



Excerpts from
**Our Pages
Of Life**



**FOR DISPLAY ONLY
DO NOT REMOVE**



There is in every human countenance either a history or a prophecy. I believe that if Samuel Taylor Coleridge would have been able to consider the impact of personal history on its writers and its audience of generations to come, he would have changed his observation to include *both a history and a prophecy*. For the past ten years, I have watched my students, writers of personal history, as they have read from their collections of life stories. Through their experiences, I have learned that in each of our lives we reflect both past and future. Stories become the thread that binds each generation to the next. I often ask my students to consider how their stories have affected those of whom they have written. Their responses convince me that we are writers, not only for ourselves, not even for an audience with only whom we are familiar. When our stories are told, we are also writing for generations yet to be. As I examine the work (and fun!) that continues in these unique classes, I am convinced more and more that I do what I do because of my love for people—and the generations that keep their histories and prophecies going. You'll fall in love with these life writers, too. You'll recognize stories of your past, and you'll probably see a faint reflection of a younger audience, one that anticipates its turn to turn prophecy into history. Enjoy these stories and keep creating your own.

Joan Stear
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Fall 2000

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Life & Letters • an intergenerational company; and the English Department, the Ira Nelson Horticulture Center,
and University College at University of Louisiana at Lafayette
for their continuous support of our efforts to write for the generations to come.
To my students—forever my teachers—thanks.
Acknowledgment also to my students for working so diligently as the editorial board for this publication.*

FRONT COVER: (Clockwise, beginning at top right corner) Jan Baudoin, center, with father and grandfather;
Stanley Fox Davis, Joan Stear, and Madge Burns, October 1999; Madge Burns; R.C. Sealy



LIFE WRITING CLASS

University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Fall 2000 • Thursday Afternoon Session

Seated, left to right: Nancy Underwood; Madge Burns;
Carol Kincel; Joan Stear, Instructor

Standing, left to right: Jan Baudoin; Florence Burleigh;
Max Baer; Martha Sonnier; R.C. Sealy

*(Missing from photo: Viola Aberly; Tom Butcher;
Shirley Comeaux; Lois Hollier; Pat Mouton; Pat O'Brien)*

A CLASS WITH GOOD FRIENDS

'Twas a month before Christmas and all through the class
Was a feeling of worry, concern...did I pass?
And now the dear teacher, Joan Stear, from us all
Requires a measure, "Rate this class for this Fall."
Now, friends and compadres of Life Writing Three,
How say you, evaluate this class now with me.
The room is quite dreary, there's no coffee pot,
Although the big tables help talking a lot.
The chairs, they are rigid, no comfort for buns.
Heat is stifling, AC, too loud when it runs.
The parking is awful, the traffic obscene,
(Just getting down Johnston makes me feel mean.)
But that's not the class, I hear wise ones say.
The class is the teacher and classmates who may
Entertain us, or stir in us memories long gone,
But never, no never do they cause us to yawn.
Each story we hear from the first to the last
Is filled with that person's most intimate past.
For instance the stories that now have been told
Are filled with the joys, tears, and heartaches of gold.
Take Pat for instance, O'Brien, I mean.
Her stories of nursing and wartime were keen.
I miss her, that's true, and part of me knows
That she's spinning her stories wherever she goes.
And Max, friendly Max, the littlest Baer,
Whose humor and history fill up the air
With chuckles and laughter, and always a pat
On the back from his friends for writing just that.
Or Madge, darling Madge, the glorious queen
Of our writing, whose love of life makes my life seem
Quite staid by comparison, but I will learn
To ride out life's journey, enjoying each turn.

The subtleties shown in the writings of Jan
Are sweet introspections.
Her memories span
Journeys, and babies and love's second chance.
And Lois, like Jan, writes of deepest romance
And homes and things that we all hold so dear.
There is love, gentle love in this group, that is clear.
And family shines in the things Carol writes.
Her love for her sons and her "parents" unites
The thread of her stories we all love to hear.
Saw Aurora Borealis...with joy and not fear.
But Viola tops all with her adventurous tale
Of whitewater rafting, the dangers prevail
From moment to moment, the risks and the dares!
But she kept a promise, that proves how she cares
For a grandson.
Her son-in-law conned her into that trip
But she fooled him, forgave him, without giving him lip.
Martha, Oh Martha, your humor is great.
Each piece you write is dessert on my plate.
You take what is common, what I've overlooked,
Regale us with laughter, until we are hooked.
And Florence, your stories of childhood up north
Bring joy and some tears for it stirs up my youth.
And R.C.—oh R.C. you DO make us roar
With tales of your first kiss and nicknames and more.
Nancy, your tales are poignant and dear.
You take simple concepts and, being quite clear,
Like rose buds they burst into meaningful flowers
When written in prose that has magical powers.
Pat Mouton, Pat Mouton, oh what can we say?
The master of everything that you survey.
Your work with the music, your knowledge of those

Who made joyous music; a good life you chose.
Tom Butcher, you write with a clarity fine.
Your memories glow of this town now called mine.
I've learned much from you, Tom, of good Cajun ways,
And know that I hope you write many more days.
That's all of the class, but lest you forget,
Our teacher who teaches us all how to set
Goals in our writing, and improve every piece
Finally shared something.
My measure won't cease
'Till mention her poem of Stanley. What a man!
Joan Stear wrote of him clearly, and that was her plan.
The Senior of Seniors of Life Writing Class,
The Champion of stories he was willing to pass.
She captured his essence in verse, and we saw
The man Stanley is, not mere letter of law.
But the properly dressed, impeccably groomed,
Stanley, whose twinkling eyes and shy smile fairly bloomed.
His writing is youthful, exuberant, clear.
And Joan caught the man we've all learned to hold dear .
I can write no more words, I went straight to my work.
I wrote of my comrades, my job I'll not shirk.
Now, laying a finger aside of my nose
And giving a nod, I am done, I suppose;
No springs in my walk, no team I can whistle,
And I 'II not fly like the down of a thistle;
But I tell you, my friends, as I fade from your sight.
"Happy Writing to all, and to all a good night!"

-Shirley Comeaux

This volume of life stories
is lovingly dedicated
to Patricia O'Brien,
our resident Army nurse.
We miss you, Pat!



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SMELLS
by
Tom Butcher

Animals and human beings are blessed with five basic senses...sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. I would not want to be without any one of these essentials which add so much to our quality of life.

Although I would not consider smell as important as sight is, many memories of my childhood would not be as rich or as vivid should my sense of smell be non-existent.

Probably the first smell I remember was that of battery acid. The first business my dad and his two brothers operated was an automobile electrical shop on West Main Street, and the main product sold was auto batteries. A triple tiered bench loaded with batteries stood against one wall of the shop with dozens of wires running every which way. It made me think that the next thing up on the shelves would be Frankenstein himself being recharged. It was fun for me, a seven-year-old boy, to go to the shop.

