
Life
&
Letters
Volume II

LIFE & LETTERS, Volume II, continues the same tradition of our first collection of reminiscence. These stories chronicle the lives of writers who have shaped and fashioned their stories from experiences, the "juice of life." These experiences echo the walk of humanity-- its tenderness, its affection, its determination, its pride, its sadness, its joy. They represent lives well-lived. As you read these stories, listen to the speaker's voice, as son, mother, observer, child, friend. These pages contain our stories, the familiar connection to a distant past.

-- Joan Stear

Front Cover (beginning clockwise, upper righthand corner): Anna Zimmer; Onelia Savoie Matherne, holding Joan Stear; Ann Lee; Bertha Thrush; Richard Lasher; Lelia Tanner; Carolyn Patin; (center) Chris Smith

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The War Years
by
Lelia Tanner

When I lived with Grandma in 1938, she seemed to talk constantly of an impending war. In my secure little world, I could not understand the implications. It was at this time that Orson Welles's radio show "War of the Worlds" was broadcast. The show, in the form of a newscast, told of an invasion from Mars. Although it was interrupted many times by an announcement that the story was fiction, the majority of listeners seemed to think it was true. National panic! I still hear references of that fateful night made occasionally and often wonder if people were so quick to accept the broadcast as truth because of the already near reality of war.

Our country did not get involved in the real war until Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. I was only fifteen years old and had no idea what war really meant. Its message was swift and harsh. A classmate, Wilana Edwards, was suddenly no longer engaged as her fiance, Malcolm Robichaux, was killed in action. Malcolm's sister, Juanita, was in my class. Before too long, she had lost another brother in the war, and the remaining brother, Carrol, as the last surviving male of his family, was deemed ineligible for overseas duty.

Western Union messages were delivered by young men in smartly dressed uniforms, but the excitement once felt as they pedaled up the driveway was now replaced with a sense of dread. The two most common messages seemed to start with the word, "Greetings!" and another boy was headed for the armed forces; or "We regret to inform you," and we'd learn that someone would not be returning home. All of Lafayette seemed to share the loss as we'd see the gold stars appear in the windows.

With three brothers in the service, it would seem the odds were against all of them coming through the war with no injury or death, especially since Fred was part of a bomber crew. Fortunately, the telegrams we received usually held the third most popular Western Union message, "I'm coming home on leave; wire money."

Local boys seemed to be leaving for the service as fast as they graduated; some put education on hold and did not wait. They often wrote to the teachers to keep them informed of life in the service, and we schoolchildren listened attentively as the letters were read to us.

Retail prices were now under the control of the Office of Price Administration, and many prices were "frozen" immediately. Among the first to be affected was steel. Soon after, rubber was rationed, and the retread business did very well as new tires became harder to obtain.

We young girls were told it was patriotic to write the boys who were away, and I tried to do my share. The soldiers were hungry for mail and tried every trick to ensure mail coming their way. I remember waiting at the railroad tracks one day as a

troop train went by. The soldiers threw pieces of paper through the windows. I picked one up, and there was a name and address on it with a request that someone write the party named. I tried to comply, but my letter was returned. I suppose the soldiers were on the move so much that mail did not always catch up with them.

I wrote people I knew, even people I didn't know. When Fred wrote from England that two members of his crew wanted mail, I wrote them. I didn't know them at all, but I was able to keep them entertained by pretending I was a barefoot country girl and making up all sorts of events that a backwoods girl would encounter. It was pure fiction, and they knew it; but Fred would write that I was keeping the crew in stitches with my letters. Unfortunately, the boys whom I wrote eventually were missing in action, and I didn't feel like being funny any more; the letters stopped.

I went to visit my friend Kitty in Jacksonville during the summer, and on the bus ride back a sailor sat next to me. It was a long ride and we had quite a conversation, but I had misgivings about supplying my address when he asked for it. He did not give up so easily. He knew what my first name was, and I had mentioned that my father worked at the post office. A few days after my return home, a letter arrived at the post office addressed to "Lelia, a postman's daughter." There weren't a lot of Lelias around, and the letter reached me. We wrote some interesting impersonal letters for a while; but when he mentioned one day that he had been married, I wrote back that there would be no more letters from me.

The Air Corps built barracks and opened a training center at the local airport. The thought of having an influx of handsomely uniformed males was most appealing to young girls my age. Although the airport was only a mile from my home, I did not have much contact with the cadets. The only one I eventually made friends with was William Cavin, a Kingsport, Tennessee native. I met him at the bowling alley, which was located in the 200 block of Jefferson Street. It had only four lanes, and was sufficient for our normal population. After the cadets arrived, it was always filled, and there was usually a waiting period to get an alley. I was not a very good bowler; I seemed to be an expert at gutter balls. Cavin, as I learned to call him, had been a bowling instructor and offered advice on correcting the curve that inevitably took my ball off course. We met many times in the bowling alley, and I soon invited him over to our house. He claimed to be a country boy and our little farm made him feel very much at home. He got along well with all the family, and soon my younger sister was writing to his sister. I have no doubt that if he had not left a sweetheart back home, we would have become much more than friends. The picture he gave me of him and his fiance was a constant reminder that our relationship would have definite limitations. We did enjoy each other's company, though, and corresponded for a while after he was transferred to Arkansas for final training before receiving his

commission. He sent me a pair of wings upon his graduation, but his heart was always reserved for his Hannah.

Girls going to college did not have trouble finding boy friends, as many Marines were in training there under the V12 Program. My good friend, Martha Lee, was a student and attended many socials and picnics planned for them. She sometimes brought me along, but I did not strike up a friendship with any of them.

The only one I know from that group who married a local girl and remained in Lafayette was "Happy" Brian. He has been involved in many civic and volunteer projects and is a credit to Lafayette.

The army sent soldiers out on maneuvers and asked permission from various citizens to station them on vacant land. Daddy signed a consent form and promptly forgot about it. Some months later, he was surprised to see a tent pitched on the back line of his property facing Simcoe Street. Going over to investigate, he found soldiers living there. Daddy promptly invited them to the house to share our meals. They made several trips across the property to our house, and I'm sure Mother's cooking made their maneuvers memorable.

