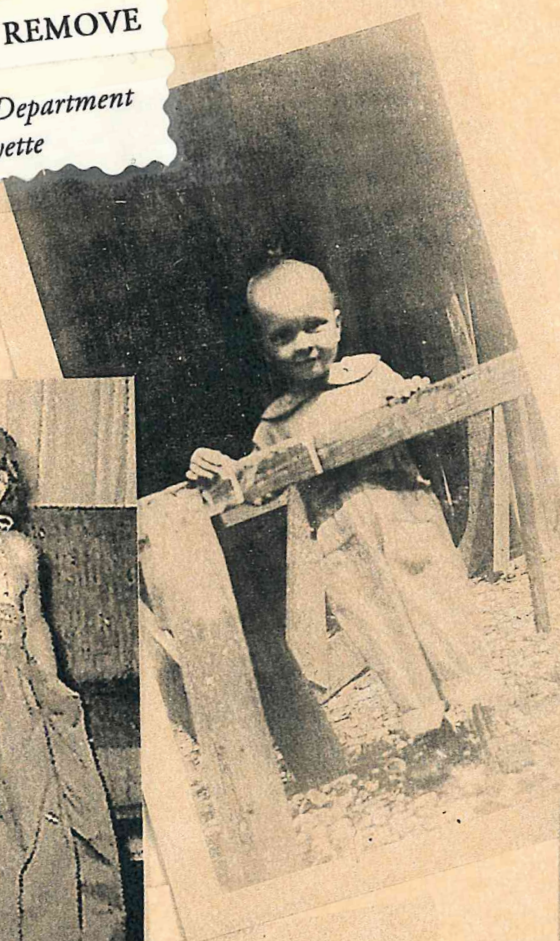
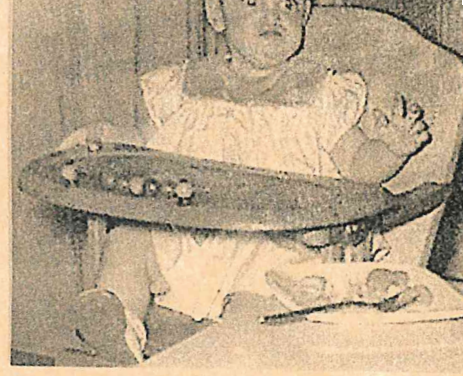
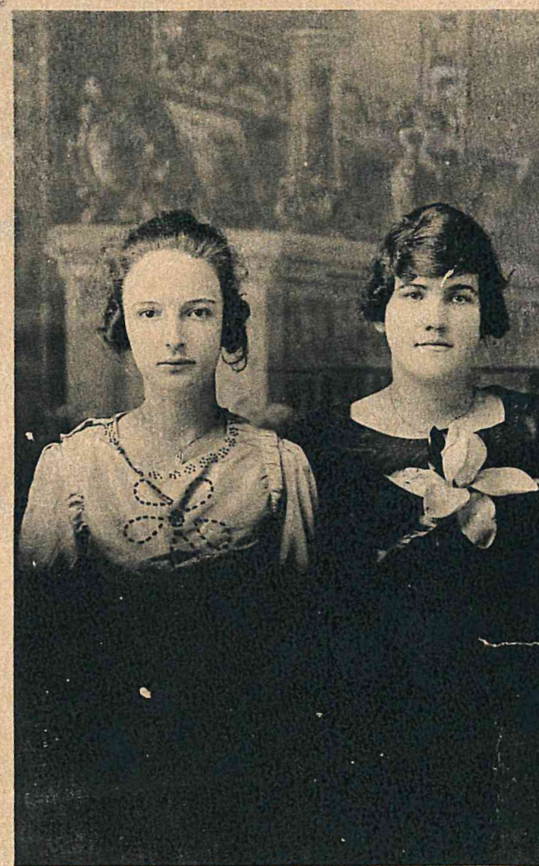


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*Excerpts from
Our Pages
Of Life*



Mother's friend
Bessie Prather

Versie L.
Mother
(Dovie Joh)



A picture attached to a memo board in my office at home is one of several old photographs. This one that I can see from my spot at the computer is of a serious faced young boy. He is wearing a long sleeved ruffled white shirt, dark shorts, black stockings, and high top shoes. One fist is curled, the other open, resting on his left knee. Both legs are supported by metal braces. He is seated above another boy, his older brother, an image cut in half because my copy has been cropped. The boy in the photograph, born in 1898, is Stanley Fox Davis, a Stanley I know now, through stories.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the life writing class of which Stanley has been a part. It also marks the closing of that decade, but more as the turning, an opening of a new chapter in our lives. This chapter of the class I have taught for the last ten years reads as its own fascinating story, besides the life of a 102-year-old gentleman. Take a look at a sampling of the roster I have counted as my list of friends through the years.

I have taught a man who wrestled alligators. Two men I know fell in love with the same young girl, Shirley—she had dimples and blonde ringlets then. One student's husband was a Pullman conductor who brought home a bag of homegrown popping corn—the best she'd ever tasted. My student never met the man who sold the popcorn on the train, but her husband recognized him almost forty years later on a television commercial for Orville Redenbacher's popcorn—the product of the traveling salesman.

Other students have met presidents and entertained ambassadors. My students have traveled the globe looking for love and war and peace. And they have found all three. Sometimes they have lost love or been betrayed.

Their treks have been taken by foot, horse and buggy, homemade roller coasters and Mardi Gras floats, trains and steamers and banana boats. They have driven long hauls, eighteen miles one way, in Model T's and Model A's, and cross country in Volkswagen bugs. They have been chased by roosters, bullies, and toddlers. They have talked to each other through discarded cans and copper wire. Now they talk through air waves and e-mail.

One student put a broken piano back together again—all by herself, with no directions. I have taught a lady who slugged a boy for kissing her (she outgrew hitting boys). I have taught a former Romper Room teacher. I have also taught a man who saw President Roosevelt, Teddy, not Franklin, walk on the White House lawn. Another student enjoyed a ticker tape parade in New York City—on the *first* first Armistice Day, a premature celebration of the end of World War I. I have taught a student who helped edit All The King's Men—as an undergraduate student of Robert Penn Warren.

War brides and war heroes have joined the life writing class to write their stories. So have Army nurses and Red Cross volunteers as have other men and women, individuals proud of their heritage—Acadian, French, British, African-American, Belgian, Italian, German, Native American, Danish, Slavic, Southern, Northern, Midwestern, and American—many cultures from around the world. These people are making my history by teaching me theirs.

In fact, all I can really admit to is that I am the student, not the teacher, in this class of elder wisdom. If I envision myself in any way as having a part to play in a scheme larger than my own imagination, it is through the desire to see generations joined as people, not as age stereotypes, and to use their stories as natural bridge builders.

I have always known that my students have had the greatest influence on my ideas about writing instruction. The main reason is that I am first and foremost a listener of my students' voices, first aloud and then on paper. By learning how to listen, I have learned how to read more carefully and how to write better. I have also learned, I believe, how to be a better person.

After tens of thousands of stories, my class roster boasts an incomparable list of hundreds of students, people who have committed themselves to a unique task: preserving their life experiences for future generations. To these students, I am indebted. Out of my students' commitment, my own commitment has become clearer: I want to participate in joining the generations through stories. You can, too, by listening to these stories and by telling your own. Keep writing for generations to come!

Joan Stear
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Spring 2001

Thanks to the Horizons Department at Lafayette General Medical Center;
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 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*) Joan Stear; Versie L. Foti's mother, Dovie Johnson, and friend Bessie Prather; Bea Murphy and her Big Texas Hair; Joan Stear; Jim Jennings, circa 1924

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This volume of life stories
is lovingly dedicated to the men and women
who have written the stories of their lifetime
for lifetimes to come.
To each of my students, XXOOXXs.



LIFE WRITING CLASS
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Spring 2001 • Tuesday Morning Session

Seated, left to right: Joe Glorioso; Bea Murphy; Jacqueline Fryns;
John Q. Lee; Kitty Kelley; Olympe Butcher
Standing, left to right: Rita Wellborn; *(in back)* Joan Stear, *Instructor*;
Bob Mayley; Betty Shoemaker; John Townsend; Versie Foti;
Jim Jennings; Fran Gross
(Missing from photo: Johnnie Kocurek)





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CHILDHOOD "SENSE"ING FUN

by
Robert L. Maley

Sight, Smell, Sound, Taste, and Touch are imagined labels on a child's personal file of experiences, into which will be sorted a whole range of experiences ranking from the worst (0) to the best (10). Overhearing kids, you will hear them ask, "What is your favorite color?" or what is the "stinkiest," "noisiest," "yuckiest," or "hurtiest" event in their lives?

