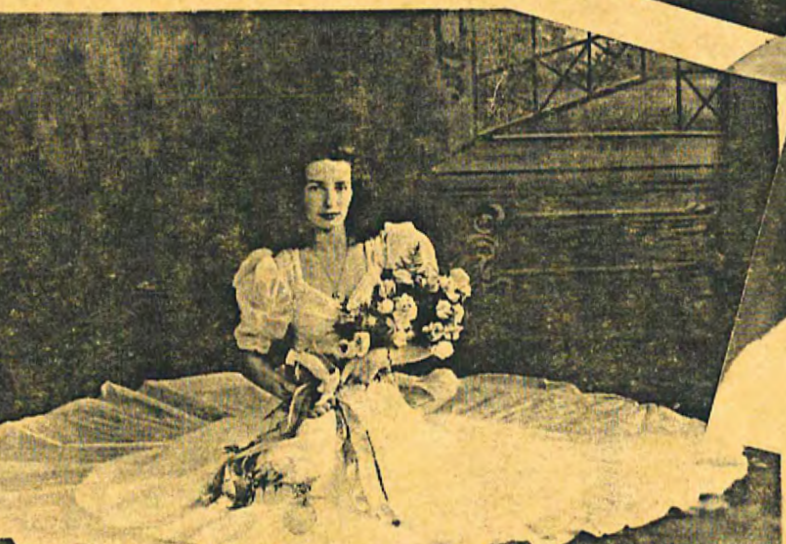
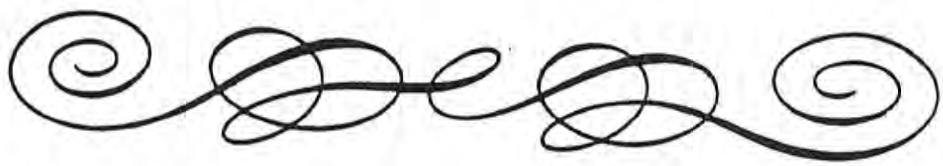
LIFE AND LETTERS

VOLUME III



LIFE & LETTERS, Volume III, reveals once again the experience and creativity of people who understand life as relationship-- the giving and receiving, the offering and accepting of life as a son, a daughter, a husband, a wife, a mother, a father, as family, and as friends. The collections of life histories these students have written over the course of the semester have proven that it doesn't take teacher, pen, paper, or Strunk and White's Elements of Style; it doesn't even take "the gift," to do what these people have done. Writing a life story requires living one first. The living part is what the stories included in this volume are about. Read and enjoy.

--Joan Stear
Summer 1991



We would like to thank the University of Southwestern of Louisiana and Lafayette General Medical Center for their support.

Front Cover (beginning clockwise, upper righthand corner): Jane Temple (on right); Esther and Ed Parker; Liz Moore; Wilma and Durwood Neveu; Hilda Faul; Chris Smith; Myrtis King.

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HOT SPRINGS
by
Myrtis King

During my years from 6 to 10, the event of my first visit to Hot Springs, Arkansas, stands out. My parents had bought a car, a Dodge touring car, and "driving around" was our entertainment. Closed cars, such as sedans, still had to be invented, so most cars were touring cars unless they were trucks or roadsters. One of our trips was a long one, over 100 miles in one day. We drove from Pine Bluff to Little Rock. There we boarded a train and went to Hot Springs where we visited friends who lived across the street from the depot. Later in the day we boarded the train again and rode back to Little Rock, got in our car and returned home. I might mention that the train entered Hot Springs engine first; but when it left, it had to back out. Hot Springs is nestled in the Ouachita Mountains, and this was the only railroad line into the town. Somewhere down the road, however, probably about Benton, Arkansas, was a Y and the train could be turned around. I didn't see Hot Springs again until January of 1926, when I was in the seventh grade.

I was so happy to be in Junior High School. Arkansas had twelve grades of school, and the seventh was the first year of junior high. Pine Bluff had good schools, attractive buildings, and the most wonderful part to me was eating at the cafeteria every day, my first experience. But this was not to last. Right after Christmas Daddy got sick with what the doctor called sciatic rheumatism, said he could do nothing to help other than narcotics for pain, and suggested we go to Hot Springs so Daddy could take the mineral baths.

On a cold January day, with the curtains up on the car, we loaded Daddy, our clothes, two men who worked for him, Mama, my step-sister Carlton, and me into the car and headed for Hot Springs. To avoid narcotics, the doctor prescribed alcohol for pain relief, and by the time we reached our destination, cold and hungry, Daddy was quite drunk. We made no attempt to stay at the elegant Arlington Hotel, but chose a weird little hotel across the street. We stayed there two nights.

On our first day Mama, Carlton, and I left the two men with Daddy and looked for an apartment. December, January, and February were considered "the Season" in Hot Springs because wealthy people from the New York area came at that time, vacationed, and enjoyed the baths. We had to look a long time because most places were filled up for that reason. We finally found a nice place of two rooms, a bedroom and a kitchen with a bed in it, and a shared bath on Prospect Street. On the second day, the two men helped Mama get moved in, take Daddy to a doctor, schedule him at a bath house, and enroll Carlton and me in school. Then they went back to Pine Bluff.

Looking back, I wonder how Mama made it through the first six weeks, as she had to help Daddy into his clothes, into the

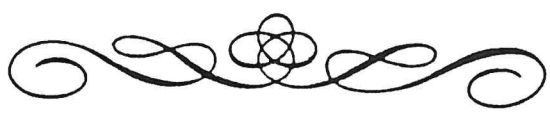
car, and chauffeur him every day to the bath house and to the masseur and the doctor quite often. Carlton and I had been taught to help with the cooking and housekeeping, which probably helped more than we realized.

But Hot Springs wasn't all bad. We got used to the school and made friends. When Daddy was better and able to help himself more, we took long rides in the car every weekend and explored roads in all directions. We found several of the "Thousand Dripping Springs" for which the area was famous, saw Hell's Half Acre where we could hunt for diamonds, went to the alligator farm and the ostrich farm, drank water at the mineral springs, and generally enjoyed the sights.

