



*Excerpts from
Our Pages
Of Life*



FOR DISPLAY ONLY
DO NOT REMOVE

Life & Letters
an intergenerational company

Volume 27c • Thursday Afternoon Class, Spring 2001



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*) Chester Baudoin, husband of Jan Baudoin;
Madge Burns with Hawaiian musicians; Jacob Ray Stear with David Stear, Joan Stear's grandfather and father;
(*center*) Shirley Comeaux; Freda Hallie Spring Stear, grandmother of Joan Stear

©2001 LIFE & LETTERS • an intergenerational company



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 • Thursday Afternoon Session

*Seated, left to right: Joan Stear, Instructor; Madge Burns;
Carol Kinzel; Shirley Comeaux; Nancy Underwood*
*Standing, left to right: Florence Burleigh; Max Baer; Martha Sonnier;
Jan Baudoin; Tom Butcher; R.C. Sealy; Patrick Mouton*
(Missing from photo: Viola Aberly)





CONTENTS

<i>LADIES PURSES by Carol Erickson Kincel</i>	1
<i>MISSISSIPPI MAMA'S GIFT by Nancy Underwood</i>	4
<i>LETTER TO MY SON-IN-LAW by Viola Aberly</i>	5
<i>BETCHA by Shirley Comeaux</i>	8
<i>PUNCTUATION by Florence Burleigh</i>	11
<i>UNE VISITE A LA COMPAGNE by Tom Butcher</i>	12
<i>WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, DADDY? by R. C. Sealy</i>	17
<i>WASHDAY DECISIONS by Max Baer</i>	20
<i>SHOPPING FOR SHOES by Jan Baudoin</i>	22
<i>PARADISE by Madge Burns</i>	25
<i>BAYOU PON-PON by Patrick E. Mouton</i>	28

LADIES PURSES
by
Carol Erickson Kincel

Ladies purses come in all shapes and sizes, fat ones, thin ones, long ones, short ones. And then when ladies stuff them with everything imaginable, those purses can become mighty hefty. There is usually a bulging wallet, the contents of which are numerous credit cards (at least two or three or maybe even more), along with a drivers license, social security card, and insurance cards. Then a makeup kit is added, plus a personal address/telephone book, and no telling what else. But it is what is in the wallet that can create endless headaches.

I work at my church, and on Friday morning, February 9th, a *black man* came in the offices looking for help. He walked right into my office and asked how I was doing. I must have looked puzzled because he then said, "Ms. Carol, don't you recognize me?" Well, I didn't! About that time the pastor came back from the kitchen and the *man* started talking to him, telling him that his van had broken down, and he needed some money to get the wrecker to move it before the police did. I went back to my work; they continued to talk in the hall.

When the *man* was ready to leave, he came back to my office with the pastor and told me good-bye; he then left the church offices. Our pastor came back to my office a few minutes later, and he told me the *man* had been coming to our church about the time the pastor came to our congregation, but then the *man* had moved away. I told the pastor I was puzzled that the *man* knew my name but that must have been how. The Pastor said he had a lunch appointment with the church moderator but he wanted me to know the *man* was coming back at one o'clock with \$53 that he, the pastor, had loaned him. Pastor said if I was uncomfortable with being there just to go ahead and leave when I was ready. This was about 11:30 A.M.

At a little before noon I was getting ready to leave because I was meeting my friend for lunch at her home. I had picked up my keys and started down the hall to the door when the *man* appeared. The door was locked, and I was going to just go on out. I should have set the alarm before opening the door but I didn't. The *man* said he had the pastor's money. I told him I would take it but he just barged right on in, saying he wanted to write a note to the pastor. I gave him a piece of paper and the *man* wrote the note. He left it on a little table in the hall. Then the *man* said he had a picture he wanted to send the pastor and "didn't I have a ruler he could use to measure." I looked in the secretary's deck and told him there wasn't one there. The *man* said he couldn't believe the church didn't have a ruler, and he went back to the

computer office where I had been working earlier when he came in the first time. I was right behind him. Then he went to the pastor's office, and again I was right behind him.

The *man* said he would call his wife and see where she was because "she had the money". He used the phone and said she was in Broussard and he was going out on the corner and wait for her. He was gone a few minutes and then came back in talking about the picture. He went in the pastor's office again with me on his tail. I was beginning to get nervous. He went again to look for his wife. I called a friend of mine and asked him to stay on the phone because I was uneasy about this *man*, and I put the phone on speaker. About this time the young girl who cleans the offices came to do her work. I told her about the *man*, that he was outside some where and I was going out to see where he was. I looked up and down the street. He was no where to be seen.

I don't know why, but I went straight to the computer office and picked up my purse; did I get a shock! My wallet was gone! I sat down at the secretary's desk and dumped the contents of my purse out, then exclaimed, "That son of a bitch stole my wallet!" The girl was cleaning in the hall, and she turned around and looked at me. She was very startled by my language. (I have known her since she was a small child, and I do not use that kind of language.) I dialed 911 right away. I gave the police a description of the *thief* and told them my wallet had been stolen. Then, after hanging up the phone, I discovered my little yellow coin purse, where I kept the valet key to my car and my spare house key, was also missing. When the police officer finally arrived (he had checked out the neighborhood for several blocks around before coming to the church), I again gave a description of the *thief* and wrote a report and a list of what was in my wallet and coin purse. The pastor came back before the officer left and also he gave a description of the *thief*. He, the pastor, also checked his office while the policeman was there. That *thief* had opened a filing cabinet drawer and moved some papers in the pastor's office. (I had been right behind the *thief*; how did he do all these things? He was fast!) The officer took the note the *thief* had written. Hopefully the crime lab can lift the fingerprints of the *thief* from the paper.

I have been very jittery ever since this incident. I keep wondering if I have remembered everything that was in my wallet that should be reported stolen, like the credit cards. Fortunately I have only four credit cards, but there are insurance cards, social security card, discount cards for my favorite book stores, blood donor card, voter registration card, punch cards for my two favorite coffee houses, and so on and on. And that *thief* knows where I live, and has a key to my house and car. My home has a total burglar alarm system, but I still worry.

I guess the moral of this story is for the ladies. Don't leave your purse unattended anywhere. Don't even carry one if it's not necessary. No place is safe, not even at church. It only takes a second for your purse to be snatched up or your wallet lifted. Believe me, I was right behind that *thief* and I didn't see him get my wallet. (I'm sure he slipped my wallet and coin purse into a pocket of the baggy pants he was wearing.) Also, I would suggest that you make a photocopy of everything that you carry in your wallet, front and back. By doing this you will know exactly what was in your wallet. A lot of cards have phone numbers on the back that you can call to report them lost or stolen. AND, you have a record of those items of value to no one but yourself, that you may want to replace.



MISSISSIPPI MAMA'S GIFT

by
Nancy Underwood

When my sixth child was 5 or 6, I ran out of steam. I felt tired all the time. Life was just work, work, work, and lots of trouble. Have you ever felt like that?

One day my friend Debra called me on the phone and invited me over for coffee. Her mother, Dorothy Stevens from Jackson Mississippi, was here in Lafayette for a visit. I was delighted. Mrs. Stevens was a widow and a retired junior high school teacher. I admired her a great deal and enjoyed her visits immensely. She introduced me to candied ginger and the culture of the Deep South. I called her my Mississippi Mama.

I envied Debra, the close proximity of her mother, and her frequent visits to Lafayette. While having coffee with these two friends, I found myself telling them how weary I was. Mrs. Stevens suggested, "Why don't you telephone your mother and ask to visit for a few days. I'll buy you a plane ticket." She cut right through all my-why-I-can't-go excuses. "Go call your mother," she insisted, "Debra and I will help you arrange the rest." So I did. And I found myself in a few days, on a plane to Houston, Texas and then to Oklahoma City. This trip was my second plane ride. The first was to attend the funeral of my mother in law, Clella Underwood. I was too sick with grief to care about a plane ride.

But my second trip I noticed everything. I felt the air crush me against the back of the seat when we took off, and I loved it. We climbed above the clouds, settled on them, and floated all the way to Houston Texas where I changed planes. The sky changed too, from fluffy clouds to bright blue sky that seemed to go on forever. The blue forever lasted as far as Oklahoma City. Mom and Dad Inge met me at the airport. I'm sure they wondered how I was able to get away by myself, and why I wanted to, but they never asked me.

I slept in my old room, in the bed I'd always shared with my sister Nony. But the trip wasn't particularly restful. Mom and Dad had places they wanted me to go with them, people they felt I needed to see, and Mother tried one more time to teach me to tat, with no success. The trip woke me up to the fact that I had changed a great deal. My parent's ideas about life and the house I grew up in were no longer home to me. Mrs. Stevens wanted me, I think, to be pampered a bit, to rest in my childhood place, and to find renewal. That's what she was able to give her daughter, Debra.

I didn't find that. I found something better. I found the beginning of my own place to stand....



LETTER TO MY SON-IN-LAW

by
Viola Aberly

Dear Tom,

I'm glad my writing assignment was "Letters" because for some time now I've been thinking I should write you a "thank-you" letter. As you know, I procrastinate, especially in letter writing. I really do want to thank you for the most horrifying day of my life. You already know what day that was. I don't remember telling you about how I felt that day, so I'm going to do it now.

You phoned me and asked me to do you a favor. You said you had promised two of your children to accompany them on an outing on the same day. Tommy was going on a Boy Scout camp out, and Tolly on a river rafting trip. Ladies aren't allowed on Boy Scout camp outs, so you wanted me to go with Tolly on her rafting trip since Brenda can't do rafting trips. You said we would float down the river in a big rubber raft and that I would enjoy looking at the wild azaleas and birds and butterflies. I don't remember the rest of the bull. Thinking back, I can't believe how naive I was.