We enjoyed sharing with the service men, and Daddy never missed a chance to invite any he met to dinner. He was always happy to pick up soldiers hitchhiking their way back to Bossier City when he'd make his periodical visits to his mother in Shreveport. I accompanied him sometimes and enjoyed talking and singing to the soldiers. They seemed to enjoy it, also. A soldier once told me that I reminded him of Katharine Hepburn. Although I did not lack her famous freckles, I could not understand how anyone could relate my southern accent to her wonderful New England speech.

With so many men gone, women began to see new doors opening everywhere. Western Union was recruiting females right out of high school. Rosalie Lester, a frail looking young girl, left for Orange, Texas, where she worked as a welder in a shipyard. Tales were circulating everywhere about the fabulous income available to women filling the places that draftees left behind. There was not a lot of security in these jobs as everyone knew that the law mandated the servicemen be given their jobs back upon discharge; but opportunities were there, and females made the most of it. They learned a new independence that was to change the world completely. Many changes have been good, but it saddens me to think of the toll it has taken on the institution of marriage. The interdependence of spouses diminished and commitments didn't seem as important as they once did.

In spite of the prosperity that war seemed to bring to most businesses-- Uncle Sam was buying up almost everything in sight, and civilians snapped up whatever was left as soon as it hit the market--, there was a sense of unrealism to life. All plans included the qualifier, "When this war is over," and it seemed that day would never come. We all seemed to be playing a game, and it wasn't much fun. The war even dominated entertainment. War movies became popular. Songs such as "I Left My Heart at the

Stage Door Canteen"; "The White Cliffs of Dover"; "I'll Be Seeing You"; "I'll Never Smile Again"; "I'll Walk Alone"; "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree"; and "Coming In On A Wing And A Prayer" filled the airwaves.

The war was particularly hard on engagements and marriages. The feeling of imminent death gave many people the attitude that life must be lived for the moment. Predictably, many wives and husbands did not remain true to their marriage vows. Men came home from the war to find babies they had not fathered; girls married men they hardly knew, only to find out later that they had legal wives in some other city. Some couples simply could not adjust to each other after such long separations, and their marriages became war casualties also.

It seemed that everything good was now rationed-- sugar, meat, cheese, fats, shoes, canned goods, tires and gasoline. Restaurants sported such signs as, "Use less sugar and stir like hell; we don't mind the noise." New cars were no longer available to the ordinary man. Wanting to keep the Ford name alive at this time, the company advertised, "There's a Ford in your future [their primary advertising spiel before the war], but the Ford in you past is the one you have now, so you'd better make it last. Yes, you'd better make it last!" As Daddy was now working at the Post Office as a rural mail carrier, gasoline proved to be no problem for us. We couldn't waste it, but we always seemed to have enough for our needs. Most of the country's nylon supply was used for parachutes, so nylon stockings were hard to come by. The rayon stockings available to us were a poor substitute.

D-Day, June 6, 1944, marked the turning point in the war. Over seven hundred ships and four thousand landing crafts invaded Normandy that day, and our big offensive was on. Everyone rejoiced at each good bit of news as the Allies advanced in Europe. When V-E Day arrived on May 8, 1945, exuberance prevailed and the general feeling was that V-J Day was not far away. No one suspected the tragedy that was to speed up the event. The world was in shock as the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. It was a decision Harry Truman lived with the rest of his life, but it achieved the desired result. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, and our jubilation knew no bounds. Many of us jumped into cars and headed downtown to join the bumper-to-bumper parade going at a snail's pace down Jefferson Street. Horns were blowing and people were shouting. It was a great day; our boys would be coming home!

The Story of a Mother's Love

by

Anna M. Zimmer

Mary Elizabeth Nothofer, my mother, was born in Dulken, Germany, a small town near the big city of Cologne, on August 17, 1878. Her brother, Monsignor Michael Paul Nothofer, two years younger than she, upon his ordination to the priesthood at the University of Louvain, in Brussels, Belgium, in 1905, had requested to be sent to the mission country of Louisiana in North America. His request was granted, and he was immediately sent to a small farming community located in the extreme northeast corner of the state. He became pastor of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, one of the oldest parishes in the entire state, and one of the very few churches for many, many miles around.

It was at her brother's invitation to keep house for him, that in 1908, my mother left her home and family and came alone to America. Although able to speak but a few words of English, it was her desire to come and do what she could to make life a little better for this young priest. Those were the horse and buggy days, and the only means of travel.

A priest had to keep in touch with people who needed spiritual help. He would leave on Mondays, traveling a radius of about thirty miles, in all kinds of weather, so that he could say Mass and bring the sacraments to those who otherwise could not have these privileges-- always returning on Saturday in order to have Sunday Mass with his parishioners of St. Patrick's.

Naturally these were terribly lonely times for my mother, who was not only alone and frightened in this strange place, but also very homesick. Soon, however, things began to look much brighter, because-- guess what-- she met and fell in love with a handsome young man named Thomas Stribling Sitton and became his bride on September 21, 1910. They were married in New York by her brother, Father Nothofer and left immediately for Germany so that her new and charming husband could meet her parents and her seven brothers and sisters.

After their honeymoon, they returned to a small frame house, surrounded by large cypress trees on the banks of beautiful Lake Providence. Just the name gives the sense of contentment, joy, peace and love; and these are my very first memories of a long life lived in this lovely little town named for the lake it surrounds. It was in this small house and in these humble surroundings that I, Anna Marie Sitton (named for my maternal grandmother in Germany), came into this world to an anxious mother and father on June 27, 1911.

I say "anxious" (and that's probably putting it mildly) because, you see, my father had previously been married and his wife had died without leaving him any children. He was 42 years old and my mother was already 33 when I made my appearance. So "anxious" perhaps may be an understatement.

I suppose my birth, however long and difficult it may have

been, was quite natural and gratifying because twenty months later, on February 21, 1913, another baby girl joined the three of us. She was named, quite appropriately, Mary Elizabeth, but we always called her Elsie.

Another baby, of course, meant we had to have a larger house, and our second home was only a temporary one until our third house became our real home, and the one in which I grew up. It was a fairly large house; a big screened-in porch across the entire front with a swing at one end. Our front door was partly glass, with long narrow glass panels on each side, at which my mother always kept pretty lace curtains. There were two big fireplaces in which we burned wood, and, except for portable kerosene heaters, the only heat we had. But the best part that my mother loved was her bathroom-- not a fancy one, but a most welcome one. There were three bedrooms, a nice sized "parlor" (as we called it), a dining area, kitchen and back porch.