At the same time, about 1934, the Brown Derby restaurant was in operation next door, and the Negro cook, George Sam, (now he would be called a chef,) was an old family friend. All of his brothers worked for our family at one time or other.

George built a brick pit in the rear of the building, and experimented with grilling chickens and meat, using a butter based sauce. Time spent watching George cook may have had something to do with my love of cooking. The smells of meat cooking on the pit with a great sauce lingers in my nose "memory" to this day. George's barbeque was probably the first served in Lafayette.

West Vermilion St. from Jefferson to St. John St. remains in my recollection as an area with several distinctive "smells" and odors, beginning with the A & P Tea Co. Grocery, located where the Lafayette Building Association is now situated on Vermilion. It was in a one story building, painted red and white, with the bicycles used by the delivery boys lined neatly in front on the sidewalk. Inside, the pungent smell of A & P coffee roasting caught my immediate attention, as well as the smell of ripe fruit and fresh vegetables in the various bins.

On the corner of Vermilion and Buchanan Streets was the Lafayette Hardware Store with its four sets of display windows exhibiting all the nice things for sale on the inside. Upon entering, the smell of the oiled wooden floor was noticeable as well as that of the paints and iron items such as files and chain.

It was a wonderful store, for it contained so many of the items a young boy my age might desire. There were knives of every description and other items, but none more longed for than the Union-brand skates which sold for two dollars a pair. They were all metal with brown leather strap to go around the ankle and came complete with a key with which to tighten the skates to the toes of one's shoes.

There was only one problem...the skates did not last very long on the rough finished cement around the courthouse, our favorite place to skate. The iron on the wheels would wear out quickly, however, not all wheels at the same time. When a pair became partly disabled, we would take them apart, using the good parts to make scooters. These were fashioned from two pieces of wood, a short length of 2 by 6 for the floorboard and a piece of 2 by 4 for the upright arm. A skate afforded two sets of wheels, and one would be nailed to the bottom front and one to the bottom rear of the floorboard. In fact, we preferred these home made scooters to the factory made ones sold at the hardware store.

In the next block of Vermilion toward St. John were two more "smelly" establishments, Shamrock Dairy on one side and directly across the street, Erny's Bakery.

Shamrock's was a favorite after-supper place for dessert, one scoop of ice cream for a nickel, and two scoops for a dime. My favorite then and to this day is Lemon Custard, although they served at least ten other flavors. The rear of the building housed the manufacturing plant including gigantic refrigeration equipment which used ammonia as the coolant. These units always leaked a little, though not excessively, and the smell of ammonia was noticeable.

Erny's Bakery was rather small compared to today's bakeries, but Erny's made the most wonderful, mouth watering confections such as gingerbread boys, cream puffs, and oatmeal cookies. Of course, their French bread was irresistible when it was hot out of the oven at 5 PM. (Who can really describe the smell of freshly baked goods adequately, just as who can properly put into words the beauty of a rose?)

Erny's Bakery was open 24 hours a day and it was a popular place in the early morning hours as well. When we were hungry after playing for a dance at Toby's Oak Grove or the Cedar Lane Club in Opelousas and wanted something on the light side, to Ernys's we went.

Down the street a bit was Cayard's, a hang-out of the teen crowd, and it was well-known for frozen RC Cola drinks. A nickel bought a large bottle of RC Cola, straight out of the freezer and the drink would expand out of the bottle when the cap was removed, a great frozen delight.

Cayard's also specialized in hot dogs with the best smelling home-made chili. The dogs were really scrumptious and big enough to share with your date, if you had one, though most teens went "stag" for economy's sake.

Our home was on West Convent Street about 8 blocks south of Huval's Bakery which was located on St. John St. The bakery was later bought by the Boustany family and renamed the Evangeline Maid Bakery.

I knew when the wind blew from the North because of the incredible smell of dough and yeast being "proofed" before baking. I have flashbacks to my childhood, when going to the Cathedral for choir practice in the evening and the wind blows from the North. I can smell the bread being made at the Evangeline Bakery. Simply wonderful!

Finally, the smell of burning incense in St. John's Cathedral for a religious service or funeral remains vivid in my smell memory. The sweet pungent odor made by burning exotic herbs and essences was always a positive experience for me, no matter what age I might be. To this day, when I experience the smell of incense burning, I am reminded of the times when, as a youngster of fifteen, I assisted at military funerals of our local boys killed in service, by blowing "taps" on a bugle. It was always a touching moment.

Until this time, I had never really considered the profound effect of smells in my life's experiences, but it was pleasant to travel back in time via memories of my sense of smell.

CLASS LETTER
FEU FOULAIS AND CROSSETT LIGHTS,
A MYSTERY STORY

by
Max Baer

Dear Class: This letter is the last writing assignment of my third semester in Life Writing Class at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Louisiana. I will use this medium to share inscriptions recorded in my mind that still mystify many people who know about the *Feu Foulais* of southern Louisiana and the Crossett Lights near Crossett, Arkansas. Crossett is located sixty miles north of Monroe, Louisiana. The lights reflect old but living “mystery” stories that seep from my old shipwrecked mind and yearn to be retold before I forget them. Soon to be a sixty-seven year old naval veteran, I am finding it more difficult these days to keep “astern and to the fore” on an even keel!

Feu foulais (compressed fire) has been around since the mid-1700s when my Cajun kinfolk first claimed the low-lying backwater marsh, swamps, woods, and fields in southwest Louisiana. Today many old swamp folks still look at the gas fed ghostly illumination with ingrained superstition and respect. Seen at night, modern explanation indicates that the fireless blue glow is luminous phosphorus escaping through crawfish holes or earthen cracks developed from its summer-parched soil. Additionally, methane gas hovering over the marsh or swamps will give the same eerie illusion. Both gases are products of plant and animal organic decay. Note the marsh regime cycle consists of grass plants growing or dying in fresh and saline water while a similar cycle applies to swamps that consist of fresh water regimes supported by trees and under-story plants. The mysterious light, also called Will o’ the Wisp and Carps Candle, can still be seen at night drifting over the wetlands of Louisiana. *Les pauve vieux monde* (poor old people) of the backwoods thought the peculiar lights had religious or supernatural connotations; that the glowing balls of fire were the souls of young babies who died before they were baptized. *Les pauve Be Be*. (The poor baby) In the absence of a priest, the parents baptized the dying infant by making a cross with water on its forehead while reciting, “I bless

you in the name of the Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost.” *Quand tu connais pas!* “When you don’t know” applies to the second half of the mystery story, too.