With a lifetime of sorting and rearranging, these files of information become the warp and woof of an individual's life, like Scottish tartans, each one different. An added feature gained with time, is editing and embellishing for dramatic effect to fill blanks following the lead-in line of a yarn: "Why I remember once when _____" and ending with, "That's the darndest thing I ever saw!" (smelled, tasted, heard, or felt).

In my personal files of senses, under the category of Sight, one would find a memory of walking a rough, cinder-packed railroad track barefooted for a mile to see an airplane, which had come to our little town barnstorming. Law! That old bi-wing plane sitting there in a farmer's field was the prettiest thing I had ever seen! My feet were sore for days after.

Concerning smell, what is the equal to homemade bread just out of the oven? One whiff of that is a reveille call to every taste bud in the human body! When sliced and still warm, slathered with home-churned butter and jelly, it comes very close to being what they call, "An out-of-body ecstatic experience."

Which brings us to the sense of taste. One who has never tasted a fresh-picked tomato, slightly salted, where the juice runs down your chin; or a right-out-of-the field ear of corn smeared with fresh butter, begging to see what you look like on the inside: And home-made ice cream heaped in a bowl, with strawberries oozing over it in rivulets—anyone who has never experienced this sort of ambrosia should ask for a refund on an unfulfilled life. Fresh, warm apple pie under a dollop of the same ice cream, mingling with its cinnamon liquors, is a close contender. How about the first bite of a slice of ice cold watermelon?

Forgotten sounds of youth came back to mind, with the lazy squeak of a porch swing, or the slamming of a screen door. The sounds of dusk when the long-cast shadows of day lengthen and vanish in the grass, as crickets tune for a night's concert, and the Great Horned Owl in the timber, quarrels with coyotes over the hill.

Years ago on a trip to my hometown, as a favor I delivered some packages to my old neighborhood. The house where we lived when I was small was on the edge of

town close to a tall, sinister-looking, black water tower. When it was built, the manufacturer had topped the tank with a huge iron ball with holes drilled through that would create moaning sound when a brisk northwest wind blew its frosty breath across the prairies. For that reason we kids felt the thing was haunted, and would hunker down in bed covers as it moaned us to sleep at night.

But as I delivered my package and was waiting for the door knock to be answered, a frisky breeze blew from the northwest over crunchy snow. It was then that I heard again the moaning voice in that old tower I had heard forty years before and forgotten, until that moment. The hair began to stand on the backs of my arms.

Which brings us to the matter of touch, and recalling a whole range of touch memories, good and bad. My dad's razor strap was one. The sudden shock of ice cold water, when on a dare, I was the first on in the swimming hole come spring, and the itch of a peeling sunburn; the free-fall sensation of a huge bag swing. The sting of wasps and bees, a stubbed toe, and the jarring thud of a brother's clenched fist, are all in my memory file of touch experiences.

But with age and puberty, other senses redefined those of childhood, not replacing, only giving them a new spin in a very mysterious way. Girls no longer were squealy humanoid hanging by their knees on the monkey bars, showing their sateen and flower-sack bloomers, skipping rope or playing jacks. Former sweaty ribbon-tied locks, now began to hang in soft ringlets down a graceful neck onto soft shoulders, and the walk would evolve into a graceful swinging glide appealing to the eye. Voices would have a gentle, melodious tone that if it ever teased or said, "Pulleese," a guy would bust his hump to do whatever the voice requested.

Gradually, what happened became the budding and a blossoming of a new "inner sense" would, with time, reinterpret the first five in a most consuming way, one from which I have yet to recover.



WHY I DON'T SMOKE

by
Rita Wellborn

When I was a teenager in the early 1940's, as the teenagers do today, I looked to the movies for role models. I remember being especially impressed by the lovely women, beautifully dressed, who were (it seemed to me) always holding a cigarette. I thought they looked so sophisticated, especially when the handsome hero rushed to light the woman's cigarette. He would flip out his gold cigarette lighter and hold it to the woman's cigarette. She would breathe deeply and then take the cigarette out of her mouth and hold it, seductively I thought, in her hand and smile her thanks to her handsome hero.

I had tried smoking as a teenager, probably at thirteen or fourteen, but I couldn't stand the taste. Most of my friends couldn't stand the taste either, but they persevered because they thought it was the thing to do, like a teenage rite of passage, and of course, it wasn't long before they were hooked. Not having persevered like my friends, I felt left out when everyone was smoking but me.

Somehow feeling left out of the smoking crowd was especially annoying to me as a young married woman. All our friends smoked, and I don't remember being annoyed by the smell of smoke as I am today. I had lived with smokers all my life. My daddy had smoked Target roll-your-own cigarettes, and my husband Johnny smoked Lucky Strikes. I had never lived in a smoke-free environment.

One night a group of us young couples had gone to a fair in Vacherie, a small community a few miles from St. James, where we lived. For some reason I felt particularly left out that night by the others, especially the women, who were all smoking. I was determined to learn to smoke. I had tried a few times puffing on a cigarette, but it seemed that if you didn't inhale it just wasn't the same.

Johnny, my husband, was going hunting for a few days with a group of friends, and I was staying at Mama's with Anne, our eighteen-month-old daughter. This reprieve from homemaker duties seemed to me to be a perfect opportunity to learn to smoke. It didn't appear to be difficult to learn. What I needed was practice. Mama was going to be gone all day at work. (She worked at the cigar factory in Donaldsonville.) I bought a pack of cigarettes and was all set to learn to smoke. I think I bought Lucky Strikes because that's what Johnny smoked. There were no low tar, low nicotine cigarettes at the time.

It didn't seem so bad when I started. The first cigarette still tasted awful, but I thought the end result would make it worth the suffering. I started early morning and

smoked one cigarette after another, inhaling every puff. I thought that was the way to do it. By noon I was beginning to feel queasy so I didn't eat lunch. I never connected my nausea to the smoking so I practiced all afternoon, cigarette after cigarette. By the time Mama came home from work I was so sick I couldn't lift my head off the pillow. Thank goodness Anne was a quiet, placid child. She just sat on the floor playing with blocks. Mama took one look at me and could see how sick I was so she took over the care of the baby. I didn't tell her about the smoking, and she didn't seem at all suspicious about the reason for my illness.

I did tell Johnny when he came home. He laughed at me, saying that no smoker, even the most seasoned, inhaled every deep puff, chain-smoking for hours. Needless to say, I never again tried to master the skill of smoking. Today, of course, I'm happy that I didn't succeed with my effort. While many of my friends are trying to quit, I can truthfully say that I never learned to smoke and that I'm glad I didn't.



ONE OF MANY "SECRETS"

by

Jacqueline Fryns

I cannot remember in what year (probably the late twenties or early thirties) the fashion for evening dresses was short in the front and long in the back. I adored the dresses I saw in the movies and in women magazines. Of course, I was much too young to have any chance to wear those dresses. Poor me! But I rarely have been short of ideas to imagine.

Dreams and make believe have always been my natural nature. I would say my secret real nature is known only to me. Now, years later, I am well aware that all along my parents knew exactly what kind of "prankful" little girl I was.

My dream to wear an evening dress came true at the time Mummy was invited to a family gathering. Only adults were invited. That was the rule in those days. Children and grown ups didn't mix much.

For that occasion Mummy had to wear an evening dress, but since she didn't have one, she choose a model, bought a pattern and some material and started working on her new dress.

I know now that the material was not an expensive one, but to me, then, it was out of this world. The color was deep yellow, looking just like gold. Unreal! When I saw Mummy all dressed up, I couldn't believe it. I had known her only as Mummy, a self-effacing woman, orientated only toward providing time, attention, and love to all.

Maybe it was the very first time I saw her as a woman. But, still as a child then, was I really looking at Mummy? I believe that it was only the dress that kept my attention.

During that period of our family life, Saturday was a special day when Daddy was usually home in the afternoon. It was, for Daddy and Mummy, cinema day. They went to the matinee at the movie-theater and returned home usually about six. Children had to go to school on Saturday afternoon. At that time there was no weekend like now. Among the three of us, brother and sisters, I was the lucky one, for my school was the nearest. I was usually the first one home because my brother Christian had a much longer road to walk, and my sister Andree had an art class later in the afternoon.

The arrival of Mummy's new dress in the house changed my schedule radically. After that Saturdays were race days, trying to be one of the first out of the class, then rushing and running to get my tramway (streetcar) I knew the schedule by heart. Tramways ran about every five minutes. Soon I learned that running through another

street, I could get the same tramway, after the long curve it had to run. Even while on the tramway, I was already near the exit, ready to be the first one out! The tramways had two carriages, a main one with the engine and a second one without doors, with a platform at each end. On Saturday, to be sure to be the first one out, I never went inside. I stayed on the platform near the exit, even on rainy days. I tried hard not to get off before the complete stop because I had been told it was dangerous, and anyway when risking it, to do it always in the way forwards. In those years the world was not so much a place where you were protected, but a world to learn how to survive.