Living in Louisiana with our slow moving bayous, I could imagine a gentle floating trip down a nice quiet river. I don't remember you saying we were going to do this in the Georgia mountains (doesn't water travel with gravity?). I packed my jeans and tennis shoes and flew to Atlanta and looked forward to my outing with Tolly.

The morning of the float trip, we drove to North Georgia with your friend John Shakleton and some other people. The landscape took on a wild look. The high cliffs looked like mountains to this resident of south Louisiana. I was becoming a bit apprehensive and wished I had not agreed to go. We came to our entry point on the river. The guides gave us instructions and said it was going to be very important to do as each guide said because there had been a heavy rain during the night, especially in the upper river region. The river had risen to within two feet of flood stage. No one was to be on the river if the water reached flood stage. To me, it already had.

I raised my hand and said, "I can't go on this trip because if the river is that rough, I might fall in, and I can't swim." The guide said, "Oh, you can't swim anyway, so all you have to do is turn on your back and catch a rope and we'll pull you out." I'm not very good at catching a ball much less a rope while being carried down stream, so by now I was petrified. The guide said they had not lost anyone (great consolation!). I had not seen the river yet nor heard the roar of the rushing water. I

looked around at the place, and at the others on the trip, and wondered, "If they are going downstream all day, they will be miles from here at the end of the day. If I back out, how would I get home?"

Nobody in the group was paying much attention to me. I just gave up and let myself go because the look on Tolly's face said, "Don't back out on me, Grandma!" I thought I could handle a paddle as I had some experience paddling a boat. I really didn't know what I was thinking about. They said that if we paddled just as the guide taught us, the boat wouldn't turn over and we wouldn't fall out. I made up my mind that I would do as instructed. I was a goner for sure if I fell out.

Next they said, "Put on your wet suit." WET SUIT?!! I didn't really know what a wet suit was. Tolly helped me into the strange suit and a helmet and a life jacket. I said a hasty act of contrition and prepared to load the equipment in the raft. Somebody handed me three big paddles to take to the river. They were extra long, and I had a hard time following Tolly down the rocky path and not banging into some other person. Oh! My! I would have run away if there had been any place to run to. The river banks were wilderness with no flowers, no birds, no butterflies...at least I certainly didn't see any! I had butterflies in my stomach. The river was flowing at a fast pace. I was behind John, who was an experienced rafter. I was supposed to watch what he did. The truth was I didn't have time to watch John. I was busy trying to keep the river from wrenching the paddle out of my hands.

I had gotten into the raft without mishap, and from there on it was a wild ride. Picture me coming down that river working as hard as I could to paddle when I was told to and just trying to stay in the raft. We were given instructions on how to "do" the rapids. One rule was to stay seated. We had gone over several rapids before we came to the big one. We were supposed to go around "Soc'em Dog." I remember the raft just seeming to fall out from under me. John was in front of me, and we all seemed to be standing for a moment. I sat down as soon as I could.

Because of the rain, what was normally an eight foot standing wave at the bottom of the rapid was now a twelve foot standing wave. We weren't supposed to go over that rapid at all because of the big hydraulic at the bottom. Going toward the rapid, our guide couldn't get us in the right direction, and we were heading right for the drop off when we got stuck on a large rock. I could see over the edge of the drop off. I get chills just thinking of it today. The water was boiling all the way down and looked like a bubbling cauldron at the bottom. The guide warned us not to do anything that would shift our weight because the raft would have lifted off of the rock and over we would have gone.

I was so terrified looking down at the rushing, roaring turbulence that I don't remember the discussion that went on in the raft about what to do. Tolly remembers

that John really wanted to go over, but the guide was firm that we couldn't. Much to my relief, the crew threw us ropes and pulled us to safety. After the near tumble, there were other rapids that we went over and a few that we had to portage around because they were too dangerous. I stayed on edge because I didn't know what to expect the rest of the trip.

At different points we were taken to some sandy spot on the shore for refreshments. There would be some level but rushing water and then more rapids. About the time my arms were very tired, the guides would find a quiet spot. We ate lunch on a sand bar. I had some fleeting thoughts wishing I could stop. Late in the day, we came to a lake. I cannot say how relieved I was that there were no more rapids.

After a cold shower, we headed home. Somebody talked about a hot tub. That sounded wonderful to me. It didn't happen. I hurt all over from the rowing, but probably more from the nervous tension. I woke up the next morning stiff and sore. I felt like I had been beaten and didn't want to get out of bed.

Tom, I do want to thank you for that experience because even though I've always had a bit of daring, this experience gave me confidence in myself that I would not have otherwise.

I had no intention of ever getting on another river in a raft, but I decided I must learn to swim. I was sixty-five years old at the time, I think. In the past, I had had very bad spells of backache. After I had been swimming a while, I realized that they had gone away. That health advantage earns a big "Thank you." I also participated in Senior Olympics swimming and won gold medals on local and state levels. What fun! I even went back and did another river raft trip and enjoyed it very much. I intend to write about my experiences flying in a Piper Cub airplane in Hawaii and a helicopter ride in the Canadian Rockies. I wasn't afraid of doing these things because they were tame compared to the ride on the Chatuga River and dealing with its Class Four and Five rapids—all on my first rafting trip.

Thank you again, Tom.

Love,
Viola



BETCHA
by
Shirley Comeaux

It was Mama's fault. She had this old handbag she didn't use any more, and it was just hanging there on a hook on the hall tree. It was a bilious shade of green, made of faux suede before anyone used the word faux. It looked like a boxy lunch pail except it closed with a drawstring at the top. When the handbag was open it invited stuff to come in. When it was closed, it resembled a large faux flower on top of a kid's ugly green lunch pail.

My sister, Neva Jean, and I were at loose ends. Summer was dragging on and there was nothing to do. Her friends and my friends couldn't play, and even though Mama gave us chores to do, we had time on our hands. We were sitting in the parlor looking at each other.

"We're just nothings," I said in my ten-year old philosophical voice. "No one cares about us."

"Not true," said Neva Jean, four years older than I. "We matter. Why are you saying that?"

"We're invisible. No one even notices if we're here or not here."

"That's nuts. Mom notices."

"Neva Jean, I bet we could walk downtown and no one would speak to us."

"Well," she said and then cleared her throat. "Lots of people would speak to us if we saw someone we knew."

"We are invisible," I said. I walked over to the hall tree and took Mama's handbag down. I fiddled with it a bit and then said, "I bet I could walk downtown with this handbag on my head and no one would notice."

Neva Jean has always been the conservative one, the one sister who worried about what people would think about anything we did, said or wore.

"You're crazy. What would people think?" she said.

"I'm telling you, I could walk downtown with this handbag on my head and no one will say anything. In this little town people won't even turn their heads and look."

"You're nuts." Neva Jean became silent. She shook her head and then a sly smile, a grin spread over her face. "Okay. You wear this handbag on your head all the way downtown, but I have to be there to be sure you really do it."

"Sure," I said. I fiddled with the drawstrings, tightening up the faux flower. "And what do I get if I'm right and no one says anything?"

Neva Jean is not only conservative about what people will think, she's conservative with any money she might have. "I'd have to think about that."

It didn't take her long to come up with the idea that if I was successful in parading through Main Street with Mama's handbag on my head, and no one said anything, she'd do the dishes alone for one week. If I wasn't successful, then I had to do the dishes for one week, plus a week of making her bed because of her humiliation at walking downtown with a nutty sister wearing her mother's handbag on her head.

I was very confident. "Agreed!" I said and before she could change her mind, I put the handbag on my head. I put it with the flat side on top of my head, the faux green flower straight ahead, like a coal miner's headlamp. I pulled the drawstrings under my chin and tied them. My reflection in the hall mirror proved it to be an adequate approximation of a hat.

We started off side by side down Bank Street, turned left on Wilson Avenue. It was only three more blocks to Main Street. By the time we started up Main Street, Neva Jean dropped about ten paces behind me. I knew she couldn't stick it out walking along side me. But she followed my every step.

There was no mall in those days, and people were downtown shopping. Women came out of the Woolworth's Five and Dime carrying little bags and out of Dunn's Bakery with large bags. Children roller-skated on the sidewalks, wheeling in and out of pedestrians. Across the street at J. C. Penney's, tables were stretched in a sidewalk sale piled with objects, and women were pawing through the things.

We went past the Best Drug Store, J. J. Newberry's Five and Dime, and the Granada Theater. I paused there and looked at the pictures advertising coming attractions. Neva Jean dawdled in front of the drug store. No one spoke.

We went past Eichmann's Fine Clothing Store and I glanced in the plate glass window. Some crazy person stared back at me—wearing a green handbag on her head.

We finally made it to the Rexall Drug Store on the far corner, and no one had even given me a glance. I smelled victory. Just then Helen, our older sister, came out of the Rexall Drug Store. She turned and nearly walked into me. She stared at me, her mouth open. Then she began to laugh. She giggled. She snorted. She guffawed!

Soon other shoppers turned to see what made her laugh, and when they saw me, they too began to giggle and snicker and hawhaw.

Neva Jean ducked her head while Helen held her sides laughing. I untied the drawstrings and removed the handbag from my head.

"What are you doing, you bonehead?" Helen could hardly talk for laughing.

Neva Jean explained our wager and her total humiliation at being seen with me wearing Mama's handbag.

“It’s not fair!” I shouted. “No one said anything until Helen. It’s not fair!”

“We didn’t say who COULDN’T say something about your so-called hat. We didn’t say it HAD to be someone outside the family. I win, I win, I win.” Neva Jean was almost crowing.