The house was built on a hill top, not exactly on the lake, but near and overlooking the water with its many, many gorgeous cypress trees, and where the evening sunset was always visible. There were lots of big pecan trees; we had a pecan orchard. There were smaller fig and other fruit trees. A cistern into which I loved to throw thing when no one was looking sat in the back of the house. These are early memories I try to hold on to, and after nearly 80 years, I still love the water and beautiful Lake Providence.

There was not much to our town. It was a river town, with dirt streets and a few stores on Main Street. There were one or two wooden churches and schools scattered about, and at the end of Main Street and almost on the levee, was a big saloon. It was here, just as soon as the river boats docked, everyone gathered to relax and enjoy themselves until time for the boat to leave again. Of course, local families mostly lived on the farms and many only came to town on the weekends.

As I've told you, my father, whom we always called "Papa" (never Dad or Daddy), owned a large plantation. My earliest recollection of him is a tall, good looking man with a dark, heavy moustache who always rode a horse. He was gone from daylight to dark almost every day, taking care of the farm. He was kind and gentle and sometimes even took me horseback riding with him. I remember mostly his blue eyes, his big moustache, and his horse.

I was only two years old, my little sister eight months old, and another baby was on the way. I think I must have been very happy; it seemed I had such fun. I loved playing with my little sister in our big yard which joined the miles and miles of nothing but cotton fields. I loved the trees, the water, the outdoors. I loved Papa and his horse, and I loved my adoring mother. My vivid and ever-abiding memory of my mother is when she would take me in her arms, and with tears streaming down her face, very softly in a beautiful voice, holding me so close, would sing in German "Brahm's Lullaby."

I didn't quite understand at the time, but you see, that is

when tragedy struck. My big, handsome father became ill with "Swamp Fever" as it was called then. He had been sick only a few days when, on October 24th, the doctor came to our house and told my mother that he would be fine. A few hours after the doctor left, Papa died. Five months later a baby boy was born to a father he never knew.

My First Memories
by
Richard M. Lasher

The first moments that I can remember take me back when I was around three years of age. During the warm weather season of the year, I would lie down on the living room floor next to the dark finished upright piano with lovely white keys. The aroma of fresh bread baking in the kitchen oven spread throughout the room. A beautiful glass chandelier hung from the ceiling, and family portraits hung on the wall. Mom would play the piano and sing songs in a pleasant soprano voice until I fell asleep for my afternoon nap.

During the cold weather season, Mom would place her rocking chair close to the stove in our dining room. A radio stood in one corner of the room. The china cabinet was stacked with beautiful colored dishes. The bowl on the dining table was always full of oranges and apples. My mother would hold me in her lap, and while rocking she would sing. I could feel the warmth from the stove and smell the wood burning. Mom would rock and sing until I fell asleep in her arms.

I can remember one of the songs that she sang. It was about a ship name Titanic, a British Steamer ship which was struck by an iceberg on the night of April 14, 1912, and sank. In time, I learned the words of the song I often heard:

Captains and Sailors gave up their lives,
Husbands were parted from loving wives,
Out in the sea of eternity,
Just when the ship went down.

When I became older, I realized that my mother had a gift of music, a talent that few people have. She was able to listen to a song and then play the song on the piano without the use of sheet music. As of this writing, this lovely person, my mother, is still living. She will be ninety-six in December.

Deep in the Heart of Texas
by
Ann Lee as told by John Quincy Lee

Making plans to go to Texas kept racing through my mind as my school teaching career came to an end that May in 1936. My mother's youngest brother, Sam Tanner, who was seven years older than I, came home for a visit from Texas where he had been living since he ran away from home at age fourteen. He could tell the most exciting stories about that far away place, especially about his work in the theater business. In a period of twelve years he had become quite successful in theater operations and management. The movie industry was approaching a peak period with more and better theaters being built, including drive-in movies with outdoor screens. So during Uncle Sam's visit we worked out the necessary details for me to come to Texas.

In June the big day came when Dad, my brothers and sisters, and I went to Axson to catch the Atlantic Coastline train. Mother had cautioned me about losing my money, so after putting my billfold in my pocket, she took her needle and thread and sewed it up. I was so proud to have my teaching money to buy my train ticket to Longview, Texas. The excitement came that morning when Miss Alma Gillis, my second grade teacher and postmistress, lighted the torch to flag the train to stop; otherwise, the train would throw out the mail sack and keep going. When the train came to a stop, the conductor put out the little step stool for me to get on with my big suit case holding all my worldly possessions. Since I was the first of the children to leave home, it was quite an emotional time telling my family goodbye. Guess they were hoping I wouldn't stay very long, but Uncle Sam had made my coming to Texas sound like the chance of a lifetime. As the train with that wonderful air conditioning moved along toward Montgomery, Alabama, I began to imagine just what it was going to be like in the Lone Star State. I'd heard the song "The Eyes of Texas," and it seemed to have a hidden message for me.

After we got into the Montgomery station, I changed trains to go to New Orleans. The air conditioning wasn't working so the windows had to be up, letting in the smoke and cinders from the coal burning engine. After the train got to New Orleans, I started talking to the station master and asked him about a place to take a bath. He found out I was from Georgia and had never been to Louisiana, so he proceeded to tell me about Huey P. Long, the governor of the state who had been assassinated a few months earlier. After our chat he directed me to the bath-- sure felt good to get "the grimy" washed off. Now it was time to board the Texas and Pacific (T & P) for the last leg of my journey to Longview. Since no bridge had been built over the Mississippi River, the train was ferried across on a big barge. Was a tremendous sight and reminded me of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer! I slept so good that night traveling through Huey Long

country, arriving in Shreveport about breakfast time. I walked back to the dining car where I ordered bacon and eggs. The porter said the grits "just comes" with it. I felt so important in that immaculate dining car-- the tablecloth so white and the dishes and silver like none I had ever seen. 'Twas fun just to dream as I looked out the window and watched the world go by. Abruptly I was brought back to reality when I heard the conductor announce, "Next stop, Longview, Texas."