Long before reaching my house, I had the key ready in my hand. In the house, taking two steps at a time, it didn't take long to be on the second floor. I can say that as soon as the school bell rang at three fifteen, the race was on without stopping up 'til now. . .

In front of that door, "the door," all rushing vanished! I stopped, entered slowly, religiously. Mummy's room was more or less a forbidden place, not exactly, but I was smart enough to perceive that it was maybe not a proper thing to do. But temptation! You cannot beat that!

In one corner was a vanity table with a large round mirror and in the corner facing it, a wardrobe with a mirrored door. Standing between the two mirrors, I could see behind myself. Part way between, part in front of the two windows, a grand bed took mostly all the room. So between the head of the bed, the two mirrors, and the door going to the bathroom, there was a square space.

I was in "the room." Respect, devotion. I opened the wardrobe and there it was. Still with respect and devotion but with care of not messing up anything inside the wardrobe, I took the dress. And, delicately, I put it on. The high heel shoes were there too. Too large for me, miserable to wear, BUT they were high heel shoes!

Two mirrors, a bed and a door. Just a square space? No, a stage, spacious, blazing with multiple lights had appeared, and I was the performer. The Star! No cloud, no smoke, no fog around me. It was real!

I spent wonderful, incredible times daydreaming, fantasizing, dancing, singing...!

Only one thing drove me back to reality: the sound of Christian's key in the front door. Happily, he was a boy. And boys, as all males, are usually not very keen to even imagine what a girl can do. He never bothered me.

This is my secret. Nobody ever knew. Well! Believe it just to keep intact my childish delight.



THE LESSON OF THE NAIL FILE

by
J.M. Jennings Jr.

I grew up in my Auntie's home in New Orleans after my Mother's death when I was three years old. By the time I had reached seven or eight years of age, I had noticed that on the top of a dresser in her bedroom, Auntie kept a modest assortment of artificial coloring agents and compounds formulated to improve or enhance a ladies' skin coloring or appearance. In my youthful ignorance, I failed to notice, or place any importance on my observation, that only females seemed to require a daily coating of powder and paint. For certain, the only two adult males in my life, my Daddy and my Uncle Modoc, seemed content to groom themselves by simply scraping their faces each morning with either a straight razor or a Gillette double edge blade.

Auntie's beautifying ritual intrigued me, which was the only experience I had with anything like it until I married. Auntie never seemed embarrassed or unsettled as I stood by her side and watched, although I do recall two occasions when I think she may have invented legitimate reasons to send me out of her room on errands.

Once she said, "Please, go down into the basement and check that all of the clothes we hung on the lines yesterday evening have dried." Another time, Auntie asked me to "go out on the front steps and bring in the milk if it's delivered, please. I think I just heard the milk truck's brakes squeal." The thought never occurred to me that she might be testing some new concoction or potion in private.

The top of Auntie's dresser fascinated me for it also displayed a thoughtfully assembled collection of implements designed to assist a lady in the beautifying process. I have always thought of these tools as a *dresser* set or *vanity* set, although I recently discovered an illustration in a 1927 Sears and Roebuck catalog that describes a similar assortment as a *toilet set*.

Auntie's set included a foot long hand mirror, a large comb, a large hair brush, a nail file with a fragile, decorative handle, and a fingernail buffer, each of ivory colored celluloid. A fellow classmate who grew up in Arkansas told me recently that the gossip around her home town was that, "ladies used a finger nail buffer to *buff* their nails to a high shine, while 'ladies-of-the-evening' used their buffers to *polish* their nails" [an interesting Clintonian distinction].

Complementing these tools were a decorated cardboard container of "Coty" brand face powder, a half dollar sized, gold colored metal case of rouge powder, and a

cut crystal jar of fragrant, lavender flower petals, each item important to the well being of a lady of the 1920's.

I frequently visited Auntie as she did her hair and face. Hair combing always came first, followed by brushing her long brown hair. I don't know if my Aunt counted the number of strokes, but I sometimes wondered if the hog bristles would wear out or fall out before she finished.

Face coloring followed. A minute dab of rouge went on each cheek and was carefully massaged and blended in so that her rosy cheeks looked natural. Face powder was applied next, patted on with a soft powder puff. I thought the powder was intended to subdue the youthful shine of healthy skin. Could that have been a 1920's fashion fad?

Lip stick? I don't remember, but there was a shallow, glass jar of a colorless gel for the lips, somewhat like today's chap stick. I always thought Auntie was beautiful as she inspected herself holding the hand mirror on one side and then the other.

Auntie allowed me to use her nail file to smooth my nails under her supervision, and this familiarity got me into trouble. During her absence one day, I borrowed the file to smooth a sharp edge on a wooden toy, and while doing so, I accidentally snapped the celluloid handle off the metal file. Feeling guilty about the damage, I reasoned that if I concealed the evidence, the problem would go away and be forgotten.

I hid the broken pieces under a heavy cedar chest where woolen blankets and sweaters were stored. Then I forgot about my faux-pas until that evening when the household investigators questioned me. During my interrogation, I confessed my guilt for the destruction of Auntie's prized nail file. Also, I begged for forgiveness for my unacceptable behavior, and even retrieved the broken pieces I had hidden under the cedar chest.

The next evening, my Daddy came home from work with a gaily wrapped box containing a duplicate of the ivory colored, celluloid handled nail file that I had broken.

I still recall my feelings of remorse that night when I presented the replacement to Auntie. I apologized for destroying the treasured original and promised never, never to touch her nail file again.

That experience taught me a lasting lesson about honesty and care with other people's possessions. During the following three score and ten years plus, I can proudly boast that I have not broken any other person's nail file and attempted to hide the pieces.



THE CATHEDRAL CYPRESS

by

John A. Townsend, Jr.

When I first saw the tall cypress I was 8 years of age. Daddy, Uncle Red, and Mr. Frank Sparks were target shooting, water moccasins if they saw one, but turtles, of which there were plenty, were their favorite. Cypress nuts or berries were targets when there was nothing else. The white Cranes and Storks were a 'No - No' as far as the men were concerned. As usual, I tagged along whenever there was a chance to go to the woods and Daddy most often allowed it. The men were shooting Daddy's 44/40 pistol, a .40 caliber on a .44 caliber frame. Mr. Sparks was the best shot of the three, able to pop the head off a turtle or a swimming snake, although I have seen Daddy keep a #3 can in the air using all six shots in the pistol. When I kept asking to shoot the pistol Uncle Red told Daddy, "John, let him try it one time."

"It will knock him down," replied Daddy.

Mr. Sparks added, "I don't know, the little squirt is as stout as a little bull calf."

"Please," I spoke.

"Okay, Junior", Daddy said, "Take the pistol – that's right keep the barrel pointed away from everyone."

I nodded, facing the trees across the water filled ditch leading into 'Giant' slough. Daddy squatted behind me while I raised the pistol, using both hands.

"Cock the gun," he said.

Using both thumbs I managed to ear the hammer back. Daddy rested his hands lightly atop my forearms while I followed his instructions to sight at a knothole in a cypress tree some thirty feet away. At his words, "Squeeze the trigger," I did so.

"Ka-Bam!" spoke the pistol, and bark flew from the tree.

Only the fact that my target was about three feet in diameter made me able to hit it, and Daddy's hands atop my arms kept the pistol from recoiling back to hit me in the head or face. If I had not already fired Mama's .410 gauge shotgun a few times prior to this event I would probably have sworn off guns because my ears rang for thirty minutes after the shot.

During a lull in the shooting, and while the men were smoking and having a drink of 'Old Grandad' whiskey, I asked Mr. Sparks about the tall tree that looked like a cross at the top.

He replied, "The natives here call it the 'Cathedral Cypress' because the limbs at the top resemble two crosses. It is over 100 feet tall. We'll have to boat in and see it sometime, when the water is a little higher. Then we will have a channel into it."

"Okay," I said, and began skipping rocks off the water.

There was a plentiful supply since the Doyline road was directly behind, not yet blacktopped in this year 1935.

It was three years later, duck hunting season, on a mild late November afternoon, that I found myself in a two-man canvas kayak with Mama's .410 slung across my shoulder, using clothesline for the sling, while I helped Mr. Sparks paddle alongside the roadway and into the narrow channel of Giant slough which led us up to where the Cathedral cypress was, about one-half mile north of the road.

A pair of mallard ducks skittered across the water ahead of us. Hastily I balanced my paddle across the kayak and unlimbered the .410. "Pow!" I shot, and one of the ducks flipped over. As the second left the water with a rush of wings I hastily ejected the spent shell and reloaded.

Mr. Sparks spoke, "Hold it. Your little gun won't reach him."