My wife, Anita, and I visited with her mother in Crossett, Arkansas, sixty miles north of Monroe, Louisiana last September on Labor Day weekend. We had a conversation about the unsolved mystery of “The Crossett Light” often seen along the Ashley Drew and Northern railroad spur. Until the mid 1980s, when the track was dismantled, it linked the Crossett Companies at Crossett to the county seat at Hamburg, 15-miles away, and Monticello 45-miles away. The young business was diversified and specialized in a variety of wood products. (i.e. lumber, charcoal, wood staves, paper, etc.) Proprietors of most of Crossett city properties, the company sold its urban holdings to Crossett citizens before selling its wood business holdings to Georgia Pacific in 1962 which currently produces forest goods, including plywood and paper products. Marie shared more historical background of Crossett Companies with me, as she told her story about *The Crossett Light*. I have embellished her story with research information graciously provided by Mrs. Dollie Pruitt, librarian at *Paul Sullins Public Library* at Crossett.

Beginning in 1892, the city of Crossett was developed as part of Crossett Lumber Company (later called Crossett Companies) by Edgar Woodward “Cap” Gates, a major stockholder, but was named after E.C. Crossett and his siblings who were also major stockholders. Today, Georgia Pacific is still the largest employer in Crossett, population 7,000. (10,000 including the adjacent urban areas.) During the early years, the Company depended on their three railroad spurs to transport timber to the mill in Crossett from the 500,000 acres of well-managed pine and hardwood lands it owned in the area. Early on, however, the company tried but failed to make a profit from agricultural crops grown on their infertile, harvested woodland. The stockholders finally realized a second and succeeding timber crops perpetuated a dependable flow of timber and pulpwood to the plant at Crossett. Products such as lumber, plywood, and paper processed in Crossett were shipped aboard the Missouri Pacific railroad to points within the U.S. and abroad. Today, trucks transport most of the raw material and finished products.

Go back in time and focus on the Ashley, Drew, and Northern, one of the three spurs used by the company; a 45-mile long railway that was built in 1912

connecting the Crossett mill to Monticello and Hamburg, Arkansas. The legend specifies that in the early 1900s the night switchman was accidentally decapitated when he was switching rails for transport of timber from Hamburg to the Crossett plant. His head was never found. The switchman's wife nightly looked for her husband's head with a kerosene lantern glowing in the dark. Many older citizens today still believe that *The Light* is the lantern. Until the rails were removed in the 1980s, visitors could witness the following event at the track, usually best seen on dark, misty, and moonless nights. A distinctive light that radiated about 18 inches in diameter and 3 feet above the rail could be seen heading towards the viewers, stopping short of touching them. If one walked towards the light to try and intercept it, the glowing luminous spear would dash about and disappear. Sometimes *The Light* would suddenly appear behind the brave spectators. One theory made by a local newspaperman and a native resident in the mid-1970s indicated "*The Light's*" energy source was the night reflection of car light rays as they crossed the tracks at an oblique angle at Highway 82 six miles north of Unity Road Crossing, a common sighting point. Seen at many crossings near Crossett, this theory and the one about escaping luminous methane gas from the swamp nearby is worthless in the opinion of research scientist and famous authors. One must consider that over eighty years ago there were few car owners to travel on rough gravel or dusty dirt roads at night. Also, it is highly unlikely swamp gas constantly provided light during the four seasons of sixty plus years of the sightings.

Marie, who visited Anita and I this past weekend confirmed that she and Anita's father, Billy, and another couple saw the light one night in 1946 at the track when it hovered above the ground as they looked through the back window of the car. She and the other woman were scared while the macho men wanted to chase the light. The women's frightful pleas changed the men's minds and they left the site! All three of Marie's children, Anita, Billy Joe, and Barbara saw the same light during the sixties and early seventies. Today, the railroad right-of-way is overgrown with shrubs and trees and *The Light* no longer shines, a sad note for present day lovebirds that shall miss the affable hypnotic effect of *The Light* at the crossings!

My dear classmates, in tune with the *Feu Foulais* and *Crossett Lights* stories, I do hope this letter sheds a *brighter light* to illuminate the way to God's

creations. An old Cajun, I pray you stay *ahead* of the pack until we meet again next spring. I leave you to conclude perhaps my letter does tell of a *light-headed* story; a *head start* to exhilarated sensations. Ha!

God bless you all and Happy Holidays!

THE KISS, OR
WHY I THINK NETTIE SHOULD GET AN AWARD
FOR SERVICE TO MANKIND!!

by
R. C. Sealy

This little tale is a follow-up of sorts to the recent story about my life in the Boy Scouts. You may recall that I described how my priorities underwent a dramatic change in my early teen years, the details of which follow.

I belonged to the New Iberia High School Band, carried a clarinet around during parades and dutifully attended band practice one night a week. We met on the stage at the front of the High School auditorium where we honed our musical skills to perfection. We also horsed around a bit but, for the most part, we were as good a bunch of kids as you would find today at any accredited correctional facility. The curtains used to close off the stage were always drawn back in the open position unless there was some performance and hung in pleated folds in the corners behind partitions—sort of like a little alcove—to conceal them. We would occasionally play in the folds of the curtains or in the small space behind them.

Nettie was one of my fellow band members; a friendly, jolly type and liked by everyone. She had blond hair and a pretty face and was a bit pudgy. I say “pudgy,” but that isn’t just right. Nettie was FAT. But she had a good personality. One night, while we were waiting to start practice, or maybe just taking a break, Nettie suggested to me that maybe we should see how things were going behind the curtain. I saw no reason to refuse and off we went. As soon as we were concealed, Nettie kissed me.

Now, I had had quite a lot of experience at that stage in my life with kissing. I had a loving mother, a sister, several aunts of various ages and some female type cousins. It was customary to kiss “hello” and “goodbye” whenever we visited or received company or to wish someone “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Birthday,” and I accepted this burden like a good boy. Sometime an aunt would slip me a dime or a quarter as payment for this penance. I remember one old aunt who would always plant a big wet one on me and I had to hurry to wipe it off. *Ugh!* Of course none of the men kissed. They just shook hands.

Nettie's kiss was different—she kissed me hard on the lips, stuck her tongue into my mouth and sort of wiggled it around. For a moment I thought a firecracker had gone off in my head. I broke out in a sweat and developed double vision. I wondered, *What is my role in this? Should I reciprocate? Where has Nettie been all my life?* Before I had a chance to resolve my dilemma, she left me standing there while she returned to band practice. I couldn't leave our love nest right away because my hair was on fire. I was confused. *Did this mean that I would have to marry Nettie?*

I followed her around for the next few days attempting to discuss and propose a deeper and more meaningful relationship. I reasoned, *If she has the hots for me I should take full advantage of the situation.* But she didn't show any particular interest—she was her usual fat and friendly self but indifferent. I decided to break the engagement. At least I was no longer a virgin and felt much taller.