When Mama got home from work that evening, Neva Jean met her at the door to tell her everything—in detail.

Mama headed right for the kitchen, and I figured she was looking for the razor strop which had not been used for sharpening a razor since Grandpa died. In fact, the razor strop had not been used even for its secondary purpose for years.

Instead, Mama took out the skillet and foraged in the icebox for eggs and bacon. She reached in the cupboard for a can of cream style corn.

I was puzzled. “Aren’t you going to fuss, Mama?”

She kept her back to me and finally said, “I think you’ve been humiliated enough for today.” Her shoulders shook. *Was she laughing?* She started preparing Squaw Corn for supper.

Mama knew it was my favorite supper.



PUNCTUATION

by

Florence Burleigh

I love punctuation marks. All those little dots and dashes, points and curves intrigue me, and to show my appreciation I use them everywhere and as often as I can. When something angers or excites me, I use exclamation points liberally!!! Periods seem to naturally fall into place at the end of a thought, and there is no question as to where questions marks go. Is there? I am very fond of quotation marks, too. They have such a nice, almost sensual curve to them, enclosing private thoughts or whole speeches with those endearing little symbols, like little hugs.

I also like colons and semi-colons, but I don't find much use for them with my limited writing ability; I prefer dashes and dot, dot, dots... really, although for all I know they're not supposed to be used for the same purpose...I don't think. Although I own three or four books on the subject of punctuation, it's hard for me to keep all the rules straight in my mind. I usually end up going with whatever feels good. As fond as I am of the aforementioned dots, dashes, exclamation points, and quotation marks, my real love affair is with the common comma. I dearly love that neat little curvaceous mark. It looks so very right wherever I drop one in a sentence. To me every comma is like another flower in a bouquet, another berry in a berry pie—in other words, the more the merrier. And have you noticed that quotation marks, apostrophes, and the lower half of a semi-colon are all commas used in different places and different ways? Whoever invented quotation marks liked commas so much he, or she, even used them upside down and backwards!

I am really crushed every time I get a paper back from Joan to find that she has, with great abandon, yanked out, with her own little squiggle mark, so many of my dear little commas. I do go home and rewrite my papers, of course, but I don't throw my little commas out. No, no!! I save them for the next paper, just daring Joan to yank them all out again!!!



*UNE VISITE A LA COMPAGNE
(A VISIT TO THE COUNTRY)*

*by
Tom Butcher*

The Great Depression was a worldwide business slump of the 1930's. It ranked as the worst and longest period of high unemployment and low business activity in modern times. The Great Depression began in October 1929, when the stock market crashed and thousands of stockholders lost huge sums of money. Many people were wiped out. Banks, factories, and stores closed and left millions of Americans jobless and penniless. Many people had to depend on the government or charity to provide them with food.

The plight of the American farmer was even worse. Farm prices had been depressed all during the 20's and many farmers lost their farms because they could not meet their mortgage payments. These farmers then had to rent their land or move.

These conditions lasted throughout the 30's, and the situation in rural Acadiana was even more grave. Unemployment was over 30 per cent, farm prices were very depressed, and there was not much future for young and old alike.

The young people clamored to leave the country for the city, at any opportunity, and young girls were no exception. They were seeking not only jobs which were scarce, but also husbands to provide for them.

In the early 30's, when we moved from the home on the bayou at Pinhook Bridge, we relocated next to Papa Butch's home at 412 West Convent Street, where Dad built a modest 3 bedroom bungalow, with another large room attached which served as a dormitory for the 5 boys in our family.

Although we were in the midst of a depression, Dad and his brothers, Edwin and Jerry, had an established electrical and battery business which provided sufficient income to keep the families together.

Mama Butch, next door, kept the children for a time, while both Mother and Dad worked 12 hour days. (On weekends, Dad played his trombone in the Warren Lacoste Band to supplement his income.)

Adding to the hardships to be endured during the depression was the fact that over 90 per cent of rural homes were not electrified and only 5 per cent had telephone service. This situation was destined to change, beginning in 1935 when Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act (REA). This act of Congress drastically changed the quality of living all over rural America, and in Louisiana, in particular.

Eventually, it became necessary for Mother to find household help to relieve Mama Butch of her daily duties. Mother sought out someone from the "country" to move in with our family, and do some of the household chores. Mama Butch still did much of the cooking for our family.

We had live-in help in our home for years. These young ladies became an integral and important part of our family. In their late teens or early twenties, they were mainly from rural Acadia and Lafayette parishes, and although uneducated, they were very kind and hard-working. They treated us as their own brothers and sisters and we reciprocated in kind.

Mother, who had a ninth grade education herself, was self educated, even to the point of taking correspondence courses, including one in sewing. She became an accomplished seamstress and made it a point to teach all the girls who came to live in our home to sew.

Remember that the girls needed not only employment, but also wanted a chance to meet some of the young men from town. Eventually they would meet these boys at the local dance hall, date them, and marry. The boys oftentimes borrowed a car and would date in front of the house in the parked vehicle. Several girls later lived in Lafayette and were happily married to hard-working men.

Their family names, with one exception, escape me, but I remember many of their given names. There were Ella, whose family name was Constantine, and Rena, Maud, and Regina. They were sweet and gentle, and on occasion, I was invited to spend a weekend at one of their homes. They worked five and a half days during the week and were off on most weekends.

I was eight years old in 1935 when I went with Ella to her home in the country, approximately five miles south of the town of Rayne. Dad brought us on a Saturday afternoon and was to return to pick us up on Sunday after lunch.

After traveling west on Highway 90, we passed through the village of Scott, and I remember seeing a sign posted over the doorway of the Judice Store, "Welcome to Scott...Where the West Begins." And for a long, long time I really believed it!

When we arrived in Duson, at the Four Roses Dance Hall, we turned left and traveled due South. The road from Lafayette to Duson was paved, but all other roads were gravel and dirt, with huge ditches on each side. There were miles and miles of barbed wire fences and broad expanses of fields and woods.

Upon arrival at Ella's house, I descended from the car, and opened the wire gate. Only then did I view the scene. There was an old, weatherbeaten, unpainted Acadian style home, completely surrounded by a wide porch. The doors and windows had no screens, and since there was a brisk breeze blowing, the printed cotton curtains, which were made from flour sacks, were blowing in the wind.

The walls inside the house had been papered with newspaper, and the floors and steps were shining due a good rubbing with powdered red brick, as was the practice in those days.

I remember a black iron wood stove in the kitchen, which was still warm after preparation of the noon meal, and beside it was a tin box oven, which set on top of the stove for baking. The iron stove was used not only for cooking but for heating the house as well, with the aid of the small individual fireplaces in each room. Of course, the granite coffee pot, called a "greg," was always in evidence on the stove in case unexpected company would arrive. Whenever the strong, Cajun coffee was served, heavy cream was floated on the surface, which turned this ordinary beverage into a heavenly brew.

The bedrooms, both of them, were sparsely, though adequately, furnished and each bed was equipped with its own mosquito bar, for use at night. Mattresses, resting on springs, contained a stuffing of cotton and dried moss. The pillows contained chicken feathers and goose down.

Illumination for the bedrooms, as well as for the kitchen and living room, was furnished by Kerosene lamps which had to be cleaned daily to remove the soot from the glass chimneys.

Since there were no toilet facilities other than the outhouse in the back yard, nor running water, each bedroom was furnished with a rather ornate "pot du chambre" or chamber pot, and a pitcher of water, which came from the well in the backyard.

The house had no refrigerator for keeping foods fresh, which was very different for a city boy like me. I had never experienced drinking sour milk or eating "Caille," a sour clabber cream, which was always served with Cush-Cush. Cush-Cush is made in a black iron pot, by sauteeing dry corn meal in a little grease until it browns a bit, then adding a sparse amount of water to soften it. After the mush is cooked, it is served with sugar cane syrup or home-made preserves, caille, and, in this case, slightly sour milk. Other foods eaten on a week-end might include a sweet potato sandwich, or a "nose" of the french bread, filled with syrup.

Most of the food served had been raised on the place. There were chickens for meat and eggs, pigs for meat and cooking grease, and cows for milk, butter and meat. Mr. Constantine raised a very large garden which supplied all the produce the family required, and vegetables not consumed were canned in glass Mason jars for future meals.

Because of the lack of refrigeration, families in the neighborhood would assemble periodically for a "boucherie" or hog butchering. After the tedious day's work was done and everyone had eaten hardily, each individual family took a share of

the food which had been butchered home for immediate consumption. Cajun farm families rarely had all the niceties city dwellers were accustomed to, but they never, ever went to bed hungry.

Washing was done in a galvanized tub with a hand powered scrub-board and homemade lye soap. The clothes were hung out to dry on a clothes line in the yard. In the case of the kitchen dishes, below the kitchen window was a shelf, where the metal tub was filled with water and the dishes. When finished washing, Mrs. Constantine merely dumped the dirty water onto the ground outside the window, and she went about her other chores.

In the yard, stood the barn, in approximately the same unpainted condition as the old house. However, as in the case of the homestead, it gave adequate shelter for the animals from the elements and served its purpose very well.

The barn housed the wagon and the family buggy, as well the horse which was used to pull the vehicles. In fact, we hitched up the buggy in the afternoon and took a ride a couple miles down the road to visit Ella's grandmother who was suffering from a severe case of asthma. For relief, I remember, she burnt some type of powder in a lid from a can and inhaled the smoke. It smelled awful, but somehow seemed to improve her breathing.

A battery powered radio was one of two forms of entertainment and the family was allowed to listen one hour per day, to the news and to Amos and Andy. The other amusement was provided by a hand-wound phonograph and the records were of Joe Falcon and his daughter, pioneer Cajun musicians. The musicians happened to be cousins of the Constantines.