At times Mama would park the car downtown on Central Avenue, and Carlton and I would climb the North mountain, which had an observation tower on it. One day we had walked up to it, and the man who guarded the tower came running out and locked the door. "Hurry, hurry!" he said. "A storm is coming, and we have to get off the mountain. Come on. I'll take you down." We climbed into the car. Now the road up the mountain to the tower is very winding and strictly one way. He did not take the designated road down, but went down the very winding road at about fifty miles per hour with two very scared girls in the car. We did not meet another car.

Central Avenue, the main street in Hot Springs, was also called Bath House Row because all of the bath houses were located on one side of the street. On the other side were the tourist attractions-- auction houses, places to get your picture made in a funny poster, gift shops, places to buy popcorn and sit and drink all the water you wanted for free, and shops to buy leather and diamonds. We loved to park and walk up and down, looking in the stores and seeing the people from different places.

I went back to Hot Springs about forty years later. Too many changes had been made, only a few auction houses, no more gift shops or water places. Lots of boarded up buildings. No more alligator or ostrich farms. Of course, there was still tourist trade; but it was for people traveling in closed, air-conditioned cars, who could not park on Central Avenue because of zoning laws. Civilization had moved in. But the old house on Prospect was still there and the Arlington Hotel and the Observation Tower on North Mountain.



STRATEGY PAYS OFF

by

Ann Lee as told by John Q. Lee

"Clear the way below-- I'm ready to make my jump!" I yelled as I ran along the top part of the barn. It was early spring and the field next to the barn had just been plowed, making it a soft place for my landing. My brothers, Josh, Luther, and Ernest, watched me and marked the exact spot where I touched the ground. We'd been taking turns for the big jumps, but we were really supposed to be working in the fields. When we left the house earlier Dad said, "I've got to go to town, so while I'm gone I want you boys to loosen up the dirt in the field where I'll be planting tomorrow." To us it was just "busy work," so we decided to mix in a little added excitement.

Since the jump off the barn to the ground was about twenty feet, there was a certain amount of danger involved, but what a thrill when one of us jumped a little farther than the other. Gee, we were having such fun until I made a bad jump and turned my ankle when I landed in the dirt. I started squealing and crying. "I've twisted my ankle!" The boys began to feel of it and made me even stand on it to see if it might be broken.

As we sat there Josh even tried to cover my ankle with some of that soft, cool dirt. Suddenly he looked at me. "What are we going to tell Daddy?" One thing was for sure, we had to make up something quick 'cause we knew we'd get punished for jumping off the barn. After thinking about the consequences a few minutes, and in between my agonizing pain, I motioned 'em to gather closer to me. In my weakest voice I said,"What do you think about this? Y'all can help me to the house, and I'll tell 'em I was runnin' and fell on a root and hurt my ankle." "Yeah," Josh said, "maybe Daddy will take you to the doctor." There was a little grumbling 'cause some of 'em thought I was trying to get out of working; but I made all kinds of promises to bring back candy for all of us.

The pact was made; so with a brother on each side to help me, I hobbled back to the house. As Mother was asking what happened, I sobbed out my tale of woe.

Dad was in the car ready to leave for town when he heard the commotion. I tried to explain how it had happened. "--And Dad, I think it's broken."

Josh spoke up. "He can't put any weight on that foot." After examining the ankle which had begun to swell, Mother said, "Jim, maybe you better take him with you and let Dr. Hall look at it."

Dad said, "Oh, I think it's just sprained and could be rubbed good with Sloan's Liniment."

I spoke up. "Oh, no, I think I have a broken bone cause I can hear 'em crunching."

Dad rubbed his head for a minute, then said, "Well, get your clothes on, and I'll wait for ya."

A nine-year-old boy who has lived in the country all his life can really get dressed pretty fast even with a sprained ankle when he knows he's getting to go to town. The boys gave me the big boost into the Model T, and we drove the eight miles in about an hour into Nichols, Georgia. There was the drug store with Dr. Hall's office in the back part. Dad helped me as I hobbled in. Dr. Hall asked, "Well, Jim, what you got here? Looks like this boy has had an accident." Dad replied, "Yes, Doc, he wants you to check his ankle for broken bones." Dr. Hall began to massage my foot, twisting it up and down and asking me to move it and my toes in all directions. Finally he said he didn't believe there were any broken bones, but he'd bandage it up in case I had a bad sprain. He looked me right in the eye when he said, "An ice cream cone will be the best thing to make it quit hurting!"

Dad caught up on all the news while we were in the drugstore, and then it was off to the grocery to buy the supplies on Mother's list. Now it was time to make my next move!!! "Daddy, don't you think we ought to get some candy to take home to the kids?"

"Well," he said, "I was thinking about getting Cracker Jacks, but get a sack and you can pick out some candy to go along with it."

I filled the sack with coconut bon-bons, lemon nougats, licorice, and gum drops. Mission accomplished and time to head home!

My brothers were waiting at the gate for us. They hardly even noticed my bandaged ankle-- they were so excited to see the candy. I said I would give it out; but Luther didn't think he was getting his share, so he threatened to tell Daddy our secret.

Didn't take the ankle too long to heal-- I was soon running and jumping again. This was just one of many strategic ways we thought up to get Dad to take us to town. But I remember that little smile of his, and I wonder if our conniving was really that convincing.

CIRCUS
by
Durwood Neveu

My brother and I never slept very well on a particular night in October. In the morning, very early, the circus trains would be arriving at the railroad crossing on Vermilion Street about three blocks from our house. The suspense had been building for about a month, ever since the advance men from the circus had

passed through town. It seemed that they papered the town with large, colored posters of lions, elephants, horses and pretty girls. One can see that I was quite young, because girls were listed last.