Since I hadn't informed Uncle Sam about my time of arrival, I took a taxi from the depot to the Alladin Theater-- baggage and all. He was there and seemed so glad to see me-- so anxious to hear the news from Georgia. Finding a job was uppermost in my mind, so after a couple of days' rest, I went to the Double Dip Ice Cream Parlor. While there I worked with Billy Bryant, whose father was superintendent of the Hercules Gas Processing Plant in Kilgore-- twelve miles away. He came real often to visit with his son, Billy, and seemed to enjoy that delicious chocolate-ripple ice cream. One day he said he had a job for me if I was interested-- thus my long career in the oil industry was about to begin.

In 1936 Kilgore, Texas, was a tremendously prosperous town of 12,000 people with 500 oil wells within the city limits. Steam powered rigs were still drilling on almost every block around the downtown area. On one block the old bank building had been torn down and seven wells had been drilled, all of them still flowing. Dad Joiner had drilled the discovery well in 1932, and as the fever spread, oil field workers flooded the town. The rains came and the mud got deeper, so oxen and mules were brought in to move the heavy machinery from place to place. Soon the market was flooded with hot oil and the National Guard had to be called in to stop the illegal drilling. When the Railroad Commission was established and placed in charge of oil operations under the federal government, the price of oil stabilized from a low of ten cents to fifty cents a barrel.

The plant where I was employed was just outside the city, and as the Christmas season approached, I could see the Merry Christmas banners strung from one derrick to another. Such a beautiful sight when the lights were turned on at night and the chimes played Christmas carols! I was fascinated with my work and so eager to learn about every procedure. The gasoline plant employed forty people who were so willing to pass on their knowledge of plant operations during my training period. Gas from 2000 wells throughout the East Texas oil field was piped into our plant for processing-- the end product was casing head gasoline. With all the engines running and the residue gas being flared, a man could hear the sputtering, hissing, and roaring within a radius of two miles. Billions of cubic feet of gas burned, scorched the earth for hundreds of yards around the flare, and lighted up the whole countryside at night. For a Georgia Cracker who had been accustomed to wood fires made from "piney woods lighter knots," it was hard to understand how all that heat could come from an invisible source. Each day I

learned more of the various phases of my work, and in due time I became quite knowledgeable in plant operations.

A Picture To Remember

by

Carolyn Patin

Papa's office and millinery business were located on Canal Street just about three blocks from the Mississippi River. Each fall and spring he published a new catalog showing the many styles of hats he had at his wholesale warehouse. The pages of this catalog consisted of men's, women's, and girls' hat styles.

I was Papa's model in the girls' hat section of the catalog. He would select a special hat from his merchandise and take this sample to a dress apparel store. There he would choose a dress to complement the hat for me to wear for the picture to be used in the catalog. This was an exciting opportunity and great fun for me.

One of the dresses was a pale peach batiste with a matching sleeveless three quarter length jacket. It had a Peter Pan collar and was trimmed around its edges and also down the front of the jacket with an inch wide braid of a contrasting color. But my favorite dress he chose was a rich color of caramel in a cotton jersey. It felt so soft and warm next to my body. The dress was a perfect fit for me, a child's size 10, my age at the time this picture was taken. Papa put me in our new car, a late Model Ford sedan, and off we went to Papa's Wholesale Millinery business on Canal Street. At the warehouse, he had a photographer snap my picture wearing the latest fall style hat for a girl of my age.

When the catalog was printed and ready to be mailed out to Papa's customers in his territory, he would give me a copy. It was strange seeing myself among ten or more mannequins wearing other style hats.

What an exciting experience it was to be a part of my Papa's catalog!

My Most Rewarding Experience In High School (1935-36)
by
Christiana G. Smith

To those of us who are old enough to remember this era which followed the involvement of our armed forces in World War I in 1917, this memory sounds like a myth. The aftermath was the great depression, which was felt by all Americans, rich and poor, black and white, just as economic crunches are felt today. The deflated dollar had lost its purchasing power.

By the time I reached my junior year in high school (1935-36), many of my friends and relatives were dropping out of school to seek employment in order to help support their families. This included my oldest sister Ludi. My uncle, who took me in over the two years of my freshman and sophomore years at Holy Ghost in Opelousas, was no longer financially able to take me in. Ludi was employed by the Val Smith family in Lafayette where she lived in their home, working as a seamstress for the family. When she left home, I asked her to find me a job. My plans were to work and save my money so I could return to school; she promised to help me do so.

In a short time, Ludi arrived home with Mr. and Mrs. Leon Mayers to get me to work for them. She was one of the Smith girls, with three small children who were in need of a nurse maid. The children, Jackie, Bubby, and Gay, accepted me immediately.

Mrs. Mayers did all the preparation of meals while I took care of the needs of the children and helped with the housekeeping. She was a devout Roman Catholic married to a compassionate Jew. Although they felt the economic pinch, they were very generous to those less fortunate than they were, including me.

I really enjoyed working for them since I lived in their home as one of the family. In this way I was able to see how the lower middle class white people lived. I discovered their housing was very comfortable, equipped with the most modern conveniences, such as gas and electricity to make work easier. This lifestyle was a far cry from the conventional lifestyle of the poor black lower class people living on farms as my family and I did. Life was so different at the Mayers family home. The one thing missing was the one thing I could live without--prejudice.

They paid me five dollars per week while other employers paid two dollars per week. This may sound absurd to the average American citizen of today, but back then Heymann's store made things available for as little as one cent. Many families lived on less than I was making. And there was no welfare or social security.

The first week's salary I received, I began saving in a can which I kept in my closet. By the end of the three months' summer vacation, I had saved over sixty dollars because the

Smith's furnished my room and board.

Just before time for school to open, Mrs. Mayers offered me to stay on the job while I attended school in Lafayette. My prayers were answered. They received my parents' permission to make the change. Actually, my parents had to agree because they had no alternative for me to receive my schooling. No relatives or friends had agreed to take me in as in the past.

I immediately registered at St. Paul's High School under the same Holy Family Sisters who taught me before at Holy Ghost. They were familiar with the problems of the black families and went out of their way to help students who wanted to stay in school.