Saturday night was as special a night in the country as it was in the city. On that visit, there was to be a dance at the O. S. T. Dance Hall in Rayne. (They pronounced it "West-T.") The dance hall, was located on the outskirts of Rayne, on Highway 90, which was called then, the Old Spanish Trail, a Camino Real used by the Spaniards in the 1790's.

No car was evident at the Constantine's house, and I wondered how we would get to the dance. I soon saw a 1933 Ford truck coming down the gravel road trailing a huge cloud of dust. It was a farmer's stake-bodied truck used for hauling rice grain to the mill, and it had a huge enclosure on the back bed, into which all the Constantines and I piled. For a dime, we were taken round trip to the dance. It was exciting.

The huge, boxy dance hall was crowded with dancers who paid a nickel to dance to the music of Happy Fats and His Raynebo Ramblers. The music was Cajun, as well as Texas Swing. It was the first time I had ever heard the Cajun "anthem,"

JOLIE BLONDE. (Incidentally, these dance halls were all shut down from Ash Wednesday until Easter Saturday in observance of the Lenten season, as most of these rural folk were Catholic and very religious.)

Along one wall was a very long mahogany bar where cold drinks and food were sold. And on the other side of the hall was an enclosure, made similar to a “play pen” where the babies would be put while the parents and friends danced. Eventually the babies went to sleep, despite the noise and excitement, hence the dance in South Louisiana is still to this day, called a “fais-do-do,” which in French means “go to sleep.”

After the dance, we all got back into the truck and returned home to Ella’s house, and the next day, after church and a delicious lunch of smothered chicken, rice and gravy, and homemade bread, Dad picked us up for the journey back to the city.

Visiting the Constantine’s country home made a lasting impression on my young mind, for I remember it today, 64 years later, just like it was just yesterday.



WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, DADDY?

Chapter 2—Panama

by

R. C. Sealy

After enjoying a ten-day leave in New Iberia during the 1943 Christmas season, I left by train for Miami. My orders, received shortly before I completed my training at Annapolis, were to report to Balboa, Panama Canal Zone, to join my ship, the USS Trenton, a light cruiser. I traveled by four-engine flying boat from Miami to Panama and, on arrival, learned that the Trenton was not there—her whereabouts and arrival schedule unknown—not uncommon in those times. I languished for a couple of weeks in quarters provided, and finally got ordered to depart the next day to join my ship. I crossed the Isthmus of Panama by train to the Atlantic side (a short but scenic journey), and left Christobal by plane the next day, bound for Salinas, Equador. The next leg of my journey was on a regular patrol plane out to the Galapagos Islands, where the Trenton lay at anchor.

My ship was engaged in diplomatic duty, visiting ports on the Pacific side of South America to "show the flag," and had been doing this for some time before I came aboard. Two days after I reported aboard we left, bound for Lima, Peru, where we remained for about four days. It was an exciting time for me, my first visit to a foreign country, and I eagerly joined some of my fellow officers in their activities ashore. We went to the Hotel Bolivar for haircuts and manicures and adjoined to the hotel bar for Pisco Sours, the local specialty. Sightseeing was in order as well as admiring the well-dressed Latin beauties strolling along the wide boulevards. After leaving Lima, we docked at Talara, Peru, a Texaco operated refining station, for fueling. After a couple of days there, we went up the Guayas River in Equador to the city of Guayaquil, where we anchored in midstream for about three days. I was able to go ashore with four or five fellow officers, decked out in our white dress uniforms, as representatives of the Navy, to attend a ceremony held in the main government building in honor of George Washington. The date was February 22, 1944, George's birthday, and a large portrait of him was unveiled at the ceremony. Many notables were present, photographs were taken, the band slaughtered the Star Spangled Banner, and we all had champagne.

In between these port visits we were at sea, doing gunnery drills, launching and recovering our planes, and conducting the many drills required to keep all hands well trained. Some of my duties included standing four-hour watches in the engine room, where the temperatures hovered at 120 degrees, day and night. I spent a lot of my free

time topside, watching the porpoises in the crystal clear Pacific water, and marveling at the large schools of flying fish as they came shooting out of the bow wave and flew off for a block or more. Our ship cruised in a zigzag pattern to thwart enemy submarines, and this pattern was set around a base course. Once, our base course was the equator and I guess I must have crossed the equator fifty or more times in a day. Our two float-planes carried aboard were launched from catapults--a big event and well attended by anyone free at the time. The launch and recovery were very dangerous and generated a lot of betting on the outcome, especially during heavy weather. Fortunately, we lost no pilots and only one plane.

Early on, my superior engineering training and managerial skills were recognized, and I was assigned a critical responsibility, necessary for keeping this vital war machine in fighting trim. The job was to keep the Coke machine in the officer's wardroom stocked with cold Cokes. I had as my staff, one of the galley messboys to do the heavy lifting plus the services of a mechanic in case of cooler breakdown. With this crew, I was able to keep the dispenser supplied with cold Cokes for all forty or so fellow officers--a critical duty in these warm climes. I consider this assignment to be a crucial stepping stone in my naval career, and reluctantly surrendered it to the next junior officer to come aboard.

We enjoyed many of the perks of the Admiral, who traveled aboard our ship and made it his flagship. We had his orchestra aboard, which performed topside with popular tunes after lunch and semi-classical after dinner. Before dinner, two men would walk through officer's quarters playing a tune on a drum and little musical instrument similar to a marimba, to announce that dinner was being served. I remember the tune was named "Ham and Eggs". After a few weeks of this rigorous and life-threatening wartime duty, we headed for our home port, Balboa, located on the Pacific end of the Panama Canal. We began several weeks of overhaul, including dry-docking, which gave me an opportunity to see a lot of the area.

The Panama Canal Zone was a beehive of activity. The area teemed with thousands of sailors, soldiers, airmen and marines from many nations along with dozens of warships. Panama City, outside the Canal Zone, offered many cultural opportunities in which fellow officers and I frequently participated. The main thoroughfare, which reminded me of the French Quarter at Mardi Gras, was always wall to wall with servicemen patronizing the many establishments. The nightclubs offered frequent educational seminars based mainly on female anatomy themes and were very popular. Some of them were also staffed with Blue Moon girls, who acted as hostesses and would help make your visit pleasant. They were always well dressed in long dresses and usually came to your table and sat down, murmuring sweetly, "Buy me a drink, Sailor Boy?" If you did, they ordered a Blue Moon, which I later learned

was watered-down wine and cost about three times the price of a beer. I also learned that they could drink three or four faster than I could drink half a beer.

Each ship spending more than a few days in the canal was required to furnish an officer plus a contingent of enlisted men to beef up the local Shore Patrol and Military Police, because the large crowds ashore got unruly at times. The duty was rotated and my turn came after about a month. I reported as officer in charge of a contingent of about ten enlisted men, equipped with canvas leggings and black armbands with the white letters SP. I was armed with a loaded forty-five caliber pistol plus a baton. We patrolled the downtown area of Panama City until the wee hours, looking for drunks, fights and troublemakers. Our instructions were to put the offenders into the paddy wagon for return to their ships or bases before the Panamanian police got them. I briefly considered the fact that I was given a pistol so I could shoot the Panamanian police if they tried to interfere.

I enjoyed my stay in Panama for many reasons, like fresh papaya for breakfast every morning, watching the Bob Hope show when it came through one day, the beautiful Latin music, competition pistol shooting with the ship's pistol team and the educational seminars offered in town. I was frustrated that my warrior skills had not been utilized but finally new orders for our ship came through and we finally went off to join the war.



WASHDAY DECISIONS

by
Max Baer

I remember three special inspirational moments in my life. These are a Holy Altar, a Star of God and a prose called WASHDAY DECISIONS.

At age ten I made a makeshift altar in my bedroom at the family home in Rayne, Louisiana. I shrouded my dresser with a white pillowcase and adorned my holy shrine with a color picture of Jesus, a silver and black rosary of the Virgin Mary and a candle. Also on the altar were the sweet smell of spring from wild onions and Forget Me Not flowers. Feeling lonely, I knelt in my hallowed bedroom temple and talked directly to God or recited the rosary to the Virgin Mary as I shared my innermost thoughts about emotional conflicts of my young orphaned life.

At age fifteen, I drew and wove a Star of God for a Rayne High Civics Class project. I sketched the largest size star I could illustrate on a white 30"x30" sheet of construction paper. Punching small half-inch spaced holes along the perimeter of the five star points, I wove multi-colored crochet threads through the holes to mimic a lattice of rays covering each point. In the pentagon shaped center of the star, I placed a picture of Christ wearing his red robe and exposing his pierced and bleeding sacred heart. Mrs. Hartwell, my teacher, made me very proud when she displayed my Star of God on the classroom wall for a long period of time.

Today, at age sixty-seven, another moment has rekindled a special spiritual dialog with my Maker. A bright idea stimulated me to find a way to use the brand names of fifty-one soaps, detergents and cleansers to invite all people to be part of the Holy Family. The list of brand names represents past and present cleaning products. The purpose of creating WASHDAY DECISIONS was to test my ability to deliver a philosophical message using cleaning agents to illustrate that there is no need to be a washout with God.