A minute later he was attaching a fat drake to a string attached to the canvas of our craft. We resumed paddling.

The shot must have scared any more ducks into hiding for we saw only high fliers until we reached the 'tree'.

I don't know what I expected to see but the sight put me in awe. The Cypress was huge, dwarfing other trees that were thirty or forty feet tall. Its trunk was something to behold. At water level the cypress knees that surrounded it formed a platform that one could have used to traverse its diameter. I was surprised to see the remnants of some boards still nailed atop some of the knees.

When I questioned Mr. Sparks I was told that some fellows had operated a moonshine still during prohibition days. Only they knew another way in during low water.

He nosed the kayak between a pair of cypress knees and I climbed out of the boat. I counted forty-eight steps while circling the base of the tree, stepping gingerly from one knee to the next, avoiding the rotten lumber. On one side I found an entry into the cypress boll. A natural break in the trunk had been enlarged using an axe it seemed. Wood slabs made a floor over a few gaps where the trunk had not closed over the water. I counted eight steps across the interior, roughly 12 feet. The remains of three bunks were still attached to the wall, a double on one wall, and a single on another. Someone had mounted a crude wooden cross just above the doorway on the inside of the wall. At the back were the rusted remains of a firebox, and a crude wooden vat or barrel that had been bound by vines. The wood above was charred rock hard all the way up to a vent or hole in the trunk about 20 feet above the interior of the tree. It was an awesome feeling being inside the tree.

We resumed our hunting and shot four or five more ducks before the approaching darkness sent us back to Mr. Sparks camp on Dorcheat Bayou.

During the time I was in service during and after WWII, six or eight years later, lightning knocked the top half of the tree down into the water and split the lower trunk. A gravel company mining for sand and gravel in the 1960s finished the tree off, another bit of history gone and forgotten by all but those old enough to remember.



THE SHINY HALF DOLLAR

by
Betty Shoemaker

Gene and Dixie Flash and their children reside on Wayne Street in New Iberia. I met Dixie at Iberia General Hospital when we were both on the nursing staff.

In the summer of 1967, Gene underwent surgery for a hernia repair. Gene was unable to drive, stoop, or lift anything heavier than five pounds for six weeks.

One afternoon, as Dixie and I were having coffee, Gene told Dixie this would be an ideal time to get the kitchen and hall painted. Gene asked me if my son Chuck could do the painting. I told Gene, "Chuck is only fourteen years old and has no experience; I doubt if he has ever picked up a paint roller." Gene assured me that he would instruct Chuck, and he would do fine. I agreed to let Chuck try, but not be responsible for the outcome.

Dixie's youngest sister, Julie, who was Chuck's age, came to spend the summer. This really complicated matters as Chuck had discovered girls.

Each morning I left Chuck at the Flash residence and picked him up on my way home.

One morning I went in to see how the job was going. Gene said, "There is only one problem. Chuck can't keep his eyes off Julie." After Gene and Chuck had a "man-to-man" talk, Chuck's work improved.

One morning on the way to work, I asked Chuck if he and Gene had agreed on a price. Chuck told me they had not even discussed a price. "Son, you always bid on a job and agree on a price, before accepting a job." I told him, "Next time you will be better prepared."

All went well, and soon the job was finished. I felt sure Chuck possessed the capability to perform anything he wanted to and do it very well. Chuck had really amazed all of us with the job he did

Later, as Dixie and I were enjoying a cup of coffee, Dixie asked Gene if he had paid Chuck. Chuck was in the yard with the children. I had never known Gene to be a prankster. He went to the door and called Chuck. As Chuck entered the kitchen, Gene reached in his pocket and said, "Chuck, this is your payment plus a bonus for a job well done," and he placed a shiny half-dollar in the palm of Chuck's hand. With the strangest look on his face Chuck carefully tucked the coin in his pocket. He thanked Gene and made a quick exit to the yard. Gene leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter.

Dixie lashed out at Gene, "Gene, how could you do that to a child?" After Gene contained his laughter, he called Chuck into the kitchen and placed four crisp five dollar bills in Chuck's hand. With a proud look of accomplishment on his face, Chuck graciously thanked Gene as he tucked the folded bills in his pocket and vanished.

I was extremely proud of my son; under adverse circumstances, he conducted himself like the gentleman he always was.



THE PEDDLING HACK

by
Versie L. Foti

One of my early childhood memories is of being at Grandma Johnson's house on Thursday afternoons when "The Peddling Hack" would pass. We children ran around in the front yard playing "Tag" and "Chase" while we waited for the magical moment. How excited we became when the cloud of dust appeared first, then we heard the clanging of the pots and pans which announced the approach of the peddling hack!

The peddling hack was basically a wagon with three sides enclosed with wooden planks and a tin roof. The front of the box-like structure was left open and had a curtain that could be drawn to prevent dust from getting inside. The height inside was perhaps 5 ½ to 6 feet from the wagon bed to the roof, ample room for the driver and a prospective customer to walk down the center aisle. A long narrow wooden bench with heavy metal springs provided a seat for the peddler who drove the team of mules that pulled the "store on wheels".

Inside the hack were shelves stacked with bolts of fabric, prints and solid colors, which were for sale for making clothing, curtains or quilts. Several drawers contained sewing thread, buttons, snaps, scissors, needles and pins, notions that were essential for the seamstress. On the opposite wall were bins containing such things as sugar, flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, coffee, pepper and perhaps a few other spices. The mobile "country store" might carry a few gallon cans of sausage preserved in oil, a few gallons of cane syrup, oatmeal, cornmeal, chicken feed or potatoes for planting. Best of all that I remember were the jars of hard candies and jelly beans for sale or were sometimes given as "lagniappe".

Attached to the rear of the hack was a wooden and wire crate to contain the chickens, ducks, geese and guineas that were taken in trade from the farm women who purchased needed goods. The pots and pans for sale that hung on either side of the hack made a clanging sound as the mules trotted along the dusty road from house to house. The banging pots and clanging pans signaled the customers that the peddler was near and if they needed anything, they should make their way to the side of the road.

Grandma sat waiting on the front porch on each Thursday afternoon with her basket of eggs near. She couldn't do without certain necessities, so she would barter using eggs. Her next trip to town might not be for a month or more, so the peddling hack was a convenience.

Grandma had already taken her daily afternoon nap and had brewed and drunk a cup of strong hot coffee that propelled her through the multitude of afternoon chores. The wait for the peddler afforded her the opportunity to play a few hands of Solitaire before she began the ritual of sewing clothes for the family, or piecing quilt blocks, or crocheting scarves for the furniture or working in the garden.

When the peddling hack crossed the bridge over the gully, indicated by the clatter of the hoofs of the mules on the wood, it was time for Grandma to put her cards away, pick up her basket of eggs and make her way to the side of the road.

"Whoa!" shouted the peddler to the mules as he pulled back on the reins from his seat. "How you doing, Miz Johnson? See you got the younguns with you today. Well, I just might happen to have a special s'prize for them."

As the driver looped the reins over a pole on the side of the hack, we jostled for position, anxiously waiting for our treats. Grandma handed her egg basket up to the peddler and asked, "How much are eggs today?"

"Why, you're sure in luck today, Miz Johnson. Yesterday they wuz 9 cents, but today, I can give you 10 cents a dozen. Let's see, you have quite a basketful here!" He disappeared behind the curtain to count the eggs.

Grandma answered, "Yes, Sir, I think I have 10 dozen."

"Right you are, Miz Johnson. An even dollar's worth. And what will you have today?" he asked.

Grandma pondered, "Let's see, I'll have a can of baking powder, 10 cents, a 5 # bag of sugar, 15 cents, 2 spools of white sewing thread, size 60, 10 cents, a box of salt, 5 cents, a 10# bag of flour, 20 cents, a box of baking soda, 5 cents, a small box of cocoa, 10 cents, and 2 # of green coffee, 20 cents. That comes to 95 cents, right?" Grandma checked off her previously tallied list.

"Yessiree, Miz Johnson. You have a nickel left."

"Well, just give me a nickel's worth of mixed candy for the younguns."

"Sure, and I'll put in a little extra for lagniappe." The peddler put Grandma's purchases in the basket and handed it down to her.

Grandma shooed us children into the yard as she walked behind us and closed the gate. We gathered around her anxiously waiting for her to divide the candy.

The peddler picked up the reins and gently slapped them across the backs of the mules. "Gid-up!" he shouted. "See you next week, Miz Johnson," he called to Grandma as the mules trotted off amid the clanging of the pots and pans and the cloud of dust.

When I was about 7 or 8 years old, the peddler replaced the mule drawn hack with a truck but we still called it “The Peddling Hack”. For at least a few years the same man drove the truck. Instead of the clanging and banging of the pots and pans, the “A-ooga, A-ooga” of the horn signaled the approach of “The Peddling Hack”—a less dramatic approach, but still filling us with excitement and expectancy.