I told the principal, Sister Boniface, that I was a working student and there may be times I would have to miss school because the Mayers had hired a girl to replace me during school hours, but she might be unreliable. Sister told me all she asked of me was to get my assignment. My predictions proved correct, for as soon as winter arrived, the other girl began to fail to show up on time. I refused to leave Mrs. Mayers alone, especially since she was paying me to work. All I did was call the school to say I would be absent. Sister sent the assignment for that day, and I brought in the ones I failed to turn in when I missed.

Mrs. Mayers had a home library which I was free to make use of to get my assignments. I received very good grades at each period. She signed my report card where my parents would have signed. She was proud of the fact that she was helping me advance. I even received my company in her living room.

I made a smooth transition from home life with my family to school life in Lafayette. The change of schools widened my circle of friends. My homeroom teacher was the principal, Sr. Boniface, a young nun who encouraged us to socialize. One day she suggested that we go on a field trip to New Orleans by chartered bus to attend Xavier University's Homecoming on Thanksgiving Day in 1935. We worked to raise the money to defray expenses.

At first, I was reluctant to mention the plan to Mrs. Mayers because of my obligation to my job. One day she heard me talking to a friend about it. She insisted that I go with my class, even giving me extra money to spend on the trip.

We enjoyed the trip, especially crossing the new Huey P. Long bridge along with many historic places of interest. We stayed at St. Mary's Academy all girls' school where they were waiting for us with a program about Thanksgiving. There was not a dull moment during the four days we were gone. With the money I had, I bought souvenirs for those left behind who had made this experience possible.

I completed the session with good grades, but I still had to return to Holy Ghost to make up some subjects I needed to graduate.

Today Mrs. Mayers is ill with lung cancer at her home. She is still as generous as ever. I pray daily for her recovery. I

call her my white mother even though she is only six years my senior.

Memories Of An Air Force Wife
by
Nancy Moreau

My husband, Clarence, transferred from Tarrant Field, Fort Worth, Texas, to Travis AFB, California, in January 1950. Clarence, our four-year-old daughter Sandra, and I travelled by car along with the Skinners, Bert, Elaine, and their three-year-old son, David. Clarence liked to rise early, pack our car, check out of the motel, go to breakfast and leave immediately. Bert liked to sleep late, go to breakfast, then pack and leave. These two good friends spent their days complaining to their wives about each other. Elaine and I decided our next transfer she and I would ride together.

I thought we would never get out of the state of Texas. We stayed overnight in Flagstaff, Arizona, with snow deep on the ground. We saw the Grand Canyon, the Petrified Forest, and Painted Desert. It was so cold, a poor time for sightseeing, especially in the desert.

We arrived in California to find everything green. Our first trip to see the Golden Gate Bridge, the fog was so thick it was hardly visible. We lived in a Quonset hut on the Navy base in Vallejo for a few weeks until the Air Force provided housing for us. We then moved into Chohot Terrace in Vallejo. These houses were duplexes occupied by shipbuilders during World War II.

The men drove twenty-three miles one way to the air base, leaving early in the morning and returning late. The wives had time for coffee together in the morning and tea in the afternoon. We learned to depend on friends for babysitting and illnesses.

I baked my first turkey in California. I bought it from a man who had come through housing, taking orders prior to Thanksgiving. I couldn't find the giblets, so I stuffed and baked the turkey with the giblets in. We discovered the giblets when the turkey was carved.

Clarence went TDY (temporary duty) overseas once a year for 3-4 months. These months passed slowly. Sandra started kindergarten. I took sewing lessons twice a week through adult education. It was fun and work at the same time. Watching my friends progress motivated me to finish my own garments. I baby sat for a friend and neighbor, Eileen Meacham while she took upholstery; she in turn babysat Sandra while I was at sewing.

The flight crew wives stayed in touch while the men were overseas, sharing any news. We made several trips to the base to talk to the men by ham radio, but were never successful. Our crew even won the bombing competition at one time. We celebrated with a party at our house.

In 1953 we transferred to Mountain Home, Idaho, where the base was being reopened. Mountain Home was a small sheepherders' town with one department store and a weekly newspaper. We lived on base in prefab houses put up especially for key personnel. We had one entrance into our tiny new home. Our two bedrooms were 7x9 feet. Boise was sixty miles away with not a stream, tree, house or service station along the way. Many personnel had to live in Boise. Entertainment was limited to the base. I played bridge once a week, had a Brownie troop, was active in the Chapel Sodality, and president of the NCO Wives' Club. After a year of not sitting down to a meal without the telephone ringing, Clarence suggested I return to work and be paid for what I was doing.

On return from TDY to Guam, a plane crashed on take off. The news found its way to all the wives, but no one knew which plane. We spent a sleepless night waiting. Bert Skinner stopped early the next morning. He could not tell me which plane, but he did tell me it was not the plane Clarence was on. A friend, Eileen Lewis, was so sure it was her husband Jack's plane that she got into her car and drove so she would not be home if the chaplain came. Jack was a crew chief, and it was his plane; but for some reason he was switched to a different plane at the last minute. A neighbor across the street was the pilot of that plane. He was due to be discharged on return. His wife was so distraught, she refused to allow the chaplain in. She had lost her first husband in the German Luftwaft during World War II.

We left Mountain Home for Palm Beach, Florida, for four months of school for Clarence and Bert, then on to Lincoln, Nebraska. We were fortunate to stay with the Skinners from Fortworth to California, Idaho, Palm Beach, Lincoln, Denver, and Germany. We left them in Orlando when Clarence retired in 1962. We had many experiences and have since remained close friends.

Scotland
by
Hilda Faul

This story finds me with my feet up against a wall near a heating vent trying to get warm. I am living in a "half a house" in a small village called Ellon on the shores of the North Sea in Scotland; the date, mid-August 1978. It is cold in the house even with the heat on full blast. It is bitter cold on the outside, a misty rain is falling, and the wind is blowing at gale force. I have been here ten days now and haven't warmed up yet!

When I left Lafayette, Louisiana, on August 4, the temperature was 98 degrees with 100% humidity. It is about 35 degrees here today with a wind chill that feels like zero. I will have a long wait before I adjust to this miserable, damp climate.

The door bell rings-- my first visitors! I expect to see my neighbors, a young Scot couple who live in the other half of our "half a house." I blink twice. These people aren't Scot, they're American just like me! They have to come from Texas as they're dressed in western outfits. "We're Ralph and Juanita Chamberlain from Farmington, New Mexico." Well, so I made a mistake as to where they were from. No problem; it is good to see their warm smiling faces and having someone to talk with about this "bloody" bitter weather!