In the dim LUX of each day you RESOLVE to wash your body and earthly goods. A heart burnt from the devil's wicked molten LAVA flows and a subconscious SHOUT of malcontent, you neglect to remove the grime and grit from your soiled soul! Alone in a high OCTAGON shaped IVORY tower you must endure the dismal and frigid IVORY SNOW of the starless night. No stubborn DUTCH CLEANSER to help purify or any OXY-AD-OL to help carry life's heavy load, you are like a blinded 20 MULE TEAM pulling against a stormy ocean TIDE. Furthermore, when your spirit is DOWNY with little feeling of self worth, DUZ you constantly DREFT

into a mental backwash cycle that constantly agitates your sense of purpose? VEL, there is much to GAIN and CHEER about if you are so BOLD to repent and CARESS your Savior! In a new FANTASTIC sky blue DAWN and with heartfelt PRIDE, life will begin anew by serving the Lord. Carried upon the back of a majestic celestial SWAN, exciting beginnings are echoed as the graceful bird CASCADEs toward the heavenly scene of your rebirth. The setting is more glorious than an IRISH SPRING with its sapphire radiance of MRS. STEWART'S BLUING or the sweet smell of CASHMERE BOUQUET's. MR. CLEAN leads the way with ARM AND HAMMER determination and SAFEGUARD care as you SURF the crest of SUPERSUDS that are sprinkled with precious GOLD DUST. Serving as a divine beacon, a lone white "DOVE OF LOVE" soars in a gentle BREEZE above. A sudden passive WISK draws you toward the radiant COMET of JOY found only in the bosom of our Lord. A Holy Spirit for the worthy, God answers every earnest SOS prayer giving greater spiritual, emotional and material value to your LIFE BOUY! He encourages the renewing TREND for ALL people to DIAL him for salvation to cleanse their souls. With the anointment of PALMOLIVE oil, the glorious day will be a FAB "SPIC AND SPAN and PUREX MOMENT". Our immaculate souls are scrubbed bright and bleached RINSO white to enable a clear WINDEX vision for all people to see and know that their P&G (PARENT AND GOD) forgives all worthy fallen lambs of his flock with love. He also protects their delicate fleece, soul, and spiritual manna with a trillion times more loving gentleness than delicate fibers enveloped in their WOOLITE security!



SHOPPING FOR SHOES

by
Jan Baudoin

Granddaddy Elijah McElhannon was hard on a pair of shoes. With his Huntington's Disease, his feet never stayed still. When he came to visit, Mother put newspapers on the floor to protect the floor. When we went to Okolona, Arkansas, to visit him, he never seemed to notice when he had holes in his shoes, but Mother did. We had to go into Arkadelphia to find shoes to fit him and also pants and shirt sleeves long enough. Granddaddy had a long, lean beanpole physique. With his long, narrow, hard-to-fit feet, and the constant shuffling and jerking, shoe shopping was a challenge. I imagine he wore whatever was long enough and never worried much about his shoes being too wide.

Mother inherited Granddaddy's long, narrow feet. Only one shoe store in Baton Rouge carried women's size 11 ½ AAAAAA. In the fall, and again in the spring, she and I went downtown to the dark, narrow, little shoe store on Third Street to see if anything had come in that she could wear. Usually there were two selections, either brown or black in the fall or white, off-white or patent leather in the spring. That was it. If nothing fit, she wore her old shoes another year. There was nowhere else to look.

When department stores became popular, she occasionally found something that would almost fit, but these department store shoes would always slip and slide on her feet because they were too wide. Eventually her old store downtown on Third Street closed. In the last ten years of her life, her habits became a more and more fixed routine. Once a day, everyday, she ate at the Piccadilly Cafeteria in the Westmoreland Shopping Center. On weekends Jennifer and I went to Baton Rouge to visit her and would go to the Piccadilly with her. All of our shopping was done at the Holmes Department Store in the Westmoreland Village Shopping Center across the parking lot from the Piccadilly. By then, Holmes carried Mother's shoe size. After her funeral, Chester, Jennifer, and I went to supper at Mother's Piccadilly. It seemed appropriate, a closure.

I never had much trouble finding shoes. When I was a little girl, the shoe store had a foolproof method for fitting shoes. I tried on the shoe, put my foot into a big, magic-box like machine. The box-machine had window on top that showed my foot bones and the outline of the shoe. We always bought shoes with lots of growing room to last the season. We bought sturdy school shoes and flats for church shoes in the fall and Easter shoes and sandals in the spring. Abruptly these magic boxes disappeared from the shoe stores, probably something to do with x-rays and radiation.

Jennifer must have been the last generation of babies to wear those heavy, white hard-soled shoes while she learned to walk. I had worn them. Somewhere I still have a bronzed baby shoe my father wore. Those shoes were like weapons on the end of flailing little legs on changing tables. I still remember being conked on the head with the rock hard sole of one of those cute little shoes.

Most of our shopping trips when Jennifer was young were done at the Westmoreland Shopping Center on the corner of Government Street and the Acadian Thruway in Baton Rouge, across from Mother's Piccadilly. It was very hard to get Mother to alter her routine, and she expected to be included on shopping trips. Spring and Fall had nothing to do with our shopping. We bought some little something nearly every week.

One week, when Jennifer was about seven years old, we branched out and went to the shoe repair shop next to Holmes, still in the Westmoreland Shopping Center. If Mother found a pair of shoes that fit, she had the soles resewn and the heels repaired until they literally could not be fixed again. While we were there, we let Jennifer try on a pair of shoes she liked. The sales lady was not friendly. She measured Jennifer's foot, inspected the shoe she was wearing, declared it to be dangerously too small, and proceeded to lecture me. I was a puddle of guilt. Mother looked angry and confused. Jennifer was absolutely clear. She did not like that lady. Her shoes didn't even hurt. And she did not want to buy any of that lady's shoes. So, we left.

The Walmarts of the world seem to have changed the whole system of shopping for children's shoes. First, the shoes are so inexpensive that buying them is very casual. The second change is the lack of the shoe salesman. People try on their own shoes and toss them into the basket. This system seems to work well, but it still bothers me a little. Who is the authority here? Who tells you what size to buy and assures you that there is plenty of growing room?

When Michael, my first grandchild, was ready to start preschool, I was sure he needed properly fitted school shoes. So off we went to the mall, Jennifer, Michael and I. We settled on the Kid's Foot Locker. A young man got Michael to stand on the metal foot measurer and brought out several styles in his size. This all felt familiar and reassuring to me. The salesman tried on each shoe on Michael's right foot, had Michael stand up and take a few steps. "How does that feel? Do you like that one?" Then a few more, always trying on the right foot. Finally we narrowed the choice down and asked Michael, "Which one do you want?" Michael looked worried and very serious. He held out his feet and pointed to them. He explained, "I need two shoes." He didn't care which style. He just wanted to be sure that he got a shoe for each foot.

Demi has an entirely different approach to shoes. At three years old, she is not too concerned about sizes. She wants pretty shoes, and she is especially partial to hot pink and purple shoes. She has dozens of shoes, shiny red Dorothy shoes, Barbie shoes, Teletubbie shoes, hot pink clogs. She can never find her tennis shoes. The other day Jennifer called me, laughing. Demi had been busy with her construction paper when she called Jennifer to "come see." She had spread out the colored paper on the sofa in a neat line. On each piece of colored paper was a shoe. Demi carefully went down the row. "This is my red shoe on the red paper. This is my Teletubbie shoe with yellow Lala on the yellow paper. This is my pink Barbie shoe on the pink paper."

Shoes used to be a much more serious business.



PARADISE
by
Madge Burns

Grass skirts, flower necklaces, beautiful scenery, brown-skinned people...paradise, and we wanted a taste of it. During the Christmas holidays of 1985, my niece, Janet Lovelady, told me that she and her mother, my sister, Ruth, wanted to go to Hawaii during the summer of 1986. She asked me if I would be interested in going with them. I said I would love to go, and I would like to take my daughter, Vanette, with me. Janet and Ruth were very pleased that we wanted to go. We started preparing and saving our money right then and there. Janet said that she would make all the arrangements through her travel agent in Duncanville, Texas. That was fine with Vanette and me. We were delighted that we didn't have that problem. We just wanted to go and have a good time.

The four of us flew out of Dallas to California, and then from there to Oahu, Hawaii. The plane trip was delightful, but long. My sister Ruth and I entertained ourselves by playing a number of card games, while Vanette and Janet watched movies. We laughed and talked with the stewardesses. One of them, from Shreveport, gave Ruth and me a special seat to play cards, and she even gave us the cards. We felt like we were almost related to her. She took us under her wing, so to speak.

Mike Foster, a long time family friend, met us at the airport. He was decked out in his brilliant white Navy outfit. He was an officer in the US Navy stationed in Hawaii. He greeted us with beautiful flower necklaces called leis, in bright red, yellow, purple, green, lavender, and white. They smelled like the most expensive perfume anyone could buy. It was almost overpowering. We felt very special, as we were the only ones in the airport who had received such gorgeous leis. There were other leis there, but none to compare with ours. Our utter joy soon turned to utter despair. My sister Ruth, who has always been allergic to all kinds of smells...got a headache. She started upchucking and seemed deathly sick, but as soon as we realized that the beautiful leis were the culprits, things got better. Thanks goodness, her sickness only lasted overnight.

The next day Mike showed us around the island. We saw surfers, beautiful beaches, palm trees, and exotic flowers. The whole island was filled with beauty where ever we looked. That same day we visited the Polynesian Culture Center. It had everything that you ever wanted to see and do about Hawaii. We walked for hours

seeing the sights. As we turned a corner, we spotted a small snack bar. We didn't want to eat much of anything because we were having a big banquet that night.