There was a large open field next to the tracks where the circus would set up. We were put on full alert by a lion roaring or an elephant trumpeting at about 5 a.m. Next came the most frustrating part of the day, the long wait for the sun to rise and my mother to fix breakfast. Finally we were dressed and had breakfast. Out the door we shot. Most of the kids in the neighborhood lived between my house and the crossing, so we would collect them as we went down the street. Finally we were there. The field looked like a madhouse with people going in all directions. It really wasn't a madhouse because each person knew what his job was and wasted no time in doing it.

The elephants were unloaded first because they were the ones who pulled the tent wagons off the flatcars. The men placed heavy metal plates between each flatcar so that the wagons could be pulled from one train only, car after car, and to the ground at the end of the string. The elephants had huge harnesses that were placed over their "shoulders" with a long cable attached. The cable was hitched to the wagon, and the elephant would walk alongside the flatcar and pull the wagon to the end of the flatcar where there was a ramp leading to the ground. Just before the wagon reached the ramp, a man would attach a braking cable to the wagon to slow it up and allow it to be eased to the ground. This process was repeated until all of the wagons were pulled off the train.

This method of loading and unloading rolling stock on flatcars was developed by the circus and later used by the military to move tanks and trucks by rail.

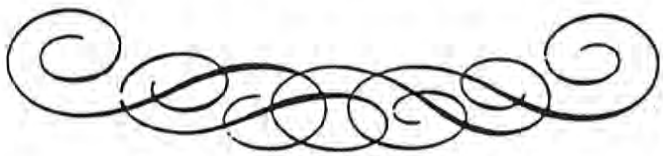
One can imagine the planning and training that goes into picking up, loading, moving to the next town, and unloading and setting up what amounts to a small town in 24 hours. First the tents were unloaded and unfolded on the ground very precisely. The main tent, menagerie tent, mess tent, and sideshow tents were laid out and the tent stakes, usually old truck and car rear axles for the smaller tents and special five foot long by one inch in diameter rods for the main tent, were dropped off at proper spacings. The main tent had about five large holes in the peak and the butts of the main poles were each put in one of the holes. The poles were pulled upright by several elephants and held in place by ropes. Each pole had a pulley at the top and ropes were attached to the tent through the pulley and hitched to several elephants that pulled the tent up the pole.

Five or so men would form a circle around the stake. Each man had a heavy sledge hammer. One man would start the stake into the ground. Then could be seen a most amazing sight. Each man in rotation and with perfect timing would swing his hammer, holding onto the very end of the handle, in a circle from his side over his head and down onto the stake. It went BANG, BANG, BANG in perfect rhythm until the stake was deep enough. All of

this was done under the close supervision and approval of a gang of us kids who watched in awe.

By this time our stomachs reminded us that it was time for dinner, so reluctantly we left the area and went home. The circus usually had a matinee and a night performance, so by the time we finished dinner, people would be arriving for the matinee performance and there really wouldn't be anymore interesting preparations to watch. My father worked on the railroad, and the circus always gave the railroad people passes to the night show, which was the one we attended. Needless to say, by the time the show was over, I was asleep and my dad carried me home.

The next morning we returned to the field. All that was left of this fantastic spectacle was a lot of hay and sawdust. The circus had been torn down and had moved to the next town.



RUNNING AWAY

by

Wilma B. Neveu

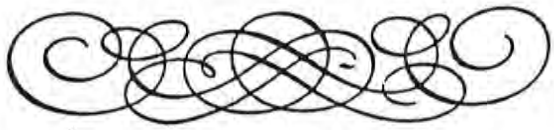
We were still living in the small white house on Vance Avenue in Alexandria, Louisiana. The Claude Bouttes lived across the side gravel street. They had a son, Claude Boutte, Jr., who was about the same age as I was. We called him Sonny. The three of us, Louise, Sonny, and I, played together.

One day the three of us decided to run away from home and go to the City Park. Sonny and I each had a little red wagon. We started out for the park with Sonny's big white dog, Pal. Louise rode in my wagon for about a block and in Sonny's wagon for two blocks when Pal and another dog started growling and barking at one another, scaring Louise. She got out of the wagon and said, "I'm going home." Sonny and I called her a sissy, but she went home anyway and told Mother where we were.

Sonny and I went on to the park and the small zoo where we wandered around looking at all the animals in the cages, especially the Guinea pigs. Then we crossed the road and went on to the golf course. Here were some nice big sand piles in which we could play. We were having more fun playing and digging in the sand traps. The greenskeeper who was responsible for the care of the golf course kept trying to get us out of the sand traps, but Pal kept chasing him back into the Clubhouse.

In the meantime Mother had called Daddy and told him Sonny and I had run off to the park. Daddy and Mr. Davis, one of the men from his office, came to the park to see about us. When Daddy drove into the park he stopped at the Clubhouse, asking if

anyone had seen two kids. The greenskeeper said, "Yes, they are on the golf course digging up all the sand traps and that big white dog with them won't let me get near those kids. If they are your kids, please take them home." Daddy drove through the golf course to where we were playing in the sand trap. He called, "Hey, you kids, come on!" as Mr. Davis got out of the car. Pal chased him back in. Then Daddy stepped out of the car and called us again. When Pal saw Daddy, he just calmly walked over and got in the backseat while Daddy put our wagons into the trunk and us in the car to take us home.



SUNDAY MASSES WITH MOMA

by

Liz Moore

One of my earliest memories is that of going to Mass at St. John's Cathedral early on a cold, star-filled moonlit night. Well, night was actually slowly turning to dawn, as we made our way to church for early Mass, 5:15 a.m. to be exact. You see, if Dad needed the car for work, we would attend early Mass and get home in time for him to go to work. Otherwise, we attended at 9 a.m.

Before the advent of the car into our lives, Mom and I (about 1 1/2 years old) rode to church in our horse-drawn buggy. I do not have strong remembrances of these trips, but I think it was sort of an adventure to me. The horse and buggy period passed and Daddy managed to buy a "horseless carriage" or automobile. Roads in those days were mostly dirt and gravel; therefore, travel was dusty or muddy, depending on the weather.