Juanita would become a good neighbor, friend, and mentor during those two wonderful years, the best years of our lives in Scotland. We would see each other every day, shop, cook, crochet, and watch the soaps, "Dallas" and "Cross Roads" on British TV. We would go on short trips together, visiting the beautiful countryside and, although of different faiths, attend each other's church on special occasions.

Ralph was a rig superintendent for the Loffland Brothers Drilling Company, International Division, working out of Norway 18 days on, 18 days off. Dad worked for the same people as an electrician and heavy duty mechanic on the Ninian Central 14 days on, 14 days off out of Aberdeen.

I was well traveled when I left Lafayette in August 1978 for my destination, Scotland. I had followed Dad on his assignments in the United States and abroad; however, I had never traveled alone. Challenging and adventurous for me, the trip to and the stay in Scotland would be fun. I would not have to worry about my children this time. Dwight was grown up and married; Tony was a junior at Tulane University in New Orleans and could take care of himself.

Dad had left the states in late April 1978 for Teeside, England. There they would get the rig ready for their move to the North Sea. When this was done and the offices were set up in Aberdeen, then the wives could travel to their new homes in Scotland.

I had a good flight up to JFK, but when the fog set in, my flight was delayed for about two hours, causing me to miss my flight out of London to Aberdeen.

On our arrival at Heathrow going into the large terminal, all I could see was wall to wall people packed in like sardines pushing and shoving each other going nowhere! There was an airline strike of some kind going on in London and also fog-ins from all over Europe I learned later on that day. What a mess of humans! I thought, "I'll never get out of here in a week's time!"

I finally made my way to the Pan Am information desk waiting in a queue for about fifteen minutes. The clerk called Dad at Aberdeen Airport and I was told not to check my bags, that they would get to Aberdeen in a couple of days. She gave me instructions on how to get out of this terminal and told me there was a bus on the outside that would take me to another smaller airport where I might get a flight out that afternoon, weather permitting.

Getting caught up in the maze of people, I shoved and pushed my way out the side door of the building, forgetting my instructions and the directions given to me by Pan Am. Looking up, I saw a bobby headed my way. I approached him, feeling and looking miserable, I'm sure. "Please help me," I said. "I'm lost!" He was cute in his black uniform with a unique looking helmet, very nice with a beautiful British accent and very helpful, directing me to what I didn't know was the bus right in front of me. It was an open looking wagon with a motor and driver. I hopped on, suddenly realizing how cold and hungry I was!

This terminal was less crowded with lots of nice people around. "Where are your bags?" asked the clerk. "At Heathrow, as instructed by my husband earlier this morning." I announced. "You will have to go back there and get them through Customs," she said. "Never," I told her. "My husband can come to London to pick them up on his days off. Just get me on a flight out of here, today!"

Finally the fog lifted, and we who had been waiting all day could continue our journey on a small British Airways jet. Walking out of the terminal to our plane, a fine misty rain fell, as cold as sleet. The wind blew, making us feel a bit uncomfortable; however, I thought about the 90 degree temperature in Louisiana. This was indeed a welcomed change. Once we were up into clouds, I could sit back and relax. I was on the last leg of my trip headed to my final destination. The hostess served us some wonderful hot British tea and biscuits (cookies). My tummy said thanks!

Flying above Aberdeen, the sun broke through the clouds, the fog having lifted. What a beautiful sight! Dad greeted me with open arms. He could hardly wait for a good Cajun style dinner!

A Blessed Event
by
Nora Sheppard

Two years had gone by in my married life, and George was progressing in his work. Now he no longer was studying under the GI Bill, but was being sent out as a full diesel mechanic on his own to work on oil rigs, shrimp and oyster boats and GM diesel engines wherever the company called him. It seemed he was going out of town most of the time now, and I was getting used to being alone.

I remember well the morning I walked the one block to my mother-in-law's house. My sister-in-law Phoebe was making her morning call for coffee. I thought the air would help the queasiness I was feeling and proceeded to tell them about my morning "wake ups." My mother-in-law gave me some dry crackers and instructed me to eat them on arising every morning. She also

gave me instructions for the do's and don'ts of the next few months. First: Don't ever put your arms above your head. Second: Don't eat salt and watch carefully what you do eat. Third: In no way let your husband touch you in "That way"; it could be dangerous. Fourth: Stop smoking. I had never known anyone pregnant and was quite ignorant of what was in store for me. My sister-in-law advised me to wait six weeks before seeing my doctor so that I would know for sure whether or not I was pregnant.

Finally I met with Dr. Magee in New Orleans, and he confirmed that I was indeed to become a mother. I could hardly wait for George to come home. We had often talked about having a family, but after two years we decided it might not be possible for me and accepted the fact. All the newlyweds in the neighborhood had families, and now we were going to join them.

Then George came home. When he heard the news, he grinned from ear to ear, and as we walked hand in hand to my in-laws' again to discuss it all, I felt ten feet tall.

The hardest thing to give up was potato chips. My mouth drooled at the sight of them, but I controlled my salt and stayed healthy. I made my doctor visits alone through the long hot summer. First I walked the many long blocks to wait for the bus that would take me to Carrollton and Claiborne Avenues, then on the St. Charles streetcar into downtown New Orleans onto Canal St. to the doctor's office. As time went on, I became, like every mother-to-be, more uncomfortable; but finally October arrived, along with the cooler weather, and time to deliver was close.

George refused to go out of town now and did everything around the house to help me. The baby was due on the 19th of October, but the 18th brought on a spurt of energy I had not had in a long time. It left me tired, and after a restless night, George left for work.

I felt the pressure and little pressure pains that could only be relieved as I walked around my kitchen table. I sat down, then got up time and time again. Round and round I went.

After a call to Phoebe, she arrived with a neighbor, and we sat in the kitchen watching the clock on my stove and timing the intervals between pains. Suddenly Phoebe jumped up. "That's it!" she said. "They are twelve minutes apart now." She was getting anxious, threatening to tie a white handkerchief to the neighbor's car antenna to attract a policeman. I was going in style.

I calmly watched her frantic actions. She then hurried me out to the car carrying my suitcase that had been packed for a week. I thought it was so funny.