I was hungry, though. Nobody else wanted to eat, but me, so I went up to the counter. Nachos was the only thing that this snack bar served. I ordered a large plate of nachos for myself. It had melted cheese on top of a pile of chips. There was a big jar of jalapenos on the counter. I didn't realize they were so hot. I piled them on top of the melted cheese and dug in. I ate the whole plateful. It was delicious at the time, but I ruined my banquet dinner. I could not eat one bite of all that wonderful food. Everyone else thoroughly enjoyed the meal. During the night, the jalapenos started working. Now it was my turn to be sick. Parts of my body that I didn't know I had were on fire. If someone had lighted a match, I would have exploded. I thought I would never be the same again, but by the end of the next day, I was feeling better. Ruth, Janet, and Vanette got to go on a wonderful tour of a volcano, and I missed it. I have not eaten another jalapeno to this day. There are just some things that you do not forget.

One of our nighttime excursions was to see and hear the famous Hawaiian entertainer, Don Ho. We registered for a door prize as we entered the room. After the show, Janet's name was draw out of a hat for a beautiful bouquet of flowers. We were so excited about this unexpected treat.

We toured two other islands, Maui and Hawaii. They each had their own special beauty. While we were in Maui, Janet wanted for us to see where Charles Lindbergh was buried. Supposedly, we had to go to Hana to find this sight. Hana was a small village at the end of a very long winding road. We drove and drove until our time ran out. We had to be at a luau that night, so we finally turned around and went back to our hotel. The drive was beautiful, so we felt like we had not wasted our day. I guess I missed my chance to see where Charles Lindbergh was buried. When I get to heaven, I'll look up ole Charles and ask him where was his grave, and did I really miss anything great.

When we got to the island of Hawaii, we were greeted my the most beautiful flowers hanging off balconies all across our hotel, a breathtaking scene. On this island, we saw volcanoes erupting. Hot lava was rolling down the mountains into the bright blue water. When it would hit the water, a big flare of smoke and steam would billow up into the sky. Another sight to behold.

Our vacation was coming to an end. We had seen and done so many wonderful things. It was our last day before returning, and we had not seen Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona, a huge Navy ship. Janet said there was just not enough time, but Vanette and I were determined to see it. Over Janet and Ruth's protests, we took off in a taxi, hollering back at them that we would meet them at the airport.

Upon arriving at the site, we were brought to tears, in spite of the tragedy. The way these service men were honored in such a beautiful spot, it made us proud to be Americans.

Oops! We checked our watches and realized we were running late. We took off like a ruptured duck and got to the airport just in time. Janet and Ruth had already checked their luggage and were in line to board the plane. We ran in pushing and shoving through the crowds of people until we got up to them. They were glad to see us. We said, "Hallelujah. Praise the Lord! We made it.

There wasn't much card playing and movie watching on the way home. We were too busy dreaming about our wonderful adventure in paradise.



BAYOU PON-PON

by

Patrick E. Mouton

Around 1932, the beginning of the Great Depression, radio station WWL started broadcasting from New Orleans, Louisiana, a daily morning show starting at 5 a.m. named, appropriately, "The Dawn Busters," featuring Mr. Henry Dupre, his sidekick "Pinky" Vadakovich and a gang of rascals who seemed to be just dragged out of the French Quarter. Within six months, this show became number one in the South and one of the biggest public relations coups in radio history.

Henry would go into the Quarter about 5 a.m., and the first character he would meet, male or female, would be guest of the honorary Mayor of the fictitious town of Bayou Pon-Pon, "Prosper" Dewey and his brother "Shoo-Shoo" Dewey, a doctor of great renown (Pinky was the doctor).

"Shoo-Shoo" was a swamp doctor and would cure his patients with a mixture of prayers used by "traiteurs" and his tonic for \$1 per bottle. He would sit the patient down and start yelling these prayers, waving his arms up and down like a big bird trying to fly. He would loudly yell "Shoo-Shoo!" to force the bad vibrations away and make you well.

His tonic was made of water, oils of different plants found in the swamps, sugar, a mixture of vitamins, and a very large dose of raw alcohol (100 proof). The oils varied—lavender, jasmine, geranium, rose and violet. Many people would develop a hacking cough just to have an excuse to buy a bottle of "Rising Sun." One elderly gentleman, who at one time thought he was an opera tenor, would ask for a bottle by singing the scale for lavender: "La-la-la-la-la-la- lavender!"

One morning, Henry had as a guest, a farmer from Iowa. What a laugh! Henry convinced the farmer that a mule wasn't a hybrid of a horse and a donkey, but a cross between a donkey and a cow. When the son of the Iowa soil went back home and tried to convince his friends of this 'fact' they must have locked him up in the loony bin.

Every Mardi Gras, Henry would precede the Rex Parade in his own float—a bass fiddle with skate wheels attached pulled by a shiftless old goat, dressed in a miniature tuxedo, his horns adorned with confetti. Henry built his seat over the strings and was dressed in a large diaper, an extra large safety pin, a big *boutee* (bonnet), and a very large milk bottle full of bourbon—or whatever kind of alcohol he liked at that time—, and a big cigar. He had attached to the bass, three air horns to

make sure that people knew he was coming. The goat liked to imbibe also. Can you see a drunk goat pulling a drunk man, sitting on a bass fiddle with wheels? Henry's doubloons were made of tin with the word "Pon" engraved on each side. His gimmick was that whoever would come to Bayou Pon-Pon with these doubloons was a personal guest of the Mayor. He would get hundreds of letters each week wanting to know how to get to Bayou Pon-Pon.

The song for Henry Dupre's imaginary place was called "Crawfish"--"Crawfish, crawfish, we like crawfish today. Crawfish, crawfish, to me it is delish. You eat it in the day time and you eat it in the night. Blues go away and lovers stay. Crawfish, crawfish, crawfish."

One of Henry's best commercials was for "Gulf Spray" bug killer. Those lyrics are "High flies the pesky fly who's here for no good reason. To make him go away, use Gulf Spray Fffst--flies no more." One day, on the "fsst," the radio audience heard an odd noise. Pinky had blown his false teeth into the tuba!

For every product of the sponsors of the "Dawn Busters," Henry would make a ditty. So many companies wanted to sponsor Henry and his program that they had to be choosy. One of his best ditties was about Tony Amarico and the Venetian Room on Royal Street, where on every Sunday afternoon musicians from the Quarter and the strippers with their husbands or sweethearts gathered for a jam session.

Well, with the coming of TV, radio went out, and so did the Dawn Busters. All of my old compadres have gone to meet their friends upstairs. Loyola University bought the Dawn Busters' recorded tapes from the station. These tapes can still be heard in the library of the university.

For all the years Henry Dupre was on the air, every morning was different, with different guests and different songs. These were some of my happy days when I sang with Emile Parra in the Quarter at Pat O'Brien's around the corner from Adam Comeaux's Lounge--the home away from home for all the stewardesses of Braniff Airlines.





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.

What a pleasure...what a wonderful trip...!
We went at such a whirlwind clip!
You see...

We belong to a very cohesive and likeable crowd,
one which is sometimes quiet and sometimes loud.

There's Viola with her brave tales of white-water rafting,
and Jan with narratives of projects, her husband's always crafting.

Good ole Max with his stories of Rayne, and frogs and cookbook menus,
and Pat, whose stories lean toward earlier, sometimes risqué venues.

And Florence whose soft, sweet voice masks her cleverness,
sitting next to Martha, whose sharp wit, is always more, never less.

Sweet dear Madge, oh, how I wish I could have her life's outlook,
and Carol who has laid out her life like a well-read book.

New Iberia came to hilarious life under RC's writings,
and Nancy, with that coquettish smile of hers and happy musings.

All of which leaves two of our crew, not two unruly,
one of which is the superb, inimitable writer, Shirley.

And, yours truly, who never again will meet so neat a bunch, I fear,
as those in life writing under our very patient tutor, Miss Joan Stear!

I am a part of a unique group, a classy group, an elite group.

I am pleased to sit with fellow writers whose manuscripts reveal personalities, loves, foibles and talents.

I am a part of the history of Acadiana made plain by Tom Butcher, R. C. Sealy, Max Baer, and Pat Mouton.

Through the eyes of Tom, I walk the streets of this burgeoning town, amazed at its vibrant history.

I am part of New Iberia and part of the university experiences of R. C.

I hear the wonderful music, thanks to Tom and Pat. I hear both big band sounds and Cajun chanka chank, and my feet move to the rhythms.

I visit the beloved family of Max Baer and rejoice in their laughter.

I share wonder and joy with Jan and Carol at love revisited, of family ties. And family ties bind together the stories of Madge, Martha, Florence and Nancy.

I hear her soft voice as Florence relates stories of life in Northern Minnesota, and her close friendship with her family.

I empathize with Viola as she relives the wartime years, recalling each rivet she drove into the the B24 partitions, and I dance with her as she celebrates her birthday. Amazing!

Laughter till we cry erupts from hearing droll stories from Martha, wry humor from Florence, tales of R. C.

I hear and enjoy Cajun tales, complete with dialect, from Max.

I meet people introduced by Pat. Characters. Outstanding human beings he presents so well. Real life is funnier than fiction.

Madge Burns proves that with her stories, read in her inimitable style, provoking more chuckles and leave us clutching our sides.

Visual images fill each reading: Carol and the blue willow dishes for her Mom. Nancy and the purloined creamer, Tom and childhood fun in downtown Lafayette, Viola, whitewater rafting against her wishes. Mind pictures are endless.

I am a part of Joan Stear. After four semesters of her quiet, gentle, yet insistent guidance, I am comma aware and on guard for *this and that*. But her presence is more than editing. She is the encourager. The mortar that unites the blocks of our writing. Joan Stear is the non-judgmental leader, sharing tiny bits of her life along the way.

I am a part of this unique group.

We are classy and elite.

We are and will always be Life Writers.