Once we arrived at the Cathedral, I always stood in awe at the size of our beautiful church. My-o-my, what a huge church it seemed to a small girl hanging on to Mama's hand. St. John's Cathedral was so impressive!

After climbing eight or ten brick steps, we entered the church through heavy, ornate wooden doors. Then I gazed down the long center aisle at the main altar; it seemed so-o-o far away.

Before Vatican Council II, the church pews were separated from the altar by an intricately carved marble railing, where communicants knelt to receive Holy Communion. Once my eyes moved past the railing, they stopped at the sight of a beautifully carved white marble altar on which were gold candelabra and, usually, flowers. As if this was not beauty enough, the early light, and later sunlight, shone through multi-colored, stained glass windows. Then as my eyes moved slowly upward, they beheld another breathtaking view of painted murals depicting saints,

prophets and angels.

As a child, I wondered how anyone managed to get up that high to paint! After some years passed and renovations were being made inside the church, that mystery was solved for me as I saw the scaffolding set up in the sanctuary. Even so, it seemed like an extremely dangerous and impossible task to me.

Pews in the church were rented by families for sixteen dollars or so per year. This stipend made it possible for a family to use the same pew for any function in church during the year. Ownership of pews was designated by a name plaque on the end of the pew. Mama and I usually sat in the pew that Mama's brother Clovis and his wife Aunt Mable, along with their six children-- Eric, Dennis, Lloyd, Charles, Gussie, and Isabelle-- rented each year. On rare occasions when Uncle Clovis and family came to the same Mass as Moma and me, we would move over to one of the pews not marked with a name plaque.

The pastor at St. John's at the time I was going to church with Moma was Father Teurlings, a native of Holland. He was of the old school-- rigid beliefs and set in his priestly ways. He insisted on old Biblical names when children were baptized. None of those modern movie star, soap opera type, actor and actress names would do. Dad and Moma named me Mary Elizabeth (which, not coincidentally, was Daddy's mother's name). Father Teurlings spelled it Marie Elisabeth.

In those years, the leader of the Diocese of Lafayette was Bishop Jules Jeanmard. He was a very stately, somber person, or at least he always seemed that way to me. When he entered the church in procession to the altar, I knew we were in for a long Mass and sermon. Add to that the fact that the Mass was prayed in Latin. During these sermons, I often became a little restless and would ease down to sit on the kneeler. If Moma was intent on the homily, I would slowly slip under the pew in front of us. One time I actually made it to the altar in that manner to get a closer look at the priest. I never tried that again! I guess you could say that Moma insisted I control my curiosity.

In the ensuing years we were to live in other towns and attend Mass in other churches; but in 1933, when I was about ten years old, much to our happiness, we returned to the farm in Lafayette. Once again we made our way to St. John's with Moma where I was to make my first communion and confirmation and eventually recite my marriage vows.

OLD CHOC

by

E. D. Parker

When I was four or five years old, my parents moved to the farm. They thought the country was the best place to raise boys. Dad owned a half section of land (one square mile) across the road from the Swearingen School. The school was located about half way between Wellington and Memphis, Texas. These towns are about 25 miles apart. Dad had obtained the land from his sister Ruth, the widow of the late Bob Ellison. Bob had owned a ranch, about ten sections or so in size, lying to the north and west of the old Memphis-Wellington road. His father, Colonel Ellison, owned a ranch of about equal size across the road from Bob's. The Colonel's ranch had been purchased by Jim Griffis before we moved to the community. The Swearingen School was built on the edge of a prairie dog town on the north side of the Colonel's ranch.

Since there was no house on our farm, we moved into the old ranch headquarters (Aunt Ruth's ranch) and lived there while Dad built a house on the farm. It was built on a hill three or four hundred yards northwest of the school house. We were the closest kids to school.

Before moving from Wellington, Dad bought a horse and buggy. The buggy and a wagon were our only means of transportation until we obtained our first car (a second hand Model T Ford touring car) several years later. The horse was used both as a buggy horse and a saddle horse. He didn't work in the field, however. We had four mules for the heavy stuff such as plowing and hauling. His name was Choc, short for Choctaw. I'm not sure how he got his name, but I suspect Dad chose it. Since Wellington is only 12 1/2 miles from Oklahoma, it is probable the name came either from the town, Choctaw, OK, or from the Indian tribe of the same name. Choc was a small horse, presumably a mustang. His color was between sorrel and palomino-- lighter than sorrel and darker than palomino.

The accompanying picture of Choc and his three principal riders was made in about 1918 or 1919. The riders are my two brother and I. The oldest is John, the youngest is Joe; I'm in the middle. If you look carefully at the shoes, you will see that two of them are lace up models; but the other is a button shoe, probably a hand-me-down from John. I just discovered that bit of shoe trivia this week. Button shoes were fastened with a button hook. I'm

sure they were going out of style when this picture was made. The picture was made by Miss Callie (Buchanon), the local school teacher. Swearingen School, a one room one teacher school, was a little over 1/2 mile from the house we were living in and just across the road from the future house we were moving into.

I have many fond memories of old Choc. To us boys he was the greatest horse that ever lived. He was so gentle we could catch him in the pasture, jump on and ride him to the house without benefit of bridle or saddle. We usually had to offer him something as a bribe. If you had a biscuit, a head of maize or especially a piece of watermelon rind as bait, he would meet you half way. In fact, we frequently caught him by picking up a clump of grass or holding out a cupped hand as if we had sugar or some other goodie. That may seem a little like cheating, but I guess our conscience didn't bother us for long.