TEXAS BIG HAIR

by
Bea Murphy

President Bush's inauguration and ball featured a special Texas delegation. The press often referred to the Texas crowd as having cowboy hats, cowboy boots, and women with "Big Hair."

I never thought of myself with Texas Big Hair, but looking through my photos, I found one picture that Jim, my husband, had taken of me when I was in my early forties. Lo and behold, I had big hair! I also had clear eyes, no bridge work, no wrinkles, and no glasses.

Jim had taken a photographic correspondence course through the Air Force and learned to develop his own negatives. As a result, I have boxes of photos of my Louisiana and Texas families from Jim's photography days.

If I could only have my old hair back, those sparkling eyes, no wrinkles and all my old teeth.

I never went to a beauty shop. Instead I would shampoo and set my hair at home once a week. No teasing, no hair spray, no "Loving Care" color. I even cut my own hair.

I remember once going to a beauty shop and the hair dresser cut all my hair off. Even when I told him to stop! He never said a word and just kept cutting. I hid myself in my apartment for a week before I ventured out.

Jim, a dentist, always warned me to stay out of beauty shops. He would comment that he saw too many female patients with big Texas hair. Hay stacks, he called them.

When Jim died twenty one years ago, I was still slender. I had my good hair, I didn't wear glasses and I had no bridge work.

I'm glad that he last saw me like that.



THE HOME MANAGEMENT HOUSE

*by
Kitty Kelley*

The two-story, white, house that adjoins the Ira Nelson Horticulture Farm, was previously the Home Management House. It was originally the Whittington home. The family donated the land that had been the Whittington farm to the University. The land for a Catholic church was also donated by the Whittington family, and Fatima Church was built. The house has been changed a little. Originally there was a wide gallery across the front of the house on both levels.

When I lived there as a senior at SLI, two of the other girls smoked. In the evening when our work was done, and if the boys weren't coming over to dance, the smokers would sit on the upper gallery with their backs against the wall. The rest of us would join them and sit along the wall like nuts in a peanut gallery.

There were four bedrooms in the house upstairs. Three were furnished in Early American Tacky. Eight senior girls were to spend nine weeks together, learning all there was to know about "keeping house." One room had recently been furnished with currently modern furniture, nothing to stir Martha Stewart's envy, but passably decent. We looked over the rooms, and, of course, we all wanted the better room. Miss Zelma Patchin had us draw straws. My roommate, Muriel Pilcher, let me draw, and I lucked out. We got the best room. We moved in and thus began nine weeks of fun.

Several times a week the "ag boys" we knew from our classes would come over and roll the carpet up and move all the furniture. We'd dance 'til midnight when Zelma would call out, "Time to go, boys." Before the boys kissed us good night they very neatly rolled the carpet back and replaced the furniture. We all thought Miss Patchin was an old old maid, but looking back I think she must have been in her mid-thirties. She never came in the parlor while we had company but she never went to sleep until we settled down.

Ethel Marchand and Lorraine O'Quin roomed together. Eleanor Vincent and Charlotte Sturdivant were in the room across the hall from us. Alice Broussard and Lite Bonin were together. We were a very agreeable group--no dissensions, no rivalry, lots of cooperation, much hilarity, and very hospitable at all times, especially when the ag profs dropped in for a cup of coffee. Ira Nelson, Louis Bourg, and Riley (don't remember his first name) were regulars. They were always happy to catch us in the kitchen taking orange muffins out of the oven. I think they picked a time when they were reasonably sure to be there for baking time. Remember, we were on a regular

work schedule. I don't remember Dr. Blackham coming for coffee, but he was in the Ag Department also. Dr. Blackham and Dr. Bourg died very young. I remember Dr. Bourg especially because he came to lunch with us one day while I was cook. We had iced tea, and he asked if he could have hot tea instead because he was so cold. He looked sick at that time, and not too long after we left the Home Management House I heard of his death.

Life was routine and always interesting in the HMH. Aside from Alice almost blowing up the entire house one day, our emergencies were the kind that we could handle. Remember, this was over fifty years ago. The gas stove oven did not have a pilot light. A match was needed to light it. Alice turned the oven on, then struck a match. She almost became the first woman in orbit, but was uninjured when the collected gas ignited and blew her across the room.

Muriel fell down the stairs and sprained her ankle. We took her to the school nurse, Adrienne, who bandaged Muriel's ankle and gave her a handful of pain killers to take as needed. This happened just before Christmas. Miss Patchin and the girls went caroling, but I stayed home with Muriel. I didn't notice Muriel take all the pills at once. She scared me. I called her mother to ask what I should do. Her mother told me to make some strong coffee and see if I could get her to drink some. I did. Eventually Muriel calmed down and finally went to sleep. I was very aggravated with Zelma Patchin because she had wanted to leave Muriel alone in that big house, even in her condition.

When Rabbi Binstock, a very distinguished speaker, was on campus the head of the Home Ec Department thought it a wonderful opportunity for the girls in the home management house to have the experience of entertaining such a well known personage. The college president, Joel Fletcher, and many dignitaries, including the mayor of Lafayette, accompanied the Rabbi to the house. We all wanted everything to be perfect and it was, until I bumped a flimsy little table and sent a small pot plant crashing to the floor, scattering flowers and dirt at the Rabbi's feet. At that moment, if the floor had opened and swallowed me, I would have been happy. No such luck! I went ahead and shook hands with him and told him I didn't usually greet visitors that way. The Rabbi was very gracious and said, "At least it didn't land on my new shoes."

In looking back on our time in the Home Management House I remember the fun times and very little of whatever it was we were supposed to be learning. The eight girls had all grown up in the depression years. We had grown up doing our share of house work at home. I think we taught Zelma Patchin a lot about combining work and pleasure.



STEALING STELLA

by

Johnnie Kocurek

“Royce, carry the money and take care of Johnnie Lee. Johnnie Lee, you behave and stay out of trouble.”

My double second cousin took the handful of streetcar tokens and coins Gaw handed him.

Royce, a foot taller than I, more worldly than I, could get me to the circus ground across town, help spend the money wisely, and get me home safely. He and I ran to the car stop, got on the streetcar, and he dropped our tokens into the coin bucket.

We sat comfortably in the trolley discussing everything we wanted to do. “How many side shows can I see?” I asked. “Two for sure, three if you don’t want cotton candy,” Royce teased.

The streetcar took us to the end of the line leaving a two mile walk to the circus ground. We walked a short distance and a police car pulled up along side of us. “Want a ride?” a familiar voice asked. “Sure, Paw Paw,” I responded. I gave my grandfather a quick peck on his cheek. “Will you blow the siren one time?” A blast of noise came from the car just as I saw the big tent ahead of us.

“Find Ev before you leave. He has a job hauling water to the elephants.” Paw Paw spoke with pride as he talked of his great nephew.

“Did you hear about his connecting up with Tom Mix?” I asked.

“What happened?” My grandfather sat up a little taller at the mention of Tom Mix.

“Ev took off a few minutes from watering the elephants yesterday afternoon and tried slipping under the big canvas tent to see the show. He was halfway under when two roustabouts saw his hind end on the outside of the tent. They grabbed him by the seat of his pants and pulled him out. They were roughing him up pretty good when a voice interrupted them. ‘Let go of that boy and let him go in.’ Ev looked up and discovered who belonged to the voice. Tom Mix himself. Even shook Ev’s hand and held the canvas up so he could crawl under it. He’s a celebrity, Paw Paw said.

“Well, yeah Paw Paw, he’s been in the movies,” I answered.

“I’m not talking about Tom Mix, I’m talking about Ev. I always knew that boy would amount to something.”

Paw Paw drove us to the circus ground entrance. We thanked him for the ride and jumped out of the police car. “Be good,” he said. “Don’t get into any trouble. Be careful

with your money cause a lot of those guys are crooks. Don't let them cheat you." With that bit of advice, he drove off.

I stood looking at the sideshow offerings. My eye caught a small man waving a cane toward the curtains that lead inside a small stage. Then he pointed his cane at me. "One thin dime. Come on in. It takes six strong men to lift her." A sign painted on the curtains read 'THE HEAVIEST WOMAN IN THE WORLD.' The rest of the curtain was covered by a painting of a huge woman under which was a single word...STELLA.

Royce surrendered my dime, and I entered the opening in the curtains. Stella was all the hawker claimed her to be...certainly the heaviest woman I had ever seen in my life.

I left STELLA'S tent searching for another side show when I saw, hanging from the rafter of a small makeshift booth, the most beautiful pink stuffed elephant dressed in a frilly tutu.

"Ring the bell, win a prize!" I heard a little man say. He raised a mallet, hit a platform and sent a metal disc straight up a board, striking a bell.