*I am a part of Life Writing Class, Spring 2001.
Just a few words from me, then I'll be done.*

How about Mr. R.C. Sealy?
Wow! That first kiss was really....
To please her granddaughter, Viola Aberly
Took a rafting trip that didn't come naturally.
Leader of the Baer clan, Max,
Educated us with Cajun facts.
Mrs. Underwood, first name Nancy,
Music is her family's fancy.
Martha Sonnier will grumble and complain,
Publishing her stories could possibly bring fame.
You like the comma, Florence Burleigh,
But not at the end of a sentence, surely?
Tom Butcher, a historian we have found,
Remembering early years in his hometown.
Jan Baudoin's family, generations five,
Wore a christening gown that still survives.
The wonderful tales of *our* Madge Burns,
Ninety plus years, and her world still turns.
Hey, Mouton! Is that you, Pat,
Writing of WWII and stuff like that?
Shirley Comeaux, what's this you telling us?
A purse for a hat, and your mother didn't fuss?
Can't forget myself, Carol Kincel,
With butterflies flitting 'round my pencil.
Last, but not least, our teacher, Joan Stear.
Sad we will be when you're not here.

*Yep! We are life writers, one and all,
Hope to see everyone again in the fall.*

Most fitting for today's last Life Writing Class is to present a departing memory fare for Joan Stear, a responsive teacher of Senior Folk extraordinaire!

REMEMBER when dry witted Martha L. Sonnier once drank her coffee from a military mug, and whose reserved shy emotions are bugged when one asks her, "How about a Hug?"

REMEMBER when Nancy Underwood at age six moved to Oklahoma City in "A Childhood Place?" Seems then, and now as a transplanted Lafayette lady, she never was in the chase to embrace her hometown's aloof social pace. A last visit with kin, Carol, who felt as a stranger fallen out of grace, departed in haste with mind and auto set in modes to race to soon face the joys awaiting at her long adopted Cajun hometown base.

REMEMBER Florence Burleigh, a punctuation nut, wrote "So Much For My Olympic Skiing Career?" At age five on her first Minnesota water slicked snow ski descent she was pushed from the rear by young boys standing near; Florence experienced little fun with these playful bums on her first and last snow ski run.

REMEMBER our classy Queen Streaker, 92-year-young Madge Burns, who could even bring a smile to a hungry Cajun's lips who lost his gumbo spoon too soon? "Girl Talk," recorded her painful plank spank introduction to her adult world as little Madge, with angelic innocence, repeated to friends at age ten, the details of her sister's pregnancy overheard in her mother's den that held a full nest of gossiping "parlor" hens.

REMEMBER Tom Butcher, once a Butcher conditioner of air, hot and cold, was so bold to take control of yesterday's airway memories in "Listening To The Radio," a listing of "oldies but goodies" programs that had a mesmerizing mental hold on both the young and the old?

REMEMBER Shirley Comeaux, who can make a rock come alive in verse, tightened her talented writing lock in "Those Turbulent Teens?" Webster City, Iowa, allowed teen Shirley to glean the gifts of a small town setting; a rural school, "Let's Pretend," Masonic temple, school band, movie, and the like which to Shirley made her life seem just right!

REMEMBER Carol Kincel, “On Mothers-in-Law” spoke of departed first husband Harold and his mother Vallie, followed by Helen, mother of her spouse Ronald? With Harold the two in-laws departed to the treasured promise awaiting them above...and today both women speak to Carol through spiritual modulation during her moments of private veneration.

REMEMBER Viola L. Aberly, the Carolina Chatuga River rapids riding daredevil, who wrote about “Our Country Thanksgiving in the Twenties” in North Louisiana, and speaks of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and all who in her eyes were dandy and handy too? All adults seem to lend a hand in cooking to prepare abundant chicken, occasional hog, trimmings and caramel pie too. Viola did not frown when she wrote about food divine shared by family and friends in Grandma Emily’s kitchen at Thanksgiving harvest time.

REMEMBER Pat Mouton? He was a drum and trombone man who played all over the land with a number of bands! A retired Lafayette man of postal renown he has been around. Now with little deception, a keen memory and innate perception he wrote about nightlife and local historical recollections to inspire future victims of mental depressions, social recessions and marital suppressions.

REMEMBER Jan Baudoin, a Baton Rouge LSU Lab School kid who colored her world with leaf colors of orange, red, yellow, and purple in her “Search for Autumn?” Through the years her unsettled thirst for spectacular hues left her feeling blue in Louisiana, Tennessee, and North Carolina, too! Finally, in New Mexico her sigh of visual relief was magnified as Carol was at last satisfied!

REMEMBER R.C. Sealy, the New Iberia Annapolis Navy man who, through “The Kiss” was instantly elevated to a top side bridge of emotional bliss? Admiral Nettie who ate all the turkey stuffing out of the bird in the oven, showed less than lean on her body machine. Recall, it was her sudden smack act behind a drawn curtain, which made young Sealy more emotionally certain!

REMEMBER mostly, Ms. Teacher Stear, to be of great cheer as the end of your Life Writing Class grows near—to know you inspired many like me to incise permanent memories into the branches of their family trees. I thank you much for the inspirational boost to record facets of my life before this old Polar Baer “Bird” flies home to roost!

- I am a part of Life Writing, recording memories for my family. But also, I need to acknowledge fellow class members, whom I have come to know like no other,...
- Like Nancy, who spoke to her friend while walking, even though the friend wasn't there and could never again be with her.
- Like Carol, who told us of the indignity she suffered when her wallet was stolen. A good lesson learned, and I Xeroxed all my credit cards as a result.
- Like Viola, whose daughter's elopement was a big surprise. What a graceful recovery!
- Like Martha, the PBX operator, who admitted something private, and it turned out that I have the same problem, but never admitted it.
- Like Florence, whose terrific imagination resulted in a discourse about commas, giving all of us pause. GO, girl!
- Like Pat, the adventurer, whose stories of his past belie classification, but carry a ring of truth and accuracy.
- Like Max, whose conversations with elderly aunts for the benefit of his family will live forever.
- Like Madge, who never quits, tells of her first fishing trip and can prove her success with pictures.
- Like Shirley, whose escapades in Iowa as a child show us we are really all alike, and share the same memories.
- Like Jan, whose entry into the coin laundry business with her husband could lead to more than they bargained for, such as harboring a criminal.
- Like Tom, whose Lafayette memories bring back scenes of my past as well.
- Like Joan, whose patience and perseverance will be missed by all. I wish her all the best, and hope our Life Writing family continues into the future because, in my book, we are truly a family.

I am a part of an enlarging, enriching, world called Life Writing Class.

I am a part of Shirley's hard won PHD and the music her son plays in Rome,
and her mother's front door key.

I am a part of Martha's career in the United States Marine Corps during World
War II, and her comfortable night at home to watch television that never
happened because her recently repaired attachments connected to the
TV set didn't work until her daughter found a loose wire, and by then
her favorite shows were over.

I am a part of Florence's commas, and her understated piques.

I am a part of R. C.'s years ago New Iberia Railroad Street and his shiny black
navy shoes.

I am a part of Tom's Cut Off, Louisiana, and the choir at St John's Cathedral.

I am a part of Max's Rayne, Louisiana, fifty years ago and the Atchafalaya Basin
of yesterday and today.

I am a part of Viola's driving in a blizzard in Colorado with two small
grandchildren and serving desert at Morrison's Cafeteria.

I am a part of Pat's zany on the road again band and all his fancy ladies,
including Flossie.

I am a part of Carol's childhood adobe house, her growing up, country, and the
spooky mystical sight of the Northern Lights.

I am a part of Madge's "ah, she missed it" trip to Germany to visit her nephew,
and her paper dolls walking on the backs of the church pews.

I am a part of Jan's affordable, slenderizing bridal gown that had to be returned
and holding hands with Chester in church, while listening to Carey
Landry's music.

I am a part of Joan Stear's charm, wit, and editing forever.

"I carry all your hearts with me (I carry them in my heart)"

That's a paraphrase of a line from an e.e. cummings poem, "I carry your heart."

Listen, my seniors, and you shall hear
Of the writing class of Joanie Stear,
On the 18th of January, in two thousand and one,
We started the class with lecture and pun.

Madge of Bernice, her experience did tell
About her observance of nudes running pell-mell.
Her eyes did detect, but her head she kept straight,
Hardly one breath she did honestly take.

Shirley and her sisters, who were also her friends,
Played tricks on each other, while hearts they did mend.
Shirley's purse became a hat to fool all around
Until sister started to laugh, and the joke became profound.

Carol said goodbye to her Mother
Who visited sometime or other.
Then Carol drove to the discount store
To purchase some prize Blue Willow ware
To salve her conscience clear.

Pat told some very weird tale
Of some places just for males.
His stories had a tendency to shock,
But we seniors took no stock
Because with age we have become tougher
So we listen, in one ear and out the other.

R.C. is a gentleman, but his past is in question.
He left New Iberia with much hesitation.
His stories of sins will be etched but not mentioned
In the archives of his memories and by us remembered.

Max Baer is a teller of tales so tall
He told of the basin with stirring sound,
Using many words long gone to the ground.
His heart is there, we all have found,

While the shadowy charm of the watery power
Made us feel the spell of the waning hour.

Viola amazed us with her antics so varied
Of son-in-law's surprises which became so harried.
She takes to the ordeals of dancing and swimming,
While years drop away and youth is returning.

Tom, through stories of Lafayette's past
Told us where names familiar still last,
Took us into alley and street
And stores on Main that continue to beat
In the hearts of all the citizens we meet.

From **Florence** the sounds of Minnesota ring
When snow descends and the children bring
Sleds and skis on the sloping hills,
Causing frozen feet and many spills.
Florence went to a party for a bride to be,
A glamorous wedding gown to see,
But snow and sleet tried her faith
And she returned to work at the usual pace.