Old Choc retired gradually. When we got our first car, the buggy was no longer used. We also acquired another horse, a young high spirited gelding. He was named Coaly because he was dark gray, almost as black as coal. He was ridden mostly by brother John. Our parents thought he was too high spirited for Joe and me. I didn't exactly agree with that decision, especially since it had been proven in my own mind that I was a better rider than John. I could ride some of the milk pen calves that he couldn't. At any rate Choc was ridden less and less and finally not at all. He grew old and skinny and spent his last days wandering around the pasture. Finally we didn't see Choc for several days, and after looking, someone found his body in a canyon in the northwest corner of the pasture completely out of sight of the house. Old Choc had come to the end of his days. That was a very sad day in the life of the Parker family.

IMPRESSIONS OF CHILDHOOD

by

Jane Temple

SPRING meant lilacs... a whole block of them. One of the neighbors had planted twenty to thirty bushes by the side of the road, and in the spring I loved to play in and around their sweet smelling branches. Spring was the time for exploring in the woods behind and beyond our home looking for the first signs of the wood violets and lily-of-the-valley. Spring had arrived when they appeared. Spring was also my birthday. Once in awhile April was warm enough to have a party outside. And then there was the birthday when we had snow on April 4th.

SUMMER was hot days playing under the sprinkler and hot

nights playing hide-and-go-seek in the twilight and not wanting to come inside because it was still light outside. Summer was rollerskating to Grandma's house, vacations at the lake with cousins and friends, reading during the hot afternoons when we were supposed to be taking a nap. Summer was my Dad taking off the training wheels and teaching me to ride a two wheeler, running alongside while I tried to keep my balance. We worked all afternoon until we were both exhausted and frustrated. The next morning I got up, got on the bike and rode like I'd been doing it all my life. Summer was a month at the lake. No electricity, no plumbing, only kerosene lamps, a stove and the outhouse. We learned to swim, row a boat, paddle a canoe and fish. The long days started with our two hour lessons. Mother, a former school teacher, insisted we study every summer so we wouldn't fall behind. How I hated those two hours!! Once we finished our lessons and our chores, we had the rest of the day free; but it seemed as if it took forever to complete our assigned tasks.

FALL was starting school, Public School #19. The school was located at the end of our street so we walked to school and came home for lunch. This was the time for learning to read, struggling with long division, playing Alice in "Alice in Wonderland" because I had straight blonde hair at that time. The days grew cooler in the fall. The leaves turned brilliant colors. Time for sweaters, hats and coats, for cleaning out the gardens, and raking the leaves.

WINTER meant freezing cold, sometimes below zero. It also meant the cream at the top of the milk bottles would freeze, and we would have a treat. In the winter when the milk left at our door every morning froze, it pushed the iced cream above the bottle top; there it stayed suspended. What a treat it was to eat it as soon as we brought it inside! Winter meant having someone pull you on a sled and, as we grew older, trudging up the good sledding hill with the sled or toboggan. The older children would start a path down the hill and through the trees. We would slide for hours until our hands and feet were too cold and we had to go home. One winter while sliding down the hill I collided with a tree and broke my arm. That took care of winter sports for that year. Ice skating was our other outdoor activity during the winter. We walked about a mile to the skating pond. My ankles were never very strong, and after a few hours, it was good to sit around the bonfire watching the older children skate. And finally, winter meant coming home after skating or sledding to a warm cup of hot chocolate with marshmallows floating on the top.

A GYPSY VISIT

by

Nancy Burns

Papa said that Beaver Creek was clear and clean because gypsies always camped near the purist of waters. They came every summer to our Appalachian Mountain town of Beverly, West Virginia. The little stream served so many purposes for them. They watered their horses from it, washed their clothing in it, and carried it to their camps to use in their cooking and drinking. The brown gypsy children swam and played in it, and all of the families bathed in the stream.

The water from Beaver Creek, trickling down from the hills above it, had carved out a hollow about a third of a mile wide. Centuries of running water had rounded out all of the rocks, making it just right for bare feet. The gypsies camped on a narrow sandbar right alongside the stream. They came in mid-June, staying about a week.

Our small town was located about two miles north of the gypsy camp. Their coming into our valley may have been the most exciting event of the summer. I used to wonder why anyone called it "vacation time" because during the Depression very few people went anywhere. Most days were long and peaceful in the early thirties. Ideas were provincial, heavily influenced by an earlier Victorian age. It was exciting to see the first gypsy ride into town and tie up his horse in front of Channel's Grocery Store. We knew that he was the Head Gypsy and that the others would arrive in a few days.

These dark, strange, mysterious people filled our heads with curiosity. Adults, as well as children, had so many questions about them... "Where did they come from?" "Do the children go to school?" "Where will they live in the winter when valleys and mountains are covered with snow?" "Do they go to doctors and hospitals when they get sick like we do?" "Can they read and write?" "Where do the gypsy men work?" Answers to our questions remained a mystery.

While the Head Gypsy was getting supplies, most of the children in town had gathered to look over his horse and to press their faces against the store windows to get a better look at him. The dark brown horse had black and red fringed blankets hanging from under the saddle. Imbedded into the leather of the bridle and saddle were pieces of silver.

The gypsy man, dressed in black, ignored us, but not before we noted his coal black eyes and swarthy complexion. His straight ink black hair hung past his shoulders. Bright feathers trimmed the brim of his hat. To our amazement, he had jeweled rings on his fingers and an earring in one ear. More curious than ever, the more daring ones of us ran alongside the gypsy man and his horse until we were all out of breath.

The arrival of the gypsy families created quite another stir. Each open wagon was pulled by two horses, and a gypsy man

rode in front on another horse. There were fifteen to twenty families riding quietly, unhurriedly through town. We waved to the dark-eyed children, but they simply stared at us.

The gypsy women had heavy shapeless bodies and sat low in the wagons. They seemed to be dressed alike in black skirts and bright red or orange blouses. Colorful fringed shawls covered their heads, but one could see their straight dark hair falling down over their backs. They wore silver necklaces, rings, and long metal earring. We stood on our porches watching the wagons go by, all the while making plans to visit the gypsy camp.