"Royce, I want that elephant more than anything I've ever wanted in the world. I think I can ring the bell."

Royce handed the little man ten cents which the bell ringer immediately put in his pocket. "She'll ring the bell," Royce told him pointing to me. Quickly the man put the mallet he was holding on the ground, reached behind him, picked up a larger mallet and handed it to me. I couldn't lift it. "I want that other mallet," pointing to the smaller one laying behind him.

"Can't have that one," he said as he picked up the small one and leaned it next to his booth wall.

"I'll do it," Royce said.

"That will be another dime, boy."

Royce looked at the pink elephant as he gave the man another dime. My second double cousin put both hands on the mallet handle, lifted the mallet up, up, up to his knees and dropped it. "Move on, move on, boy," ordered the little man as he picked up the smaller mallet and demonstrated how easy it was to ring the bell.

A young man paid his dime and was handed the heavier mallet. The little mallet leaned against the wall, unwatched and tempting.

Royce pulled me to his side. "When I say *GO*, follow me and be fast about it."

"GO!" whispered Royce walking in a fast gait toward an open field. In his right hand was the small mallet.

The two mile walk to the streetcar line was hard on Royce. Although he was a strong thirteen-year-old, the mallet was a burden to him and he carried, dragged, and even pushed it across the field. I helped all I could, taking a turn, pulling it down the

road. It was the heaviest thing I ever pulled. I named the mallet 'STELLA' remembering the heaviest woman I had ever seen.

We were thankful Paw Paw did not come by and offer us a ride. We could not have explained STELLA to the Chief of Police. I suggested to Royce that we drop the mallet and leave STELLA along the road. "No." Royce's tone was full of regret and guilt. Both of us hung our heads.

"The little man can't run his booth without STELLA. I'll come back in the morning and tell him we'd return STELLA to him," Royce said, talking to me and God.

STELLA was put under our feet on the streetcar ride home, and then hidden in a dark corner of Gaw's garage for the rest of the night.

Royce returned to the circus grounds the next morning. He found the "RING THE BELL" booth. Signs were gone, the platform, board, and the bell were gone, and so was the little man and his heavy mallet. A passing circus worker told Royce that the man had packed up the night before. No one knew where he had gone.

STELLA lived in Gaw's garage until I moved from Hot Springs. STELLA moved with me and occupied a prominent place everywhere I lived.

I have looked at STELLA almost everyday for many years. To this day, I feel guilty that I put that little man out of business. Many nights I have had trouble falling asleep thinking about the afternoon Royce and I went to the circus to be good, to stay out of trouble, and to have fun.

WE DIDN'T END UP FINDING EV, MEETING TOM MIX, OR BUYING COTTON CANDY. WE JUST ENDED UP "STEALING STELLA."



TICKET IN MY POCKET

by

Olympe Butcher

There have been so many stories told about Louisiana's most interesting political figures, Huey and Earl Long, that I wondered what kind of tales I would hear at the symposium on the life and political career of Earl K. Long on Saturday, Sept. 19, 1998, at Louisiana State College to which I had been invited.

My friend Lessie Wynne had given me such a special invitation to attend that I could hardly refuse. (Her son Michael Wynne, historian and genealogist, was chairperson of the program sponsored by the Department of History and Political Science of Louisiana College on the 50th anniversary of Earl Long's initial election as governor of Louisiana as told by the people who knew him.)

Speakers and panel guests included many of the candidates and other officials who served during the Long regime: Sixty Rayburn, Speedy Long, Carlos Spaht, Harold McSween, George, and Clyde Bennett.

One story, especially, remained with me. One panelist (whose wife told us later while we ate a delicious meal at noon, that he didn't want to be a speaker at all) told the best story of how Earl Long felt so much and wanted so much to help the poor people of the state. I've entitled his story "Ticket In My Pocket."

As Earl traveled throughout the state politicking, his driver (the panelist) in charge of the sound trucks for the campaign drove into a little Louisiana town. Soon there was a large gathering of people from the surrounding area. Because Earl felt so deeply for the poor, it was his custom to have baskets, each containing a ham, lard, and groceries, to give out to the needy after his campaign speech. But this time he was worried. The crowd was much larger than the twenty baskets he had. As Earl glanced around, he noticed a young mother with three children. Upon inquiring Earl soon found out that she was new in town, with three small children and owned nothing. He whispered to his driver, "She must get a basket, but how will we manage, with such a large crowd?" "I'll take care of that," the driver replied.

The driver took out his fish bowl and gave everyone a ticket, placing the stubs in the fish bowl. As he approached the young mother she very shyly said, "No, thank you." Upon coaxing her—and telling her, "Everyone gets a ticket. Take it." She did. The driver at this point took her stub and placed it in his pocket.

Now after Earl's speech, the twenty baskets were to be distributed as the winners' stubs were pulled out of the fish bowl. After a while, at the appropriate time, the driver reached for the "ticket in the pocket" and as he looked at the young mother

with three kids he called out her number. She was new in town and had a basket to take home. No one asked her how she voted!!





The following pieces are the results of our final assignment, which I delivered with more enthusiasm than clear direction. Some students grumbled, some trembled, some conspired and rebelled, but all wrote as the writers they are, looking back on their experiences this year. The poems are about the intimate circle of friends these once upon a time strangers may have been. Let the inside references make you part of the world of this class act of life writers.

Inside the Circle

by Johnnie Kocurek

I am part of those in a circle that has formed.

I'm a part of Vee in a field the night it stormed.

I'm a part of Joe on cathedral steps holding a young girl's hand,
a part of John Q. and his Georgia Cracker land.

I'm a part of Bea and her art of sharing the ups and downs of her only son, Larry.

I'm a part of Betty Shoe, feeling her loss as Mothers do

And I'm a part of Olympe Butcher, the Arceneauxs and the Moutons that touch her.

I'm a part of Jacqueline, a young girl posing in a yellow dress

And a part of Kitty Kelley and her son, the general, a cut above the rest.

I'm a part of Jim's pride in the United States Navy and his culinary skills making
white gravy.

And I'm a part of John T., an adventurous man, exploring outdoors as only he can.

I'm a part of Bob who can tell a tale, and I'm a part of Rita, who never learned to
inhale.

I, too, am part of the circle held together by Joan.

We all are blooming fellow writers by choice,

Who will wither a bit when Joan is gone.

LIFE & LETTERS CLASS

by Jacqueline Fryns

I am part of hairdo's world

Because of Bea.

I am part of a talking mule's world

Because of Betty.

I am part of natural gas' world

Because of Bob.

I am part of business and job's world

Because of John.

I open my ears and my mind.

I listen.

I become wiser and happier,

Now.

I am part of many different little worlds.

It makes me part of the whole world.

I am part of it;

I am part of Humanity.

The Cruise of the Agin' Cajun

by Bob Maley

Come sail on the Agin' Cajun!
And ho! to her mighty crew.
They set sail in a gale to spin a tale
And swear that it is true.

So heave a ho, my hearties,
And bend a listening ear,
As we sail the seas of our reveries,
In command of Captain Stear.

We're bound for the land of Olympe-ia,
To the shores of Cajun lore,
And listen to a Versie for better or worsie,
From nineteen and Foti-four.

Jim Jennings, the trusty helmsman,
And his mate is Glorious Joe.
These two who stear wear a ring in their ear,
And outrun any foe.

Kelley shy, climbs the riggin' high,
Ms. Murphy belays the pin,
With John Q. Lee and Bob Malee,
And trusty Jac-que-line.

Shoemaker is the gunner's mate,
John Townsend mans the deck,
With Welborn Rita, and the fair "conchita,"
Johnnie Kocurek.

So heave a ho, my hearties,
And bend a listening ear,
As we sail the seas of our reveries,
With tales for all to hear.

Memories

by Betty Shoemaker

I remember Olympe's wonderful stories of her Acadian culture and family genealogy.
I traveled with Versie down the dirt road in the cane fields to look for the old crippled
gentleman who changed her flat tire in the rain.

I suffered through Jacqueline's days in prison camp during World War II.

I remember Jim's critter in his backyard.

I strolled on the L.S.U. campus with Joe and went overseas with him during World
War II.

I went on a trip with Kitty to her family's farm in New York State.

I remember the old Indian and the new five copper pennies next door to Johnnie.

I remember sitting in the first class John Q. taught.

I landed a P51 at the airport as Bob watched from his front yard.

I traveled to the birthplace of Bea, her grandmother's home.

I fished with John in North Louisiana when we were children.

I enjoyed growing up with Rita in Donaldsonville.