Nettie had given me a lot of things to think about, which I did with enthusiasm. I don't know whatever became of Nettie, but I'll bet she married some lucky fellow and raised a bunch of nice kids. In all these years I had never thought about her until I began searching my memory for stories about my younger days. We all have a Nettie or her equivalent in our lives, and I suggest we search hard for these lovely memories lest they be forgotten forever.

I DID LOOK

by

Madge Burns

The campus was full of mischief. Students and faculty could be seen in all corners of the university whispering messages to one another. Behind bushes, on street corners, under lampposts people were talking. Everyone was wondering if what they were hearing was really going to happen.

I heard it, too, but I couldn't believe such a thing could really happen. It certainly had never happened in Bernice, or any other place I had ever been. Any sane person wouldn't be caught dead doing something like that in front of people, especially ladies.

It was the fall of 1976, and I was the housemother of Highland Hall on the LSU campus. There were about 200 girls living in this dorm. I was responsible for their well being, and wanted no harm to ever come to them. They felt very comfortable coming to me with any questions about school, dating, clothes, and a bunch of other stuff too long to mention.

One evening around sunset, word spread around the dorm that something was going to take place that would involve only young men. Of course, the girls were all excited. They came running into my apartment and told me to come down to the sidewalk quickly. Something was going on that they wanted me to see. When I got there, hundreds of girls were lined up waiting to see the activity that everyone had been talking about. I was still in the dark. What was all this about? Finally, I heard several of the girls use the word, "Streaking." I thought to myself, *What in the world is streaking?* I turned to the girl next to me, and asked, "What is streaking?" She laughed, "Mrs. Burns, you are going to be shocked. I'm just going to let you see for yourself, because I hear the guys coming now."

The sight was unbelievable. The whole street was covered with naked men. They were hollering and waving just like they were in the Rose Parade. They were in the street, on hoods of cars, and in the backs of pickup trucks. Everywhere I looked, there were naked men. They seemed unashamed for all these girls to see them nude. In fact, they were enjoying themselves immensely.

The girls, too, were having the time of their lives. They were looking, pointing, and screaming at all the different shapes and sizes. I could hear shrieks in the crowd....."Look at his...!" "Oh, my goodness, if I was him, I would get on the back row." "If I didn't have any more than that, I would have stayed home."

The parade seemed to go on for hours, but I'm sure it was only minutes. After it was all over, the girls returned to their dorm. They stayed up to all hours laughing and talking about the experience. The streaking parade was the talk of the campus for weeks.

Oh, by the way, I have to admit, I did look.

ON MOTHERS-IN-LAW

by

Carol Erickson Kincel

Vallie Pearl Hoy Rinard was my first mother-in-law. She was born on February 19, 1900, south of Baxter, in Jasper County, Iowa. Vallie had one sister and six brothers. When Vallie was two years old she contracted polio. At that time doctors weren't really sure what her illness was. Her sister, Phoebe, was ten years older; therefore playmates were her brothers, some older and some younger than she was. She always said the reason she could walk was because she had to keep up with her brothers as a child.

Due to her battle with polio, Vallie did not start school until eight years of age. She and her brothers walked several miles to a one-room schoolhouse. During times of bad weather she missed a lot of school but was very happy when she graduated from high school at the age of 21. Vallie said she didn't feel too bad because there was one fellow graduating older than she was.

On July 8, 1922, Vallie married Wesley Francis Church Rinard. Four children were born to them, Leon, Fonda, Harold and Leona. Wesley died April 28, 1945, at the age of 56. He had suffered lung damage from the deadly gases used in World War I. In her story "Sketch of Myself" Vallie wrote, "He was so jolly and full of life to be taken so young. I had a boy and a girl in the service, (reference was to World War II) an eight-year-old boy and a four-year old girl left in my care. Life was difficult emotionally and financially, but not any more so than anyone else who has a loved one taken."

Vallie was a good mother and provider to her children. They all grew up to be respected members of the community. In 1960 I married that "eight-year-old boy," who was, at that time, twenty-four. Harold was always so loving and kind to his mother. You could see the love between Vallie and her children, children-in-laws, and grandchildren (of which there were several when I married into the family).

Harold and I moved to Sweetwater, Texas, after our wedding. We were always happy when we could go "home" for a visit. Both our families would get together and there would be much visiting and merry-making and plenty of good food.

Vallie was such a wonderful Christian. She was self-taught in many areas of life. She taught herself how to play the piano and played at the little Church of God up the street from her house. She also taught Sunday School to pre-teens. Vallie bought a violin and was learning to play that instrument, as well as a clarinet one of the grandchildren had left at her house. Someone gave her an old Smith Corona manual typewriter. and she bought a manual and followed the lessons, teaching herself how to type. Vallie had a truly spiritual outlook on life, saying (and I quote again from "Sketch of Myself"), "There is really no outstanding episodes to record except the common drama of life." She would have enjoyed attending a Life Writing class. This exceptional woman wrote in her diary every day of her life; but in her last weeks she was destroying her journals until her daughter, Leona, discovered what she was doing and a few were saved.

This remarkable person told us personal stories that made us laugh and, sometimes, made us want to cry. She was always a welcome visitor in my home. She was Grandma Vallie to my son Robert. After Harold's death, when I married Ronald Kincel, she was truly glad for me. Once when she was visiting after Frank was born, I was busy at the stove and he wanted something, Vallie said, come show Grandma. Then she apologized to me for saying *Grandma*. I told her it could not be any other way. She was still ours.

Almost every October Vallie would come with my mother to visit with my family and me. And when it was discovered she had cancer, in final stages, when she was 92, she held out until the last loving child had come to say good-bye before journeying on.

Helen Thompson Kincel was my second mother-in-law. She was born Anna Helmi Poyhtari on August 3, 1907, in Lutcher, Louisiana. Helen was the daughter of Johanne and Emma Poyhtari who had immigrated to the United States from Himanka, Finland. Johanne changed his name to John Thompson when he was admitted as a United States citizen on October 14, 1902. John and Emma had four children, John William, Anna Helmi (known as Helen), Franz (known as Frank), and Jennie Olivia (known as Fannie). Isn't it crazy how lovely old country names became Americanized so easily?

When Helen was seven or eight her father, John, was shot and killed in Sandy Hook, Mississippi, where he had been working as a timber foreman. He was boarding a train headed for home near New Orleans, Louisiana. John was shot by accident; the man with the gun was shooting at someone else (poor aim).