That year, my brother Bob refused to go with us, claiming "Never again!". The previous summer a gypsy man had tricked him into working a whole day with the promise, "I'll give that pony to you." Bob hauled water for the horses, washed down wagons, scrubbed tents, helped the gypsy women wash clothing and did all sorts of jobs the man had told him to do. Late that afternoon, the gypsy tied a cord around the pony's neck and handed the other end to Bob. The pony and his new master had not gone far when the animal broke the cord easily and ran back to its mother. Bob immediately went to retrieve his property, but the gypsy angrily told him "Get going. I gave him to you once. No more!".

My other brothers and sisters were eager to go. That summer evening, a crowd of teenagers and younger children accompanied by twelve to fifteen adults began an excited pilgrimage to the gypsy camp. We children skipped and ran ahead. Some of us were bare footed, but the gray gravel road didn't bother us at all. Grownups took their time and visited with each other. The good smell of chicken and spices cooking let us know that it was time to turn off the road. A curving, weedy pathway led to the water's edge. There was the gypsy camp on the other side of Beaver Creek. Brown tents with pointed tops were spread along the stream with smoky, yellow fires sparkling in front of them.

After a two mile walk it was nice just to sit and watch the gypsies. Children played in and out of the water. Younger ones were naked, but took no notice of our pointing and giggling. Gypsy boys brushed their horses and led them to the stream to drink. Girls with long black hair gathered firewood from the woods nearby. Later the women rinsed their skillets and dishes in the stream while some of the men sat in circles, dealing out cards to each other.

When the golden sun began to set, families came together and sat on rugs outside their tents. Children, now dressed in flowered gowns, played close by. Shortly before dark the camp became quiet. Reflections of the brilliant setting danced in the waters of Beaver Creek. Gypsy men brought out their mandolins and began to play sweet, haunting melodies. All of us sat on the grassy bank, listening in hushed silence. The only other sound was that of rippling water.

The enchanting music of the gypsies must have cast a spell on their uninvited guests, for later that evening, we walked home in silence.

THE SUMMER OF 1909

by

Judith S. Solberg

The summer of 1909 found me growing up. I was three and a half years old. I remember my Father coming in from the field on his horse. After he hung his derby hat on the hat rack, a servant brought him a glass of water and a cup of hot coffee. Papa used cream and sugar. I still have the green pitcher with pink roses he always used.

One afternoon Papa called me to the back porch. He lifted me up, seating me in front of him in the saddle on his big horse Frank. We rode to the field where the workers were busy picking cotton. They dragged long sacks behind them as they picked each row of cotton. When the sacks were full, the hired pickers took them to a large wagon where the foreman weighed the cotton on a scale rigged-up for the field. The pickers were paid for each one hundred pounds they picked. Sharecroppers were not paid that way for they had a share of the crop that was picked.

I was so proud and happy, sitting with my Father on his beautiful horse. Frank was a very large horse. He had a dark red color, a curly blond mane, and a long blond tail. A gaited horse, he had various gaits, or steps, on touch command.

Papa usually wore brown clothes. He also wore a pistol around his waist to kill a rattle snake, or maybe shoot a rabbit. On his boots he wore spurs. The spurs were attached to an iron ring the boot slipped through. A small wheel, made of metal, with points like stars, was at the back of the boot. A gentle "touch" was enough to make the horse go faster. Papa was a handsome man.

On all plantations, workers were in the field from "kin-to-can't." They worked during the cool mornings and evenings. Papa had made a horn from a cow's horn. He had worked out a sort of "Marconi code" to call the men. There were ten or twelve sharecropper families on the plantation. They lived in small wooden houses called cabins, located in various parts of the farming land. Two short toots and a long one called Pierre to the house. Two long calls and a short one brought Antoine to the house. They all knew their calls. I remember Papa blowing the horn. There was also a large ball on a high pole to call all the workers to the house. Such was life without the telephone.

ASSIGNMENT: WEISBADEN, PART II

by

Hilda Faul

My sister, Cora Williamson, drove the boys and I to the airport in Lafayette, Louisiana. There we said our farewells and boarded a small plane that took us to New Orleans on the first leg of our journey. We would be gone for three years.

Upon arriving in New Orleans, I checked our bags. We would have a two hour wait before boarding our second plane. This large carrier would fly us to Newark, New Jersey, with only one stop in Atlanta to our reunion with Dad!

Flying out of Atlanta, we were served cocktails and a delicious meal of Cornish hen with all the trimmings. We arrived at Newark airport in record time. No problems-- it had been a fun trip.

Upon landing, though, both of my children, Tony (2) and Dwight (10), became airsick! Everyone was getting off the plane except us! Tony upchucked once, a reaction I'm sure, to watching Dwight as he began filling up all the airbags in sight!

The crew helped me by gathering our things, bringing me wet towels, trying in vain to get us off the aircraft! The pilot and co-pilot came by to cheer us up. One of them patted Tony's head saying "This boy will make a good aviator; but that one," as he looked at Dwight, "had better keep his feet solidly on the ground!"

Someone working with the crew directed us to the large terminal after Dwight finally settled down. The building was about a city block away from where the airplane was parked. In those days planes parked away from the terminals after landing.

I sat the boys down and went to check my heavy bags. A Red Cap helped, then directed me to a bus stop just out of the front part of the large building. Here in about two hours we would board a bus that would take us to McGuire A.F.B., about thirty or forty miles away. There was a guest house he informed me where we could rest up before being processed to leave the United States.

I fed Dwight some dry crackers, asking him not to drink too much fluids. We still had a very long trip ahead of us. Having his feet on the ground, trying to read some, and helping me with his little brother helped a bit. I noticed he was flushed, his skin was dry and hot to the touch; he was running a temperature! I started to worry that something might be wrong with this kid that always seemed to pick up any bug going around. I gave him some aspirin and prayed he would be alright! All seemed well again before we got on the bus to McGuire.