I Am A Part Of

by Versie L. Foti

- I am a part of the beautiful relationship between Olympe and her adored brother,
Charley Boy.
- I am a part of her early life in Belgium as experienced by Jacqueline.
- I am a part of the romances of Joe's boyhood years growing up in New Iberia,
Louisiana.
- I am a part of the intimacy that Jim shared with his family in New Orleans where he
spent his early years, and his later years when he was in the military.
- I am a part of the wonderful years on the farm in upstate New York as recalled by
Kitty.
- I am a part of the fun and laughter and childhood escapades as told by Johnnie.
- I am a part of the rural Georgia Hill Country so lovingly described by the Georgia
Cracker, John Q. Lee. His experiences in the classroom as a teacher were a
delight to my soul.
- I am a part of the learning experiences of writing and storytelling of the "New Kid On
The Block," Bob. Even though we grew up miles apart, our childhood was
similar.
- I am a part of the antics and pranks of both Bea and Larry and the early Acadian
family Bea has researched and so graciously shared with us.
- I am a part of the courage that Betty displays in her struggle to do her assignments
and get back and forth to class in spite of her handicap.
- I am a part of the North Louisiana influence and love of family, as well as his interest
in preserving history, which shines through in John's stories.
- I am a part of the early, rich Donaldsonville area stories shared with us by Rita.
- We are all individuals, unique in our way,
But cut from the same cloth in having our say.

Participant

by John Townsend

I am a part of...

Olympe's travels of the Acadians;

Versie's era of integration in schools;

Jacqueline's remark about becoming old: *It has been so fast that I didn't see the time pass;*

Joe's war adventures and fishing on the Teche;

Jim's "private conversation that only I remember" and "that car I never owned," and his father's stint in WWI;

Kitty's corner grocery store;

Johnnie's conning of the tourists in Hot Springs, Arkansas;

John Q.'s teaching school in Georgia, to traveling to the oil fields of Texas;

Bob's reminiscing of the P-51 Fighters—the queen of the skies over Europe in WWII;

Bea's talking animals—don't laugh. I've seen some bird dogs that could—almost;

Betty's tragedies, to six-gun Molly;

Rita's first trip to St. James and the surprise she found;

My own, "Where did the spring go?"

We are from all walks of life and simpler ties, but as one we are history.

I LIKED or I REMEMBER or I AM A PART OF. .. Or MAYBE I JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THIS ASSIGNMENT!

by Jim Jennings

I liked Olympe Butcher's stories about Charlie Boy, and I admire her photography. I vividly remember Versie Foti's lonely experience with a flat tire in a rainy, dark sugar cane field.

I admire the cheerfulness of Jacqueline Fryns, the Belgian lady with the beautiful smile.

I am impressed by Joe Glorioso's stories of his skiff and his childhood adventures on Bayou Teche.

Jim Jennings—Out of a sense of modesty, I shall skip him.

I stood with Kitty Kelley and watched the New York landscape through her eyes as she told of her family vacations on the farm.

I'll always treasure Johnnie Kocurek's description of war-time stocking substitutes and garter belts. (I hope this is not too racy for this class!)

I forgot to ask if John Q. Lee, the Georgia Cracker, ever really got bucked off a horse or if being a Texas cowboy is a myth.

I relished the manner that Bob Maley used to describe his recollection of the screaming roar of a P-51 Mustang's Rolls Royce Merlin engine running at full throttle.

I was amused by Bea Murphy's yarns about her adventures raising her son, Larry.

I recall Betty Shoemaker's anguish as she wrote of her son's accidental death.

I admire the effort that John Townsend expended to research his reports of historical happenings.

I cringed at the unsuccessful, gut-wrenching effort that Rita Welborn made to learn to smoke cigarettes.

Finally, we are friends now, writers of history who compete only against ourselves.

Postscript: I will always remember the dedication and the murderously long hours that Joan Stear gave to read our stories and to make thoughtful suggestions about how we might improve them.

T'ain't No Poem
by Joe Glorioso

I remember my lovely girlfriend writing so eloquently about her ancestors long departed.

I remember my pretty Cajun dreamboat writing reverently about her ancestors ever so long, long ago.

I remember my elegant Georgia Cracker writing in chronological order about his life from Georgia to Texas and finally to our great Cajun Country, admittedly, the love of his life.

I remember the kind Southern Belle sharing and saddening our lives as we listened to the tragedies in her life and the solutions to them.

I remember the Belgian matron cheerfully writing about living as a young girl in Belgium's beautiful countryside.

I remember the serenely deliberate teacher writing vividly and objectively about the integration of students in Shady Grove High School.

I remember the helpful dude from New Orleans writing respectfully about his father soldiering patriotically in the U.S. Army during World War I.

I remember the displaced Southern writing eloquently about summers with her family on a farm in New York State after her co-ed years at SLI.

I remember the memorable stories of the great organizer of the many extra-curricular activities she managed to contrive for our enjoyment.

I remember the French teacher writing delightful stories of Donaldsonville where I vacationed during the summers of my early childhood.

I remember the stately gentleman from the northwest corner of Louisiana writing stories of his youth, which reminded me in many instances of the experiences of my own youthful days and nights.

I remember the illustrator-man writing about World War II P-51's and about the thrills encountered in naughty New Orleans.

I remember my pretty pencil pushing mademoiselle mutilating my writings with a severely pointed pencil fiendishly grimacing as the carbon tear like, flowed from my printed letters down the page, embarrassing my computer which bears the fault of typographical errors, mismatching subjects and verbs, ignoring long run-on sentences, overlooking transitions, deliberately ignoring the active voice, and dispassionately forgiving parallelisms.

I remember the endearing charm of our mademoiselle, promising me that she would recruit an attractive *young* woman of equal knowledge, skilled as an editorial specialist, generous with pencil, superbly kind, humorous to a fault, peerless as an enterprising entrepreneur, and, above all, hopelessly dedicated to those who enjoy the abiding pleasure of writing their life stories.

I remember Mademoiselle Joan tearfully bidding *au revoir* to the best class of life writers she'll ever have the delightful pleasure of marking with her trusty pencil.

Part Of

by Bea Murphy

- I am a part of Olympe's story about Charlie Boy. The love Olympe has in her heart for Charlie Boy is the way I feel about my sisters Vivian, Jeanne, and Jewell.
- I am a part of Versie's stories. Her upbringing on a farm, her success in life as an educator has really impressed me. She was part of the history of desegregation.
- I am a part of Jacqueline's story, her childhood in Belgium, her sense of humor. I know it must be really nostalgic when she looks at pictures of her handsome father in his uniform, her elegant mother, and her beautiful Belgium childhood house.
- I am a part of Joe's stories. Freetown and his childhood friends were part of the history of New Iberia. His interesting and informative stories of World War II meant a lot to me as a member of the World War II generation. The letters he had written to Carolyn were touching. Joe fought and was injured in Belgium. He is our World War II hero.
- I am a part of Jim's stories. I really never knew anyone who had grown up in New Orleans, and found it a contrast to my growing up on a farm. What a find to have his father's World War I letters, and he shared them with the class.
- I am a part of Kitty's stories. She's the General's mother. He even came to class, and I can see why she'd be very proud of him. The New York farm stories, I really enjoyed. Her nephew's ride on the family horse was a sure way to never ride again.
- I am a part of Johnnie's stories. She had a colorful and adventurous childhood and young womanhood in Arkansas and Texas. I can see her sitting on Gaw's front porch. What an adventure and historical visit to Oak Ridge. Wish I could have visited Johnnie as a child.... We could have had mischievous fun together.
- I am a part of John Q. Lee's stories. His gentle childhood on a farm in Georgia helped him become a true southern gentleman. His long train trip from Georgia to Texas must have been exciting for a young man of eighteen who had never traveled before.
- I am a part of Bob Maley's story. The love he and his mother shared was so touching. What a sweet little boy in the coat his mother sewed for him. A great loss for a little five-year-old boy. It touched my heart.
- I am a part of Betty's stories. I especially remember her story about her first venture in the emergency room with the man who had an accident while working on his acre. He lost part of his face. It would be a good script for the ER television program.

I am a part of John Townsend's stories. He was an outdoorsman as a boy. His fishing, hunting, and picnic stories were fun. He and his father were close friends.

I am a part of Rita's stories. Her stories of St. James and Donaldsonville inspired me to write about my ancestors who were the first settlers of St. James and Donaldsonville.

I am a part of Stanley's stories, that grand old man. What an inspiration he was to all my classmates. He started life on a farm, picking cotton and moved on to be a man of the world. He was so generous in giving his classmates a book of his stories. I enjoy reading his life writing stories about his interesting long life.

I was part of Joan Stear's life writing class. With her knowledge, encouragement, and caring, I was able to achieve my goal of writing family stories that I hope my descendants will read and enjoy and also get a sense of family history.

My Expanded Horizon

by Rita Welborn

Because of the two and one-half enjoyable hours I spent each Tuesday this semester in my writing class...