Her mother, Emma, was in such despair at John's death that she became ill and died, leaving the four children orphans. The courts in Orleans Parish ruled that the Catholic Orphanage in New Orleans had to take in the four Protestant children.

Helen's stories of the orphanage were not so great. Her older brother, John, *escaped* to Minnesota where he knew an uncle lived. John was sent to the farmers market by the Sisters at the orphanage to collect the day old vegetables. He left his horse and cart and hid behind the levee, then made his way to Minnesota by following the river. When John arrived in Embarrass, Minnesota, his uncle was glad to have another hand on his farm and sent for Frank to come north too. The two girls, Helen and Fannie, were not needed or wanted, and were left behind.

Fannie, being the youngest child, cute and happy, was adopted. Helen was eight or nine and, with so many younger children, it seemed no one wanted to adopt her. She told us that Jane Smith finally rescued her. The children of Mrs. Smith were grown and she needed someone to help in her Abbeville home. Helen became a foster child. Later Mrs. Smith and Helen moved to Crowley.

Helen had a difficult childhood but she always felt loved by her foster mother. She was able to go to school and after graduation from high school went to work as a telephone operator for Ma Bell. Later on she was telephone operator for one of the banks in Crowley.

On March 6, 1930, Helen married John Joseph Kincel in Crowley, Louisiana. Helen and "Joe" had three sons, Arlen, Ronald and John Joseph, Jr. Helen's life was no "bed of roses" married to "old Joe." He was a very self-centered man. If he gave Helen \$20 to buy groceries, for three growing boys, he wanted change.

After Helen's foster mother died, she read in the paper that the property where they had lived was going up for sale for back taxes. She did other peoples' laundry on a scrub board to earn the money to pay the taxes in order buy the house and lot. Old Joe wasn't about to spend his hard-earned money on that old place. But after the property was in his name, Joe and the boys tore down the old house and built a four-room house, two bedrooms, bath, living room and kitchen. Joe was a carpenter by trade, and he had the work lined up for Arlen, Ronald, and Joe every day after school. He told them what he wanted done and they had better have it finished by the time he came home from work.

In 1959 Helen and Joe divorced. Helen kept the house on First Street in Crowley and continued to work at the Crowley Bank of Commerce until her retirement. She walked to and from work every day unless the weather was bad, then she took a taxi.

I did not meet Helen until several months after I married Ronald. She was such a fun lady. I could not help but love her. In July of 1969 when Frank was born she came to visit us for a week to help out. Ronald had taken a week off from work too. It was almost too much with a new baby in the house, but I enjoyed visiting with Helen. We had time to learn about each other.

Ronald and I visited his mother in Crowley several times before we moved to Lafayette. The children, Mark and Cindy (from Ronald's first marriage), Robert (from my first marriage), and Frank loved her house. It was half a block from the railroad tracks and the children loved to watch the trains pass by. We had to keep a sharp eye on Frank or he would toddle to the tracks by himself. Ronald would put pennies on the track for the trains to smash, and after the train passed Mark, Cindy, Robert and Frank would hurry to pick the coins up, so excited over their treasure. Helen loved the grandchildren. She once told me she liked simply to sit and watch the grandchildren play.

Helen came to stay with Robert and Frank at our house in Phoenix in April of 1971. Ronald and I had to make a trip to Massachusetts to look for a house. Ronald's company was transferring us to Boston. I think the boys gave her a hard time. Not that they were bad, she was just not used to taking care of young children.

Helen got the bug to find out something about her parents. There had been a little money in a bank account when her parents died and she wanted to find out what happened to it. She made several trips to New Orleans to visit the courthouse there. She would take an evening bus to New Orleans, camp out in the bus station until the courthouse opened, take care of her business, and then catch a bus back to Crowley. She never was afraid. Lord have mercy; I would have been scared to death. She also went to Lake Charles the same way. Helen had a large suitcase full of documentation about her father and mother, which I inherited when she died. Had her father lived, they would have been wealthy. Her father was buying most of what is now down town Lake Charles. Of course, all of that was lost when John Thompson died.

Anyway, with the help of legal aide Helen did find the money that was the inheritance from her father. Guess where? It was in the coffers of the State of Louisiana. She received a check for her one-fourth but the rest remained in the state because her brothers and sister were deceased. Go figure! Helen would have made a good detective. And her bus travels were a plus; Helen loved to visit with the strangers she met while riding on the bus.

In 1981 Helen started having serious health problems. Left to her own resources she was feeding her diabetes and congestive heart failure every thing a person with those problems should not eat. She loved sweets and salty foods. What good south Louisiana woman doesn't? After a stay in the hospital, she came to live with Ronald and me. She really was a joy to have around. Helen went everywhere with us, even on vacations. There were difficult times too, but I would not have had it any other way.

In the winter of 1982 she went to live in a nursing home in Crowley. She had a spell with the congestive heart disease and was admitted to the hospital early in 1983. While in the hospital she had a stroke. One of Helen's sister-in-law's, Theresa, lived in the same nursing home. When Helen returned to the nursing home after her stroke, in a coma, Aunt Theresa sat with her every day, held her hand and talked to her. I was so thankful Aunt Theresa was there to comfort Helen every day. About two weeks after her return to the home, Helen died.

Although both my mother-in-laws are gone, I think of them often. I was close to both ladies. And believe it or not, when there was a problem between their son, and myself Vallie or Helen took my side. I have a hard time understanding the problems between young women and their mother-in-laws. Both my experiences with "*the mother-in-law*" were happy ones. They were wonderful to me and Robert and Frank were blessed to have them for Grandmothers.

Maybe I should add that Vallie and Helen were well acquainted with each other. When Vallie would come to Louisiana, these two dear old ladies would sit in the swing on my back porch and have a good visit.

SEARCHING FOR AUTUMN

by

Jan Baudoin

When I was in the fifth grade Mama and Daddy bought the small house in which they would live for the rest of their lives. Our new house was in Baton Rouge on the corner of Loyola and Delgado Drives, in University Hills near the LSU campus. After having spent a few years in apartments, I liked the pansies, the gumball trees, and the yard for Snowball, our aging toy Spitz. Our new house was pink with gray shutters, the bathroom also pink and gray. After several coats of pink and gray paint, Mother switched to shades of green. When I sold the empty house several years ago, it was still green with pink and gray tile in the bathroom.

With the gumball trees in the front yard, I was accustomed to colorful leaves for awhile each fall. I was also accustomed to the piercing sharpness of dry gumballs under my bare feet. Raking a yard full of dead leaves and gumballs was serious work, a job that required sturdy shoes, gloves, and long sleeves to grab big armloads of leaves and balls and pile them around the camellia and azalea bushes. The leaves were piled high around the plants, overflowing the flower beds until the rain and cold beat them down, turning them into a damp, rotting compost—an insulation against the cold, protecting the roots.