Just before the bus arrived, I got them into their snowsuits and parkas. We went out into the very cold windy February weather to wait for our transportation. Soon we were going to be on a military installation! I would feel comfortable and secure again! I knew some one there would help me with my sick child.

I still have a good feeling when driving onto a military base. It's like coming home to a family.

The bus arrived packed with people, standing room only. We had to take this one since there wasn't another one coming until the next morning! One young man gave up his seat for me. I let Dwight have it. He was having a hard time standing up. His legs were wobbly. He looked pale!

Most of these people were young Army men headed for Fort Dix, New Jersey. They were all wearing their Class A uniforms. The bus made several stops. Finally we could all be seated! One of the last stops was at Fort Dix. I never dreamed as I said goodbye to a couple of new friends getting off the bus here that I would be back in two days' time with a very sick child!

The A.F. had made reservations for us at the McGuire A.F.B. Guesthouse. Our bus took us to the steps of that complex. We all had to stand in line to sign in and get our key. They had people there to help with our bags. We found our room, took a shower, and then all took a short nap! We had been traveling since early that morning. It was dark when we arrived at McGuire. It had been a very long day!

After our nap we took our evening meal at the base cafeteria nearby. Dwight picked at his food. All he wanted to do was drink Cokes. He wasn't complaining of pain, had stopped vomiting, and his temperature stayed normal. I was giving him aspirin every four hours! I was concerned about my child and took him to the A.F. Clinic on base. The doctor who examined him though it was probably airsickness. I felt better about the whole thing. I was just overreacting!

Dwight made friends very easily and soon after our arrival at McGuire was "paling" around with a couple boys his age. That night Tony and I slept well. Dwight didn't!

The next morning was a busy one for me! We were briefed on how to conduct ourselves in a foreign country, told to be good ambassadors, and reminded anything done to the contrary would reflect on the sponsor and mean a ticket back to U.S. to face the consequences! This took all morning! There were large groups of people leaving on the MATS flights the following day! Our afternoon was free to do as we pleased. We were going to be on one of the early flights the next day.

The boys and I took a cab from the guesthouse to the terminal, bringing our bags to be checked early, getting them out of the way. Then we took seats in the waiting area and people-watched! It was fun trying to guess where they might be headed! There were many happy smiling faces as they lined up to get on their MATS flights which seemed to be leaving every two or three hours. After breakfast the next morning it was our turn to be bused from the guesthouse to the terminal. Our passports and shot records were checked, we were lined up, and boarded the aircraft. We were seated, our handbags were put in the proper place; we were all set to go!

A storm came up. We had to disembark, go back into the terminal, and be seated to wait out the weather! It was about an

hour later that Dwight left his seat to go to the bathroom. About this time we were told to line up again! I sent his new found friend to get him; he had been in the bathroom a long time! The friend came out of the men's bathroom to tell me Dwight was very sick. "He has a stomachache," he said. I went into the men's room to find my son doubled up in pain! I broke all the rules and found a medic, a corpsman, on duty at the terminal. He checked Dwight and told me, "I'm no doctor, but I think your son had a hot appendix!"

The duty officer was called, and the MATS flight was held up again, so they could remove our bags from the airplane! A nearby staff car was summoned, and the driver assisted in getting us to Fort Dix Hospital Emergency Room fifteen miles away. The hospital had been called; an Army doctor was waiting for us ! Yes, indeed, Dwight had a hot appendix! He would go into surgery as soon as they could get a team together! Lordy, Lordy, what am I supposed to do now?

The Army Hospital notified Dad who had been waiting for us at the Frankfurt Airport. Someone took my bags back to the guesthouse and placed them in the same room we had slept in two nights before! I couldn't believe the military had moved so well, so quickly! Dwight's surgery went well and by midnight on the day we should have been reunited with Dad after a year's separation, we were still in the U.S.! I knelt beside my bed in the guesthouse at McGuire A.F.B., New Jersey, thanking God that our son was going to be all right! I prayed for the A.F. Dr. who had goofed, for the people at the terminal who had helped us, and especially for the surgeon whose skilled hands had saved our son's life! To this day I wonder what would have happened if that storm had not come up when it did, on that day so long ago in the state of New Jersey, U.S.A.!

The A.F rescheduled our flight after the Army doctor o.k.'ed Dwight's being able to travel. We were booked on a Pan Am flight to Frankfurt, seven days after Dwight lost his appendix! We had a wonderful flight with a stopover in Shannon, Ireland!

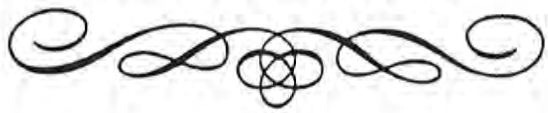
The boys grabbed handfuls of snow as we walked from our plane into the terminal at Shannon. I had my first "Irish coffee" there! It tasted so good! I have never tasted another one quite as good ever again. Not even on our visit to the same airport years later! I guess I really needed that first one!

As a child I had dreamed of seeing Ireland when I grew up. I had read about this beautiful country all during my school years. I was here now, and all I could see was the snow on the ground, airplanes on the runway, and the inside of a building! It was the middle of the night, and there was a heavy fog.

Dad would take me on a week's vacation by car to this beautiful country some years later! That's another story!

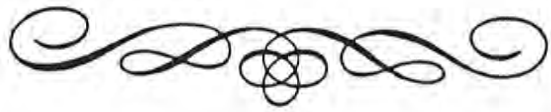
We arrived in Frankfurt on time. Dad and a group of friends were there to greet us! We drove to Weisbaden and climbed the stairs to our beautiful third floor apartment that would be our home for the next three years. We loved our "Assignment Weisbaden" with ample time off from the job, the American

dependent schools, the churches, the castles on the Rhine, the lovely countryside, and the German people!



