope that you can give us your opinion and guidance in this very important decision."

"Let's see," the Dean said courteously as he adjusted to the situation and to the unusual individual in front of him. "Let me study what you have for a few minutes."

I had said nothing and even then, intended to remain silent. Mom gave him the neatly outlined plan that was based on the completed courses and tucked in the catalog. Then she pretended to study a paper in her lap. I did not know whether the paper was a dialogue for the next act of the meeting or a copy of what she had given to the Dean.

After a long studying pause the Dean stated, "Mrs. Edwins, it seems as if you have indeed studied the requirements. Certainly you have spent many hours in figuring the courses presently needed for the year. If the courses are offered during the summer and next two semesters, I see no reason for your plan to fail."

Fail is all that I heard. What a responsibility! Still I remained silent as the Dean asked his secretary for three copies of the upcoming class schedule. He began to study it and, of course, Mom "gobbled it up." I remained calm and silent as I looked at mine.

The Dean spoke first after the silent schedule interlude, "Well, it seems as if the courses will be offered. I advise Patsy to take two of the difficult subjects and one necessary prerequisite this summer. Then the rest of the courses will require intense studying but should be of such interest that she will enjoy them and find studying self-propelling."

Mom was so overjoyed that she stood up immediately, stretched her hand across the wide desk to thank the Dean. Then she said, "You hear that Patsy, you can do it?"

I can do it, I thought as I stood to leave the Dean's office. *But what if I don't do it?* I turned to the Dean not knowing whether my words would come out. "Thank you, Dean Allport.

thank you for your time, your interest, and your confidence in me. I will give it my very best. Do you think that it would be all right if I went by Pat? I gave up being a Patsy several years ago when I had to assert my independence from an older brother."

"O.K., Pat!" rejoiced the Dean. "That sounds wonderful, and be sure to stop by if you run into any major problems."

Mom and I left his office, walking the length of sidewalk to the ancient aged car lined with "stuff" in the back seat. When we reached the end of the circular drive, we had a true moment of celebration. Mom took a fleeting glance at the catalog and transcripts, then a long fond look at me before we embraced in a hug and said endearing remarks of love and respect for each other.

The Mom continued to be a strong force in her own life and in her daughters' lives. After her husband died she taught elementary school. When nearing the forced retirement age, she went back to school to become qualified in teaching the deaf. When asked on the phone whether or not she could still walk, she was hired to teach the deaf at Bayou Blue between Houma and Thibodaux, Louisiana. When too old to teach, she went into her own real estate adventure, buying small pieces of property and houses, living in them while fixing them up and later selling them. Her most profitable venture was "Frog Pond" which she sold when the approach to Interstate 10 was being built in Slidell.

She passed away after two heart attacks, two strokes, and a train accident. Her sitter/companion had taken her to get a passport only six weeks before her curfew.



A MEMORY COLLAGE

by
Max H. Baer

My flashback of people, situations, and learned knowledge about my natural and spiritual environments allow me to pause and reflect momentarily. There is so much to tell of the good and bad things that both helped to frame and mold my life. The choices leave me to ponder the most significant bits of information needed to form an abbreviated collage of fibers, which, when weaved, begin to accurately describe this person called Max Henry Baer. Perhaps the most orderly approach to satisfy this need is to reflect two periods of time in my life. They are my Childhood and Teen years.

Childhood

Parade: I am fortunate to have a copy of a fifteen second clip of a black and white 8mm movie film taken by Mr. Roland Privat in the 1930s. He was co-owner of Privat Lumber Yard in Rayne. The film showed my Daddy driving the family's black Chevrolet Carryall, with Mama and many of their eleven kids easily seen sitting inside the auto. Our gang rode in the annual Rice Festival Parade held in Crowley, Louisiana, (presently one of the oldest Louisiana festivals). The car was decorated with patriotic red, white, and blue streamers proudly fluttering in the gentle breeze, as the carryall slowly moved in the parade. For "God and Country" posters were affixed to both sides of the car. Our family won a prize for our entourage.

Haircut: I awoke on the wooden pine floor between two single metal beds in the boys' room early one summer afternoon.

Mama had not been amused when she saw that, in a fit of anger, I had chopped my hair with a small pair of school paper scissors. Punished, I had fallen asleep. The real drama began when Mama sent me outside to Daddy for him to redesign my hairstyle. He and his Louisiana Frog Company staff were sitting in the shade under the native pecan tree located in the empty lot close to the house. Daddy was waiting with a mechanical hair clipper. All present (except me) had impish grins across their faces! I was cut to the scalp! Unbeknownst to me, Daddy left a long clump of hair in the rear but near the top of the crown of my naked skull. He then tied a wad of crumbled paper to the end of a long piece of cotton string that hung down to the small of my back. The other end was tied to the clump of hair.