Fall seemed a little off sync in South Louisiana. In school, every September calendar had red and yellow and orange numbers for the days of the first month of school. A new school year, the autumn season, colored leaves, and chilly weather were supposed to go together. Our calendar leaves had been put away and replaced with numbered pumpkins long before I saw patches of colored trees. School clothes were skirts and blouses and sweater sets. Since I went to school at the LSU Laboratory School, LSU football games were a big part of our autumn tradition. My girl friends and I filled grocery bags full of torn newspaper to throw as confetti at the games. When I was in high school we dressed up in little two piece woolen suits for the games and wore huge yellow chrysanthemums with purple pipe cleaners spelling LSU. There we sat on the bleachers in woolen suits, stockings, and heels long before the fall weather arrived.

When I went *north* to Rhodes College in Memphis Tennessee, I loved walking through the brightly colored leaves that piled up on the trails in Overton Park across from the campus. Instead of spots and patches of color, the whole park was yellow, red, orange, and purple. My roommate had come *south* to Memphis from Roanoke, Virginia. She grieved for the autumn she knew at home. *What was wrong with the trees? Was it always this plain and dull in the South?* I was offended and puzzled. I wanted to defend the South but I thought I was in the North. She missed the autumn glow. *Glow?* I began to suspect that I was appreciating inferiorly colored trees.

Since then I've occasionally tried to find these raved about glowing trees. Once I was in Highlands, North Carolina, in late October. Chester and I had arrived at the Alpine Lodge after dark. The next morning at breakfast there was a yellow and orange tree glowing right outside the window by the front porch. It truly looked like it was on fire or had some inner light source. We went on our way expecting more and more spectacular sights but we were too late, the season was past its peak. We saw some spots of color but no more glow. Last year we tried Eureka Springs in Northern Arkansas. We arrived just after a huge, torrential rain. Eureka Springs streets were covered with soaked yellow leaves. Again we had just missed autumn.

This year we went West in search of yellow Aspen leaves. Arriving in Santa Fe at the beginning of the second week of October we heard that the leaves had peaked last week, there had been snow in the mountains last weekend, but there might still be some Aspen leaves up in the ski basin. We raced right out and up the mountain. There they were, tall, white and straight, glowing with butter colored leaves. Aspen leaves have a special relationship with wind and light, a flirtatious relationship. They quiver and shimmy back and forth in the breeze. They not only glow, they twinkle! As we raced around taking pictures, hoping that some of the magic would catch on film, we could see whole patches of bare silvery trunks.

We found mustard yellow cottonwoods lining and reflecting in mountain streams. We found ripe little red and yellow apples falling off of overloaded branches. We found a full moon coming up behind layers of snow capped blue mountains one night and behind red monument rocks another night.

Everywhere we went someone assured us that last week had been much more spectacular. Once again we had missed the absolute pinnacle of glory. But this time I was satisfied.

WOULD YOU REPEAT THAT PLEASE?

by
Florence Burleigh

Do you ever wonder just how a child hears the things that grown-ups say? I know they get confused by words that sound like words they are familiar with, and I know they often aren't concentrating on actually listening to what someone is saying, so the things they say sometimes come out a bit amusing. Let me give you a few examples which happened in our family.

We moved to Lafayette and into our home on Marilyn Drive in February of 1959. At that time our back lot line was actually the city limits. About four months after we moved in, another family moved into the house across the side street from us. They were the Hedrick family from West Texas, who had two little girls, Diane and Melanie, about the ages of our two oldest daughters. The girls soon became fast friends, birthday partying together, swimming together, sleeping over and going to school together. I will never forget the day little Melanie knocked on our back door shortly after they moved in. Her mother had called earlier to ask if Melanie could come over to play. The little girl had been instructed to introduce herself and ask if she could play with Sue and Elaine. When I opened the door, this beautiful child with short, dark brown hair and the biggest brown eyes I had ever seen, looked up at me and asked in a sweet little voice, "Do ya'll have any cookies in ya'lls cookie jar, ya'll?" How could anyone resist an overture like that?

The girls did everything together except go to the same church. The Hedricks were Baptists, and the Burleighs were Methodists. One summer evening, when Sue and Elaine were 6 and 3 ½ years old, they were invited to attend a Baptist Revival meeting with the Hedrick family at their church. Melanie and Diane's mother, Zoenell, assured us they would have our girls home by 9 p.m. so we had them bathed, dressed and fed in time to be picked up at 6 o'clock.

The clock struck 9, and Sue and Elaine were soon walking in the door. I should say Sue walked in, but Elaine staggered in. She was so tired that she fell fast asleep as soon as I picked her up. We walked to their bedroom, and as I got Elaine into her night clothes and tucked her into bed, I asked Sue if she had enjoyed the

evening. Her eyes were as big as saucers, and she seemed somewhat distracted. I asked her again to tell me about the Revival meeting as I helped her get ready for bed, and she said, "Mama! There was a man there who was really mad!" "Oh? And what was he mad about?" I asked. She shook her curly little head. "I don't know what he was mad about," she replied, "but he stood behind a table on the stage, and kept yelling and pounding the table with his fists. And you know what, Mama?" she almost whispered, "He was using some bad words!" Well now, that got my attention! "He was? Who is this man? What's his name?" My hackles were up. "I don't know what his name is, Mama," she said, "but the people there called him the "Creature!" "Preacher" does sound a lot like "Creature" to a child's ears.

When Ann, our third daughter, was 6 years old and in the first grade, she came home from school shortly before the Christmas holiday telling us that her class was learning a new Christmas song. "It's a German song, Mama." "Wonderful! Can you sing it for me in German?" I asked, knowing that the song they were learning was "Oh, Tannenbaum." "Uh huh," she replied...and started belting out the first few words, as she had understood them. "Oh cannon ball, oh cannon ball..." Oh, how I love that song!

Many years later when our granddaughter Sarah had just celebrated her fourth birthday, she was in our backyard riding her little low-slung plastic tricycle on the patio. The neighbors had a great big old gray cat named Pete who loved little children, but wasn't fond of grown-ups who were not members of his own family. Pete loved Sarah, for she would always stop what she was doing to scratch him behind the ears. When Pete saw Sarah riding her tricycle he came over for a little attention. A short time later Sarah came into the house for a glass of lemonade and announced to her dad, "Daddy, I ran over Pete's tail with my tricycle!" Robert looked up from the paper he was reading and, shaking his head, said, "Oh, Sarah, you mustn't do that. You might hurt old Pete, and besides, he might get mad." "Oh, no, Daddy," said Sarah, "he liked it. He said WOW!" Don't you just love 'em?