Jan has a Chester who loud and clear
Expressed his desire to further his career.
He hammered and chopped at things on the stair
But preferred to work while getting in her hair.
So Jan took him to Spain and lands so far,
To keep him busy reaching for a star.

Nancy learned a lesson early,
Daddy spanked when daughters were surly.
Tricycles you can ride back and forth,
But our street you cannot cross.
Rules are made and are not broken
Parents' words can be provoking.

To **Joan**, our teacher, our love and respect
For her abounds as we say our goodbyes,
And wish her the best, which we all expect.

We will miss her bright smile and her obvious sighs,
As her devotion was shown when she listened so well
To our papers although obviously dull.
With tears in our hearts we take our farewells,
But we wish her good luck and a happy life,
For the years spent with Joanie were spice of our life.

In delightful moment I feel the spell
Of our writing class, where all is well.
The class with love and humor so bright,
Brings a glimmer and a gleam of shining light,
To make us desire to continue together
To meet once a week and laugh and chatter,
As we share with each other, in our writings so nice,
Some of our thoughts of happiness and a little strife.

- I am a part of Tom Butcher's adventures growing up on quiet, residential streets around St. John's Cathedral in a much smaller Lafayette.
- I am a part of Pat Mouton's childhood gang's daring adventures sliding down makeshift roller coasters, scaring and thrilling themselves.
- I am a part of Max's Baers, growing up in Rayne, watching his father skin frogs and harvest their legs, losing his parents too soon.
- I am a part of Madge Burn's dunking at the Bernice Baptist Church when she was baptized wearing the white dress her mother sewed for her with weights in the hem so the skirt would stay down in the water.
- I am part of Viola Aberly's party she held to welcome her new son-in-law after her daughter ran off and married a man she hardly knew.
- I am a part of Shirley Comeaux's sister's escape from her grandfather's broom, sliding under the bed and hanging onto the springs.
- I am a part of Martha Sonnier's reluctance to hold other people's babies, her preference for fixing the coffee rather than hugging.
- I am a part of Florence Burleigh's granddaughter reassuring her family that the cat liked having her tail run over by the tricycle. It said, "WOW!"
- I am a part of Nancy Underwood's grandson's sword fight with the newly bloomed amaryllis and her daughter's collaborative solution to find another plant before she and Jim returned home to discover the damage.
- I am a part of Carol Kincel's patchwork quilt, a handmade treasure from her mother-in-law.
- I am a part of R. C. Sealy's early days in New Iberia exploring, spying on the forbidden lights on Railroad Street after dark.
- I am a part of Joan Stear's trip to Utrecht to present her vision of intergenerational stories to the world. I am proud to have been her student.

We are a mosaic of memories, colorful, overlapping, and poignant.

I am a part of a writing group which seeks to leave a trail
Of memories and histories through which we tell our tale.
We hope our children, and their own, will learn just who we are;
How and where we grew and learned, and how we've done thus far.
Our group has a cast of characters, and they are, I kid you not!
We tell our sad or silly stories, whether or not we ought.
Joan has the patience of Job with the motley crew that we are.
She corrects our papers while biting her tongue;
Without her we wouldn't go far.

First there's Pat who says he's just making a phone call from a house of ill repute. I'll
bet there's more to that story, but about that he is smilingly mute!

Our petite pincher of pretty pitchers presents them to her particular friends. I'm afraid
you'll land you in hot water, Nancy, if your ways you do not mend.

Martha's Mexican driver scared her so, going around those curves,
She and her friends had to break out the Scotch, just to calm their nerves.
He was just trying to impress you, Martha, with his prowess behind the wheel.
He was trying to show what a man he was, but you thought he was a real heel.

Viola resorted to spirits, too, when she heard her daughter had eloped.
But after a few chug-a-lugs, she knew she'd be able to cope.
She has learned to love her son-in-law and no longer lives in dread.
Now she thinks he's the best thing to come along since sliced bread.

Carol spent time in the desert surrounded by tamarack trees.
She became brown as a berry from her head down past her knees.
She became entranced with the butterflies that visited her there,
And keeps images of them around her, almost everywhere.

Tom writes of the Lafayette of old and gives us a glimpse of the past,
Of the town as it used to be when he was just a lad.
He writes of the people who made the town what it is today,
Who made the town the place in Louisiana where so many have chosen to stay.

Dear little Madge from Bernice has experienced much of life.
She has lived through rain and sunshine, through happy times and strife,
Through Limburger cheese and streakers, too, (though she gave them barely a glance.)
But one of the things she really regrets is that she never got to France.

In a friendly little town way up in loway,
Little Shirley got her very first permanent wave.
She later walked to town with her Mama's hand bag on her head,
Her sister following behind in a perfect state of dread.
But no strangers laughed, none of them snickered—what kind of town is that,
Where it's considered normal to wear a hand bag for a hat?

Then there's R.C. from New Iberia way, whose escapades would horrify his Mom.
From riding around unsavory districts at night, in some good friend's old bomb
To contemplating a night-time heist, which thankfully never took place,
A fact that saved them all from embarrassment and disgrace.

Now, we can't forget Jan, who found her true love in a man who likes to fix things.
He buys old buildings and jazzes them up, mostly for the joy it brings.
His latest is a laundromat, where Jan picks up the money.
She does this 'cause she loves him. He's her big time honey.

Last, but not least, is Max, a real Cajun Baer,
He's writing a book so we'll learn how to cook
To spice up our usual fare.
He explains the meaning of expressions so ancient
We are all surprised that our speech is so dated.

We are all fellow writers with a desire to write our history
So our great-grandchildren's ancestors won't be such a mystery.

Please don't forget us, Joan, though there are times I'm sure you wish you could.
Whatever I write I'd want you here to yank out my commas, I really, *comma*, really,
comma, would.

We all wish you the very best and will keep you in our prayers, Joan.

I, Viola Aberly, connect to all the writing class at some point because we did a lot of the same kind of things.

Max Baer told about Feu Follet. My mother told about Feu Follet.

Jan Baudoin traveled near and far to see fall foliage. I traveled near and far to see fall foliage.

Florence Burleigh gets amused by what children say. My grandson at three stood with one foot crossed over the other, listening carefully, when I sang a nursery song and said, "Maw, Maw, you don't sing very well."

Tom Butcher remembers A & P coffee roasting. I remember my mom's coffee roasting.

Madge Burns lived in a small North Louisiana village. So did I.

Pat Mouton played music and went to New Orleans. I went to listen to music played in New Orleans.

Shirley Comeaux got a permanent from a monster machine. So did I.

Carol Kincel liked her mother-in-law. So did I.

R.C. Sealey's story about camps reminded me of Lake Pontchartrain camps.

Martha Sonnier hated gym class. So did I.

Nancy Underwood's mother worried about her on her red tricycle. I worry about my grandson on his red three wheeler.

Joan Stear is a kind, considerate, encouraging teacher. I had one like her in high school.

We did a lot of things alike, so...

We are fellow writers,

We are friends.

I am a part of Nancy Underwood's boundary crossings...to cross or not to cross?

That is the question.

I am a part of R. C. Sealy's kissin' days— instead of a Nettie, with a Tom, instead of behind the curtain, at the gate.

I am a part of Max Baer's making people laugh out loud with his Cajun joke telling.

I am a part of Jan Baudoin's shoe buying sprees with her mom because I can understand the exasperation in trying to find a shoe that fits.

I am a part of Tom Butcher's smells of yesterday. Oh, for a piece of lemon custard or an oatmeal cookie!

I am a part of Carol Kincel's early school days experiences...reading, writing, and arithmetic.

I am a part of Pat Mouton's growing up years, sliding down slides,...swinging on swings, playing with friends.

I am a part of Shirley Comeaux's experience with her first perm because my oldest daughter, Ann, was a beautician, and her middle daughter, Amy, still is.

I am a part of Martha Sonnier's gym class and can feel her dissatisfaction with it because it wasn't my favorite either...a deck of cards suited me much better, and when the coach had his back turned, shuffling could be heard behind the bleachers.

I am a part of Viola Aberly's Thanksgiving celebration with family, friends, and caramel pies, pecan pies, chocolate pies, and egg custards, and cakes galore.

I am definitely a part of Florence Burleigh's children's confusion with words...*would you repeat that please?*

There are so many of us, so many personalities, so many different backgrounds,
Yet we are all part of each other.

by Joan Stear

Oh, I tell every class, "You are my favorite,"
As a mother would her own her children.
A mother's heart cannot lie.
So that is the truth.
"You are my favorite."
But I would be lying if I repeated to others what endears me to you,
for after all, only you have made me a part of...

Viola. The courage of the river is hers. You are my favorite.

Max, his kindness and Cajun humor. You are my favorite.

Jan. Who else could plumb such depths of ordinary things and find meaning in
skinny shoes and washeterias? You are my favorite.

Florence. "Don't you know," I shall ask, with commas in between, "You are my
favorite?"

Madge, the youngest at heart. You are my favorite.

Tom, our toastmaster of family and faith. You are my favorite.

Shirley. Her way with words is just right. Just right. You are my favorite.

Carol, Her many turns in life. Her mom. Her mother. She loved them both. You
are my favorite.

Pat, the ingenious inventor of roller coasters and pranks. You are my favorite.

R.C. His Navy and New Iberia I have experienced through the eyes of boy made
man through kisses and forbidden porches. You are my favorite.

Martha's wit. Like soft French bread, her heart is encased by its delicious crust. You
are my favorite.

Nancy and her appealing metaphors. She is a rocking chair. She is a Mama Bear.
You are my favorite.

We are a part of each other.

Thursday afternoon, don't tell, you are my favorite.