We safely arrived at the Baptist Hospital in New Orleans and approached the reception desk. I stood first on one foot, then on the other, feeling the pains close. I could not concentrate on what was being asked of me. Phoebe stepped forward to answer as I walked round and round the waiting room. Suddenly I heard the loud outburst of "How the heck do I know? You had better get

her upstairs. She's about to have this baby right here!"

I proceeded to get into the elevator, all the time listening to Phoebe's rendition of how a person could die standing there answering stupid questions. It seems they had asked her how to spell my maiden name of Oglesby. Although she had written often while I was in England, in her anxiety she had forgotten how to spell it.

I was settled down into the labor room. Three hours later I was delivered of a seven pound baby boy. He was perfect. He was a healthy and beautiful baby. I could not believe it. I was awake as the doctor told me it was a boy. My first reaction was, "Oh, Doctor, what am I going to do with a boy? How am I going to dress him?" Little boys dress differently here than they do in England. Dr. Magee patted my hand. "Don't you worry about that now. All you have to do is get a Sears and Roebuck catalogue and follow that. You'll do all right and have no problems." I took his word for it and settled down to look at my new baby boy.

I had owned nothing in my life, but now, here was my child, a living part of me. As I studied his tiny perfect hands and feet, then his little face, I thought only God could create him. I thanked Him over and over for He was good. How lucky I was! I had a caring and loving husband, a hard working man, who would cherish and protect us.

George walked into my hospital room with a large box of chocolates, a dozen red roses, and a smile as large as life. We took the baby home a week later. We were a family now. We would begin a whole new life.

We named our little boy George Walter. He was a "blessed event," a "true gift from God" that was repeated three years later when Ronald Charles arrived, and for eighteen years I subscribed faithfully to the Sears and Roebuck Catalogue.

Number, Please?

by

Liz Moore

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the "talking machine," he reached out into the future in an exciting way. Surely he could not have envisioned the innumerable uses into which it would evolve.

In the span of my lifetime, the telephone has evolved from a very basic system that was available to only the elite few to an intricate everyday item-- design, color and quantity being the information necessary when applying for a phone-- affordable to almost anyone.

In the late 1920's, as a youngster living on the family farm across the road from what is now the Delhomme Funeral Home on Bertrand Drive, I had not the slightest idea of what a telephone was. There were no lines for carrying electricity down our road, much less telephone lines. Goodness, I wonder how many homes or businesses in Lafayette were privileged to own a telephone at that time. After World War II, in 1946, there were approximately 3,800 telephones in the Lafayette area as compared to 95,500 in service in 1990.

It seems almost impossible to imagine that some sixty years ago, one could not pick up the telephone to call doctors, hospitals or police. We certainly weren't calling for airline information-- there were no airlines. We weren't calling movie theaters or restaurants-- nor were there phone lines to bowling lanes-- these had not become a part of our lives yet.

When I was in high school in the late thirties it was a wonderful feeling to finally have a telephone in our home, if only for a brief time. We had more pressing needs such as food, heat for our home, clothes, medicines and electricity to light our nights. Before the advent of the telephone in our home, we would apologetically ask our neighbors-- three of them-- to use their phone briefly. Making calls to family was not as discomforting as trying to hold a conversation with a friend, male or female, while our neighbor listened in.

Our first telephone was boxlike with the part you spoke into on the center front of the box and the ear piece-- or part you put to your ear-- was a hand held piece of some four or five inches in length. When finished with the conversation, one would hang this piece on the hook located on the side of the boxlike fixture affixed to the wall. A few years later, when we could afford a phone again, the telephone had a new shape that is a little difficult to describe. It was a little more convenient because it was slightly movable. The mouthpiece, which we spoke into, was at the top of about an eight inch stem connected to a five inch circular base. The hearing piece, as in the original wall phone, was a cylinder-shaped piece about four or five inches long, which you replaced on a hook on the stem part.

The "princess" phone that I now lease is pretty, but in no

way is it as wear-ready or dependable as the old black dial model we used for so many years-- like 35 years or so-- until recently. It wasn't pretty, but it was always there and working!

The phone number that remains in my memory is the one that people used to call us for so many years-- 836!! In those early years, when you picked up the receiver, a usually sweet-voiced operator would come on the line with the familiar "number, please?". She would then connect you with the number that you requested. Later our phone number was 824-3070-- the number that must have been dialed a million times by friends of our eight children.

One of my greatest, but pleasurable weaknesses is using that little instrument to "Reach out, America." I reach out by phone to my Army son in Hawaii; to keep in touch with my little families in Shreveport, Alexandria, Jennings and Lafayette. I visit with friends and family here and there and don't very often think to thank Alexander Bell, who dared to try. Today, I say "thanks, Alexander, wherever you are."

Porches
by
Evon Lejaune

I have a thing about porches, porches extending around the front of the house; short porches bordered with cement pillars and wooden banisters; porches with worn paths leading to open doors where footsteps have faded away the paint and many hands have smoothed the guardrail.

I see a small darkhaired girl sitting on the broad steps of one porch. She is removing Easter candy from a multicolored basket. She carefully places the Easter bunny in front of the colored eggs. The line of goodies extends to the edge of the step. There is also a dime for the horse drawn ice cream wagon. The man will trade her dime for a Fudgescicle. She wonders why she is still at Grandma's. It surely must be time for Mama and Daddy to come and get her.

The porch at home is filled with bright sunshine on a cold January day. The little girl stands before the glass door looking out, waiting for the sun to warm the porch enough for her to go out. While at Grandma's, she had scarlet fever and whooping cough which left her with chronic asthma.

She spends most of the winter in bed, so going out is a special treat. She feels the chill of the cold air on her face as she unlocks the door. An icy mound of snow remains on the steps. Snow is rare and the soft moistness shapes into a handpacked ball which she throws at a bird on a nearby bush. Mama comes out with a pan and spoon to gather a bit of snow. The little girl puts sugar and lemon juice on the gathered snow. She hurries back into the house for Daddy told her not to get out. He is afraid she might slip on the icy steps because she is getting so big.

In every season, Grandma's porch is my favorite. Grandma and Grandpa moved back to Iota from Galveston during the Depression. Grandpa was lucky enough to get the job of running the rice mill. Their porch extended across the front of the house and wrapped around the north side opening into my aunt's room.