THE PERM
by
Shirley Comeaux

I was ten, all legs and scrawny arms. Brown straw instead of soft shiny hair. "It's time," Mama said. I shuddered. I didn't know what it was time for, but when Mama looked at me—I mean right at me, something bad was up. Usually I didn't fare more than a sidelong glance, except maybe on Saturday night after my bath.

Mama touched my hair. It was in stiff braids, corralling the usually fly-away straw in rigid posts. "Yes," she said, "I think it's time."

My oldest sister, Mary Margaret, snickered and Helen rolled her eyes. Neva Jean made a slashing motion across her throat. *What did they know that I didn't?*

Mama took me to Flo's Beauty Shop on Main Street in Webster City, Iowa. It was located above the Best Drug Store which was not named that because it was the best in town. It was just that George Best owned it. Inside Flo's shop a row of straight-back chairs sat, all facing away from the fly-specked window where "Flo's Beauty Salon" yellow neon sign flashed on and off.

Flo herself came to the desk, and she and Mama had a little conference. *Why did they both turn to look at me like that?* Then Flo beckoned to me and said, "Right this way, Dearie."

I followed her to a little sink where an aluminum drainboard stuck out in front. With one swift motion, Flo wrestled me into the chair, trussed me up in a sheet so I couldn't move and pushed my head back on the drain board. With strong fingers, she quickly unwound my braids, turned on chilling water and scrubbed my hair, as if racing the shampooer at the next little sink.

My scalp tingled and my eyes smarted from the suds Flo splashed in my face. My sister Mary Margaret had always shampooed my hair, but even on her worst day she had not hurt me like this.

Suddenly Flo jerked me up from the sink, out of the chair, and over to another chair where she raked a comb through my hair. Then she began to cut my hair. Oh my, did she cut! I glanced down at the floor. *My hair!* All I could think of was Samson and Delilah.

But Flo was not done with me yet. She began winding the remaining hair onto funny little rods. Over and over and over she cranked my hair into little rolls. When at last there was not a loose strand of hair showing, Flo dragged a strange machine toward me. It loomed above me as tall as a man. My eyes bulged as I stared, studying this ugly thing, trying to anticipate its next move. I was not prepared for what did happen next.

Flo pulled on a cord, one of the many that dangled from the top of this monster, and clamped it onto one of the little rollers on my head. Then she clamped another and another and another. This creature was bound to me with its slender tentacles which suddenly became hot and burned my scalp in a dozen places. Tears rolled down my cheeks from pain and frustration at being captive of this tenacious manacled leech.

Eventually Flo forced the tentacles off and rolled the subdued creature back to a corner, its dozens of arms waving and clanking. She brushed through my hair and in a few minutes spun my chair around. I was facing the mirror and I glanced up. A strange reflection stared back at me.

Soft brown curls, a halo of ringlets capped the face that peered at me. The face grinned. *Me! It was me!*

I was captivated. I was a new person...an incredible metamorphosis. Flo, the miracle worker, had done her magic with my very first perm.

HISTORY IN OUR HOMETOWN

by
Lois Hollier

Beginning with my 4th grade year, our family, the Strouds, lived in Ruskin, Florida. Dad worked on a gladiola farm and Mother worked in the fields from time to time and in the tomato packing house during harvest times.

I worked in the fields after school and gathered berries in the woods to sell from door to door. After age 16, I was allowed to work at Dickman's Prepak where we prepared and packaged fresh vegetables for the supermarkets. My recreation and social life was centered around the church. There were four services a week plus district meetings and Sunday school parties. Many of our parties were held in the big yard of the country home belonging to one of our member families. They had a large family of children, two of whom we had never met. There were rumors they were in prison.

One of the sons, L. J., dated Shirley, one of my best friends. L. J. was a quiet, handsome fellow who owned his own car. That car, a shining blue Ford convertible, was the envy of us all. Shirley lived by the Little Manatee River with a boat and dock. When we girls had a sleepover, the boy friends were invited too for a couple hours. The boys would take us boat riding. Sometimes we would fish for awhile. I spent many happy summer evenings on the Little Manatee River.

We were attending high school in the 50's when the shock came. L. J. had been arrested with his two older brothers, who had been released from prison. They had robbed a bank just across the Georgia state line. One of the brothers, a two time loser, shot the guard. Before it was over L. J. took the fall for that, and all three brothers received life sentences. The church and community were in shock and grieving for the family. As time went on L. J. and one of his brothers were placed in San Quinten because of repeated attempts at escape. In time they did successfully escape "the Rock" never to be heard from again.

You would recognize L. J. as John Anglin in the movie made about the escape. The authorities publicly declare, "The convicts could not have lived. They are dead." However, the family continues to be watched until this day. When L.J.'s parents died, undercover agents attended the funerals. "Unsolved Mysteries" TV

show replays the story at least once a year with computer aged pictures of the brothers. Still L.J. and his brother evade capture. A bad decision by an otherwise nice young man brought shame and heartache to his family and a sorrowful history to our little town. I lost a friend.

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS: A PLACE MEMORY

by
Martha L. Sonnier

I hated gym class in 1936 and 37 in Junior High School, as did many of my classmates, not only because of the exercise, but also the undressing, donning gym clothes, and then, the worst of all, taking showers with girls who wore not one shred of modesty.

One session of the gym class consisted of jumping over a horse, not a live one, but a leather horse too high for a clumsy person like me to jump over . We had to run, then jump over the horse with hands on the top in a special way to give the push to go over the top. I needed a little more than the run, I had to have someone give me a shove, a big shove on the rear. Then I would usually fall sideways instead of over.

Another part of the class consisted of hanging from a rope with a ring on the end and flying across the gym to another set of ropes, like a monkey on a trapeze. I just couldn't do it. First, I couldn't jump high enough to grab the rings, and then, when someone lifted me up to catch them, I stayed right there, hanging on for dear life. I was a flop in gym class, and I hated it with a passion. I just wasn't a clever monkey.

To rub salt in the wounds, as they say, I also hated the dressing, undressing, showering, and rushing, with wet hair, to the next class. When we finished the exercise on the gym floor, we had to undress in open stalls, wrap our bodies in a small towel, then go to the shower room. Once there, we had to step in a dirty looking large, square pan of disinfectant which was supposed to keep us from getting athletes feet. The disinfectant looked so dirty and nasty that many of us tried to avoid putting our feet into it. Getting caught was a misdemeanor but was worth it when we looked at that nasty pan.

We each had to go into an open shower stall, after dropping the towel on a bench. We showered, then picked up the towel, wrapped it around our bodies again, then ran to the stall where our clothes were hung. Some of us were really embarrassed about running through the room with just a small towel on. The bold girls, who had no modesty, would try to take the towels off of us. Then we had to

rush to our next class from the gym class with wet, straggle hair, most of the time late with no excuse that was sufficient for the teacher.