- I am now a part of Versie's integration experience at Shady Grove High School,
An impressive account of how clear thinking, fairness and compassion brought
That school through a difficult period without violence or permanent scars.
- I am a part of Kitty's Irish family reunions in New York and particularly of her
Search for Kelly roots in Ireland.
- I am a part of Jim's relationship with his father, developed through his father's
World War I correspondence.
- I am a part of John Lee's early teaching experience—
The teacher in me especially impressed by the maturity shown by an eighteen-
year-old.
- I am now a part of Bea's knowledge of early Donaldsonville history, much of
Which, although I'm a Donaldsonville native, I was ignorant.
- I was able to see New Orleans in a fresh, new light through the eyes of first time
Visitors, Bob and his wife.
- I am now a part of Betty's strength in her ferocious defense of her friends and
Her principles—neither of which was apparent from her gentle demeanor in
class.
- I shared the delight and excitement of eight-year-old Jacqueline, modeling
Before two mirrors, her mother's golden party dress.
- I am now a part of Johnnie's brush with the military at a high security atom bomb
facility—a humorous treatment of a potentially frightening situation.
- I share each week the excitement Olympe gets from each new encounter
With a person who shares her family history and heritage.
- I feel the nervousness and apprehension Joe must have felt at his first
Exposure, however slight, to a homosexual male.
- Thanks to John Townsend, I now have a comprehensive documentation
Of the Bush-Gore election, which I knew only in bits and pieces.

I Will Remember

by Kitty Kelley

I will remember that Olympe was often late, but she came.
I will remember Versie covered her topics thoroughly.
I will remember Jacqueline had the nicest French accent.
I will remember I saw Joe as a little boy in the stories he wrote.
I will remember Jim, a nice guy, helped the teacher.
I will remember Johnnie as the best comedic writer in the class.
I will remember that John Q. was the best hugger and was a gentleman.
I will remember Bob wore a sassy, funny little cap.
I will remember Bea's picture of her dog in the hat she made him.
I will remember Betty carried a gun to protect her friend.
I will remember John's pocket knife falling into the water.
I will remember Rita trying to learn to smoke and I hoped she failed.

Taking some words from Wordsworth,
"For oft when on my couch I lie, in vacant or pensive mood,
They'll flash across my inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude."

I am not an artist, nor a historian, but when I joined Life Writing classes in the Fall of 1995, it was a promise to William. He wanted me to write family stories. Being timid, I wondered how long I'd last in this class. In my first semester, I found so many friends!

Fall 1996 came around, and I heard these persons reading great stories:

Margaretta Blanchard wrote about her travels and about her Confederate great-grandfather who was very late in coming home from the war—one and a half years later, he walked in.

Wilma Bowles wrote about her family and her son who was ill.

Anne Comeaux wrote poetry about us.

Virginia Cook, Shirley Dugas, Marion Embree, Yvonne Seneca, Paul Miller, Betty Tripp, Judith Hebert, who made us laugh with her many Hail Mary's.

But now it's 2001, and I'm still here. I've lasted this long, and I have more friends in every corner. They're all around!

Our dear beloved teacher, Joan Stear could be called Joan Star. She shines in the blue and gives us a clue as to what to do next. Look around the corner...

There's Jim—he looks at his watch!

He wants me no later than on time!

He also wants more Charlie Boy stories. Me, too.

Bea's stories tell me we're bound to be related. She has Cabanocey, too.

Versie reminds me of when papa helped Mama to wash and hang the clothes out on the long clothesline outdoors. Jim Bradshaw heard about her. And, too, she remembers her first black student. Me, too!

Joe doesn't sound like a teacher—maybe a preacher, traveling.

Nell's stories of Mexico remind me of my Mother's classmate from Mexico. Mama and Mathilda Ipini were at school in 1899 in Grand Coteau at the Academy of the Sacred Heart. Mathilda went home to San Luis Potosi and became First Lady. I have Mathilda's pictures and letters (a treasure!) to Mama.

Fran has taken me with pictures and words to all parts. I think I climbed the Great Wall. She has given me a lifetime of learning by traveling through her stories.

Woodson says he knows not the Butchers but it's his Lafayette Hopkins that harbored the first Butcher who came to Louisiana (William G. Butcher) after the catastrophe at the South West Pass Lighthouse.

Kitty Kelley, I love her, too. She's been around with a loving family of which she is very proud!

Johnnie Kocurek—my savior from tears. I was late and in fear of the principal at Lafayette Elementary. I admired her then as our First Mother (PTA President) who kept us on our toes and in stitches. I wondered how my sixth graders would make sheep out of wire and cotton. Heidi, that was my assignment. We presented the play. The audience howled upon seeing the darling sheep walking across the stage.

I'm so proud also to have friends like John Q. Lee and John Townsend. John Q. Lee sees some Irish in me and shares seeds to plant (I hope they cover my fence). John Townsend also writes great stories of adventure, an interesting North Louisianan, John needs to know of my Easter Gift, a six inch potted china ball—or china berry tree as he says it—a gift from Golden Meadow. He says China Berry—I say China Ball.

Betty Shoemaker honored me by letting me read one of her stories. That was thrilling! She's a special lady!

Mr. Dronet wrote a book. He put Erath on the map, and his book is very well done.

Jacqueline—we've been friends for a long time. I'll bet if we two started talking in a foreign tongue, you'd be surprised!

And now, my friend, Rita. She's such a treasure I think she's my sister. When we were younger, her girls and my Ron made snowballs in my backyard after a snow.

Bob Maley, my newest classmate, is so well organized and writes neat and fantastic stories. His mom would love them.

But it's this last one—Stanley D. who gives me advice...and I listen. "Use that cane. Just keep moving." Just three words, "Just keep moving"; but those three words I will guard with my life—until I just can't keep moving.

Did I forget anyone? I hope not, but I have to mention...

Lucien Martin. Lucien's not in this class, but his photos are all around, including a rare one of Mary's Syrup Mill which he acquired by special permission to copy from the old house where N'oncle Brook, an ex-slave lived. Rosa gave permission. Lucien made me a copy which I consider a treasure...for me.

There Are Friends in Every Corner

There are friends in every corner!

Friends we found when we were toddlers,
Friends we found when we were scholars.

As our lives get slightly older,

Our friends are seen——all over.

There are those we love so dearly,
And each day we feel that—nearly
They are family...not just friends.
They are in our lives forever!

It's a sharing, can't be surpassed.
It's a feeling, a treat, first class.
It's a feeling not to be ignored
Like a happy day of yore!

I realize you, my friends, are my real treasures.
In Life Writing we store these memories.
Use them now or
Use them later...

But for sure
Without a dear,
A super classy friend, Joan Stear,
We are lost forever...NO!

In Life Writing with friends in every corner,
There she is! Right in the Center
Never to be lost, ever!

There are Friends in Every Corner!

A Tuesday Morning Jaunt

by Joan Stear

Every sunny-day-Tuesday the sky seems bluer.
Even when gray clouds touch my horizon, April raindrops are welcome
as I prepare for a Tuesday morning jaunt....

...with **Olympe**, historical map in hand, guiding each of us through a time past to
enjoy a blessed future.

...with **Versie** in rural Acadia to watch and wait for a peddler and his pots and pans.
Later we would watch and wait with her for more sounds, the restless stirrings of her
children's generation. She would take care of them.

...with **Jacqueline**, eating Belgian sweets and swirling in Mama's evening gown,
dreaming, dancing, daring life.

...with **Joe** on steamboats paddling down muddy bayous flooded with Italian graces,
enough to cover the town where I was born, a New Iberia I never knew...until now.

...with **Jim**, aboard ship, scanning the sky for weather patterns. I'll always look up to
the fun side whether I stand aft, starboard, or port on any vessel.

...with **Kitty** each summer to a cooler place, a country place up, up above the Mason-
Dixon line to vacation among Yankee hospitality and humor.

...with **Johnnie**, the writer who claims she almost wasn't, the storyteller who always
was, Stella's saboteur, the military's subversive civilian. Truman should have hired
her.

...with **John Quincy Lee**. I knew this Georgia cracker through Ann's stories. Even
then I was glad he calls Louisiana his home. From train rides across the Mississippi to
moonshine stills, his curiosity is contagious.

...with **Bob** who has shown with words what words cannot describe—the moon's
splendor, the firefly's light, the night owl's call.

...with **Bea** through her Acadiana to enjoy a country life and downtown gossip. Her
stories are bigger than her Texas hair.

...with **Betty**, riding shotgun. She has worn shoes some men can't fill.

...with **John Townsend** to witness nature's fingerprints left behind in North Louisiana on cypress trees, in catfish lakes, and along dusty roads. His words become a photographer's lens.

...with **Rita**, down Main Street in a small town to movies and snowball stands and back to a loving country home.

Don't let this ride end.