I followed Grandma around like a shadow while she watered the flowers in the beds beneath the porch and around the fence bordering the yard. She loved the roses and never went anywhere without coming back with a cutting. Our favorite pastime was to swing on the porch, swinging until the


SCHOOL DAYS 1941-'42
Iota High

porch swing touched the roof, sometimes turning it over, tumbling us all out on the floor. This always interrupted the in-progress card game and brought the grown-ups running.

Life at Central Amistad
Sugar Cane Plantation in Cuba
by
Judith Solberg

My day started with breakfast with the two children, Magda and Armando. Our breakfast was served at a small table in front of the bay window of the large dining room at about 8:30 each morning; there we had a beautiful view of the garden. Breakfast usually consisted of a fresh tropical fruit such as half of a papaya or a mango, a glass of juice, an egg, bacon, toast and milk.

We walked to the classroom at 9:00 a.m. The children, both very smart, loved attending class. I was well prepared, having gone to the elementary education department at S.L.I. for help. I had only one year of business education, but I explained to the professor what I was going to do, teach two Spanish speaking children how to speak English. She was most interested and helpful. The department had just gotten several new beginners' teaching material; a pupil's small reader, a pictured dictionary, a tablet with pictures and a place to paste "cutouts" pictures for each lesson and a teacher's manual made up the set. Just what I needed! Perfect! The professor also recommended beginners' books in arithmetic, a song book and story books and writing tablets. I purchased all of the books. I felt very confident I could teach, and I did. The children were well-behaved; they had inquisitive minds. Teaching on the plantation was a pleasure.

Our daily schedule continued with a recess at 10:00 a.m. We played games or they rode their bikes. I taught them how to jump rope and to play hop scotch and other games. Lunch for the three of us was served at eleven o'clock. The children then rested in their bedroom until 1:30 p.m. Afternoons consisted of stories and playtime in the classroom area.

A walk through the garden was always a pleasure for us. There were fine gardeners working in the rose garden. The lawn always looked manicured.

At least once a week we went horseback riding. The children had gentle ponies. Since I had said I knew how to ride, that I had owned a horse of my own, I was given a beautiful spirited black horse. He was very hard to handle, always wanting to run! He performed by trying to get me off his back, rearing on his back feet and pawing the air! I was too proud to say "Please, a

gentle horse for me, too!" Two guards with pistols strapped on accompanied us. One rode in front; the other in the back. The children were strapped to their saddles; I objected, but to no avail. Riding at a fast gallop at times, the horses might have stumbled or tripped, hurting the children also.

Mrs. Urruela's tailor had made my riding pants and those of the children. The jodhpurs (riding boots) were also handmade by a cobbler in Havana.

The workers' homes were near the stables. In the afternoon many sat on their front porches and delighted in watching us start on our ride and the antics my horse would perform.

Sometimes after classes the children joined their parents. They would get their books and read their lessons. Mr. and Mrs. Urruela were pleased with their progress. The children's day ended when they had dinner with their nurse and they went to their playroom and bedrooms and to bed.

Everyone dressed for the evening meal, served in courses by the butler. I had dinner with the Urruela's. After dinner we talked or listened to records. Mr. Urruela loved to dance and often danced with Mrs. Urruela and I. I'd later retire to my room to read.

During the mid-1920's, Cuba was a tourist mecca-- the casinos, beautiful nightclubs, sunny beaches--, a foreign land so close to the U.S.A. Many of the sugar plantations were owned or partly owned by New York banks. Amistad was one of these. A trip to Cuba by wealthy investors and their friends to see the workings of a plantation happened often. They visited the large sugar mill and were driven into the cane fields. Lunch or dinner at the manager's house was a must. Mrs. Urruela often called me to help entertain the visitors. I met several of the Rockefeller men there. I was asked to visit their homes. All very charming people--

Mrs. Urruela was a very beautiful lady-- a flawless ivory complexion--, a Spanish beauty with a perfect figure. She had a lovely disposition and a pretty smile.

I was free on weekends. I'd often call Lorena, and her husband C.B. would drive over to get me for a weekend visit. Sometimes the Uruella family would be driven to Havana to visit relatives or to attend a concert. Often there were "State side" visitors on weekends. Never a dull moment!

I had been at Amistad about six months when Mrs. Urruela told me they would be having a large dinner party Saturday night. "Would you want to stay or will you visit your friends?" I decided I'd visit Lorena. I got a call Saturday morning. Lorena was not feeling well. I understood. I stayed.

Big preparations were going on. A large table was being set up on the cement tennis court, places for thirty couples. A beautiful setting! The party, a midnight dinner and dance, was catered by the large hotel in Havana. It was a perfect evening. The table had dozens of orchids and exotic flowers along the middle. It was set to perfection with crystal, china, and silver for the various courses.

Guests arrived about 10:00 p.m. Most of the guests were older couples. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres were served in the house, then at midnight the guests walked to the dinner table. All the lights were turned on and the guests were seated. Waiters with white gloves served the wines and the different courses, a gourmet meal-- starting with soup, salad, fish, chicken, and beef all done to perfection. Dessert was a flaming baked Alaska. Never had I eaten such a delicious meal, and so beautifully served!

I was seated at the end of the large table. The man next to me had had too many cocktails. I looked around the table-- only one young man with a nice looking young girl. They sat way up to the right of the host and hostess. I decided I'd like to meet the good looking blond man. While we dined, the orchestra from the hotel played soft music.

After coffee was served we entered the house. The reception rooms had been cleared of furniture and dancing began.

I had on my prettiest formal, a pale pink chiffon dress with a beaded top and full knee length skirt. I felt I was the belle of the ball. I was the youngest person there. I weighed about one hundred pounds. I was a good dancer and I was rushed by all the older men; they all thought I was Cuban. I asked several men if they knew who the blond young man was; none knew him, but I noticed him looking at me, too.

During intermission I spotted him sitting in a large rocker. I walked in front of him, looking the other was. I said, "Has anyone got a chair for me?" We introduced ourselves. He was surprised I was an American girl. I had just introduced myself to my future husband, a first generation Swedish American, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Clarence Melvin Solberg of Ashland, Wisconsin. His nickname was Andy.