We all had various excuses for not taking the gym class. Our favorite was the "usual excuse," which was supposed to explain that it was our "monthly time." How often we had the "usual excuse" was more than once a month as long as we could get away with it. Our gym teacher finally caught on, and she started keeping a chart for each girl that ended our usual excuse, except for once a month. I'm sure the teacher had a great many laughs about some of the poor excuses she heard from the non-athletic students.

I did manage to get through gym class each year, but only because I showed some athletic ability when our class played baseball. I was tall and lanky, so I could run rather fast, as well as hit the ball occasionally. I wasn't too clumsy when I played field hockey and volley ball, but the leather horses and ringed ropes were my undoing. I don't even watch TV during the Olympics for fear that I will get a bad grade just for watching.

THE RED TRICYCLE

by
Nancy Underwood

In 1941 when I was almost five, my family lived in a big house on Orville Avenue in Kansas City, Kansas. Orville Avenue was a fairly busy street. And I had a red tricycle. I was allowed to ride my tricycle on the sidewalk in front of my house. I could ride back and forth to the corner, but no farther. I was warned not to go across the street. A penalty was issued with that warning. "Daddy will spank you if you go across the street." I loved riding my tricycle, the wind blowing in my face as I rode. I don't think I thought about the warning at all.

Across the street lived a little boy who also rode a tricycle back and forth on his sidewalk. All went well until the day he had something he wanted me to see. He teased and teased me to come across—and I finally went pulling my trike behind me. I don't remember what he had that was so wonderful. But I had to see it. I was barely across the street when I saw Mother coming after me and felt that first stab in my gut known later as conviction of sin. Only then did I remember "If you cross the street, Daddy will spank you."

I was marched home, my bike put away. And I waited. The wait was terrible. All afternoon, in fear and trembling, I waited for Daddy.

It was dark before he came. Mother met him at the door and while he was hanging up his jacket, she told him of my bad deed. I burst into tears as my father walked into the living room. I don't remember if the spanking hurt, but my heart did. When I look back on this incident I think Daddy felt nearly as bad as I did. It wasn't much of a spanking but he had to carry out his threat or maybe it was his promise. It's hard to know the difference sometimes.

My red tricycle story, makes me think of all my boundary crossings and the dangers involved, and that bit of a backlash that comes with each crossing.

OUR COUNTRY THANKSGIVING IN THE 20's

by
Viola L. Aberly

The harvest was over by Thanksgiving time, so it was a time to visit with family and friends. Before I was 10 years old, when my Grandmother, Emily Rambin DeSoto, was still alive my Father, Adolph Laffitte, Mother, Elia DeSoto Laffitte, and I would go down to my Maternal Grandparent's (Sam and Emily DeSoto) house at Smithport. Aunt Lizzy and Uncle Leo hadn't married yet and were still living at home. Aunt Mary wasn't married yet either. She was a nurse and living in Shreveport. She wasn't always able to get home for the holidays.

We would always visit back and forth with family, friends and neighbors. We would visit with Pete and Jack Rambins family who lived just up the road. Probably the Vasco's too but I don't remember. Edgar Vasco later married Aunt Lizzy so he must have visited sometimes. I do not recall any other children. I am the only child in my mothers family so I didn't have any first cousins on my mothers side to play with. I was not allowed in the kitchen when the cooking was going on so it sometimes got lonesome.

We would have chicken most of the time because they didn't have much luck raising turkeys although they would try. Mama and Grandma would get the turkey eggs and put them under the chickens and try to get turkeys. Sometime it worked and we would have turkey. If the weather turned cold before Thanksgiving, then they would often butcher a hog and we would have a fresh pork roast to go with the poultry. We would have all kinds of vegetables. Everyone canned so there were lots of vegetables. We would have sweet potatoes and mashed potatoes. I got to eat with the grown ups at Grandma Emily's house but in large families, such as my father's family, the children had to wait until after the grownups had eaten. After dinner we would all get to have desert with the coffee. By that time, there were usually some family or friends that came by to visit.

I remember the deserts very well. Aunt Lizzie DeSoto, my Mother's older sister, made the best caramel pies I've ever tasted. She always made two for thanksgiving. My mother made the cakes because she didn't have any luck with making the pie crust when she started cooking so she quit trying. When she tried

early on she didn't know to poke holes in the pastry to keep it from puffing up so the filling would run over in the stove and bum. She cooked on a wood stove so it wasn't easy to clean so she quit making pies and left that up to Aunt Lizzy. Daddy liked pies but he didn't get to eat Mom's. Mother would make the cakes and Aunt Lizzie would make the pies. Starting with Thanksgiving there would be family visiting going on so they would make plenty of pies and cakes. They didn't get together to cook them but they would share them.

There was a colored lady named Duce that would come to help my Mother and they would make cakes all day long. At the end of the day Duce would take some to her family. They would make seven or eight cakes in one day. There was no electricity, and certainly no electric mixers, so everything was done by hand...all the beating.

Aunt Lizzy would make caramel pies, pecan pies, chocolate pies and egg custards. I don't remember fruit pies at all but maybe it's because I didn't care for fruit pies. I don't know why we didn't have peach pies and fruit pies...maybe we did and I just don't remember it. I still prefer cream pies to fruit pies. We did have blackberry pies in the summer but Mamma was so allergic to red bugs, that she couldn't berry pick. She would swell up. When I was older, I used to berry pick, but Mamma wouldn't let me go by myself so I had to wait till someone could go with me. We ate blackberries out of the jar but we didn't make pies with the canned berries or fruit.

One of the cakes Mama made was coconut cake that used all egg whites and then they had to use the egg yolks because we didn't throw anything away. She would make yellow cake with crushed pineapple filling. Pineapple was very expensive but could be bought at the grocery store. Sometimes if money was very tight she would use her jam or jelly for a filling. I always liked it when she used blackberry jam. She always had all kinds of different flavorings that she bought from the Watkins man who was a traveling salesman for kitchen supplies that you couldn't get in the grocery store. The fancy cakes they made were ribbon cakes. They didn't make them often. A ribbon cake was a cake with a white layer, a chocolate layer, and a strawberry layer made with strawberry flavoring from the Watkins man. It was six layers high. Clarisse Fontenot Rambin, Jack Rambin's wife, made this kind of cake for church cake sales, and special times. My Mom always made my Dad a pound cake without any icing because that was his favorite.

That sounds like an awful lot of pies and cakes, but my dad had eight siblings and he was the youngest. My mother had two sisters and a brother and their spouses that were close by. They would all visit back and forth and enjoy eating the sweets with their coffee at their visits.