“Max,” he said, “Go to Simineaux’s Grocery and buy Daddy a pack of Granger’s pipe tobacco.” (The brand with the bird dog pointing on the front of the pack.) I was amused, but mystified, to smell the sweet odor of pipe tobacco as I hurried to the store which was two blocks away. I arrived at the store in record time, pulling open the store’s screened double doors and entered with no difficulty. After purchasing the tobacco, I anxiously departed, and suddenly heard howls of belly laughter coming from the three men in the store. I *felt* why they laughed now! The darn aromatic, empty Granger tobacco pack hanging from the string in the back of my head got caught in the crack between the two closing screen doors! This sudden jerking of my head left tears of pain streaming down my cheeks! Daddy had prescribed a self-induced punishment as retribution for the hair cutting episode!

Teen Years

Diamond Ring: I worked the graveyard shift, alone, at LeBlanc's Service Station during my last two years at Rayne High School. Thank goodness I was naive, or I might have been buried in the St. Joseph Catholic Church's graveyard located only a block away! One night, around one in the morning, two men in their early 40s parked at the gas pumps outside the station. They stepped out of their red 1948 Chevrolet Impala convertible and walked into the garage. The car's black canvas top was down where I could easily see the steering wheel and its decoration, a clear plastic steering knob encasing a picture of a topless stripper. The car had red vinyl seats, which smelled of a stale mix of cigarettes, talcum powder, and spearmint gum, a wiggling Hawaiian hula doll centered on the dashboard, and a coon tail hanging at the top of the rear antenna. The car suited the picture to the two men.

Broke, they wanted to barter by trading a diamond ring for gas. I told them, "Let me check it out by rubbing it against the large front show glass window." They agreed. The stone fell out of the setting, and one of the men said he had been meaning to have it fixed. I agreed to take the ring for gas. As soon as they left, I called and awakened Phillip, my older brother. He immediately said I had been duped by the now obvious glass stone, but not to worry.

The next morning my boss, Mr. Augustine LeBlanc, arrived to take over the day shift. He shook his head and smiled when I told him of the gas/ring episode and my offer to pay for the gas. "Max," he replied, "No charge for an experience of life which left you unhurt."

Rice Hunt: It was fun to harvest migratory Blue Peter and Moor Hen (Marsh Hen) fowl that nested and foraged in the rice fields during spring and summer. There were many cottontail rabbits, too. One Saturday morning I was on a rice field hunt with about twelve men. Arriving at the site, we surrounded this plot of rice being harvested. (I was seventeen years old.) Each man was carrying a six-foot long stick. The wild game stuck to the protective cover of the uncut plot. At the right moment, all rushed into the small, uncut rice pot and massacred the game by swinging or throwing their sticks at them. I remembered this hunt yielded one hundred birds and thirty rabbits. Yes, we did have a sauce piquant that night!

These are but a few fiber-producing stories that stand out as significant threads which have helped develop Max Baer's demeanor.



PAYBACK
by
Kat Favrot

Do you remember how much we laughed when Bev and Dee, my two wonderful beauticians, literally forgot to come to dinner? They went to a movie and not until Saturday morning did they remember that they should have come to dinner at my house instead. They entertained their early morning customers by trying to decide who should call me to apologize.

Bev told Dee, “You call,” but Dee protested, “She’s your customer!” “And you do her when I’m not here,” was the reply.

“Well, someone has to call.”

Bev finally decided, “I’ll call.”

Once she reached me, she apologized profusely. Laughing, I told her, “The only thing you can do is come today so the meal won’t go to waste. See you in a few minutes.” Bev and Dee arrived at my door with a huge bouquet.

Everyone at the salon laughed loudly again when I walked into XYZ Company with Radical Forgiveness in my hand to read under the hair dryer.

Weeks went by until Bev invited me to have dinner at her gorgeous home in Youngsville. I haven’t seen it in the seven years she’s lived there. I’m so honored because in all their twenty-five years at XYZ, they haven’t entertained many customers.

As Dee picked me up, she said, “Your limousine awaits.” She gave me the guided tour and drove me through several beautiful subdivisions, new and old, before we reached Bev’s double carport. We walked through the patio with wine and flowers in hand to the back door.

The gas fireplace is topped with an exquisite eucalyptus arrangement on the mantel. It is flanked by two sofas and a coffee table and end tables with hand painted gold candles. The dining table and chairs are in front of a beautifully draped window near the foyer to the front door. Just off that foyer is Bev’s office, with her desk, chairs, and all of her awards on the wall. On the right side of her home is the lovely spare bedroom and bath. The master bedroom, its huge closet and bath, are on the left behind the kitchen and breakfast nook with its grapevine draped wine bottle holder. I plan to paint a grape picture for one of two places I spied in her precious breakfast room.

After a delicious dinner of stuffed smoked pork chops, potatoes au gratin, and crispy green salad, and delectable brownies and vanilla ice cream for dessert, Dee entertained us and made us laugh as she described a very boring sales meeting she had attended recently about the promotion of ladies sunflower slippers. She described them. “They have huge sunflowers on the fronts and very thick soles. They are comfortable, though. I’m surprised that they’re selling like hot cakes.”

I just hope Dee will laugh when I give her my sunflower painting I’m working on now. I also hope bev will like her grape picture I’m working on now.