WHEN I WAS FIVE
by
Bonnie Gillis

In West Texas, it was hot. Dirt roads, no way to stay cool in summer. My dad was a big, strong, wise, strict, and loving father of ten children, six girls and four boys. I never heard him say an ugly word. He worked lots of men in the oilfield and I am sure he heard coarse language, but he said it showed lack of intelligence. When he came home he sat on the front screened porch with his feet in a tub of water to rest and cool off while reading the Wichita Daily Times. This day I went crying to him, and he picked me up and asked, "what's the matter?" I said, "I'm not pretty like Nookie." She had blond curly hair. Mine was thick, dark brown, cut Buster Brown style, and I had freckles on my nose. He kissed me and said, "Baby, I love every freckle on your pretty little face." I jumped down and ran off to play and was happy because he loved me.



PAPA'S DREAM
by
Chris Smith

Soon after Papa married Mama, his family suffered the loss of their large estate near Arnaudville, Louisiana, causing them to become sharecroppers. Papa vowed that he would one day be the owner of the land on which he earned his living.

After taking over the farm belonging to his father-in-law, Pierre LeBlanc, in 1914, he was getting two thirds of the produce. When Grandfather died in 1922, we moved into his house. Then Papa had to settle with the heirs, which included Mama. Our family grew so fast that the house had to be enlarged by 1932.

It was agreed that the heirs would allow Papa to keep all

the funds coming from the farm until the cost of improvement was paid. But the heirs refused to pay him their share of what he had spent on improvements of the place.

By 1942, Papa realized he was getting old. His health was failing, and his three sons had left home to serve their country. Papa was receiving an allotment from two of them; but he refused to spend their money to purchase land for the family.

As a last resort, Papa called a meeting of the heirs and informed them that he had taken judgement against the property for the cost of improvement over ten years. The difference came to $600 that he would pay them if they sold to him. This excluded Mama's share. The other heirs agreed to the plan. But Papa did not have the funds to purchase the land. If they had agreed to pay him off, he could have bought elsewhere with the money he received.

One day he decided to try borrowing from a bank and offer the 42 arpents as collateral. The officer told him that he would have to give $200 deposit, and the note would be due monthly. Papa tried to reason with him, but he did not succeed. Standing in line behind Papa was a man named George Arceneaux who told him to wait outside. Mr. Arceneaux introduced himself to Papa and wrote a note to Mrs. Charles Miller who lived in Carencro.

Papa followed Mr. Arceneaux's instructions to go to a house located on Highway 182 next to the high school. Upon arrival, he rang the front doorbell, which was not customary for black men to do at the home of white people at that time.

A black maid answered the door, asking his reason for calling. He heard a voice in the background. "Who is it?" Papa handed the note to the maid, who took it to Mrs. Miller. She came to the door and offered to shake Papa's hand, making him feel ill at ease. But she insisted and introduced herself and invited him into her home.

She called her daughter, Miss Bonnie, who was confined to a wheelchair, to meet Papa. She was her mother's bookkeeper and a teacher in the Nursing Department at S.L.I. After listening to Papa's tale of woe, Mrs. Miller gave orders to Miss Bonnie to call Bill Mouton, their attorney, for advice. She told Papa that she operated a loan business to help poor black folks to own the farms they worked.

As Papa left, Mrs. Miller assured Papa that in a matter of a few days she would finance the note. Papa was so happy, he came home with ice, salt, and flavorings to celebrate with ice cream. A few days later, Mrs. Miller and Miss Bonnie paid us a visit to inspect the place that they would buy. They fell in love with the place immediately. They seemed happier than us to have invested their money in our land.

When the agreements were drawn, Papa signed a note for $600 with no deposit and interest at 8% due annually. She did not require payment on the principal. She left this decision to the borrower.

Papa worried about the mortgage, so he saved the money from the allotments and the farm produce. In a matter of six months,

he paid the note off. Mrs. Miller was not too happy at first, but after Papa explained the possibility of his death before she was paid, she agreed with him. This act of payment in advance resulted in Mrs. Miller's becoming the family's source of finances. Three of us bought our homes through Mrs. Miller.

The farm which she made possible for us to own is still in the family. Mama died in 1943; Papa died in 1945. We have since divided the property among the ten children. There was a time it was used as a family camp for the grandchildren.

A recent survey revealed that land ownership among black people in the South has diminished over the years. Our ancestors placed more value on being land owners with less education and income at their disposal than we enjoy today. Papa's dying requests to the ten of us were, "When one has, let ten have; when one bleeds, let ten bleed." "Never sell our land to a stranger. If one has to sell his or her share, sell to each other." Over the years, this has been the LeBlanc family tradition. That is why today it remains the LeBlanc Estate.

Our land changed names when the family sold to Mama and Papa. It came into the family possession as an Acadian land grant over 200 years ago. Great-grandfather Placide LeBlanc was the recipient at the time of the Acadian exile and left the land to his descendants. The entire estate is 168 arpents of land near the Vermilion River. This was divided among the three sons: Stanville, Victor, and Pierre.

WORK, A WAR, A WEDDING, AND VICTORY

by

Esther Parker

The construction of Southern Regional Research Laboratory, Department of Agriculture, was started about 1940 and finished in the latter part of 1941. It is located on Robert E. Lee Boulevard in New Orleans, Louisiana, quite an impressive building-- one of four such laboratories in our country, Northern, Eastern, Western, and ours, the Southern. It opened for business in the summer of '41. My brother's wife, Billie Warren, was employed there; when she learned that they wanted to hire someone on a temporary basis, she told me about the opening position. I applied, starting work on Friday, December 5, 1941. One of the many advantages about working at SRRL, as the personnel manager, Mr. Smith, pointed out to me, was the several holidays to be enjoyed if the position should become permanent.

Well, Pearl Harbor was attacked that Sunday, December 7. We were informed over the intercom Monday morning that leaves would

be limited and the only holiday for the duration would be Christmas.

I was hired initially to take dictation from Dr. Glen Bickford, a chemist, who was translating from German scientific journals. My work was very interesting and challenging; Dr. Bickford was great to work with. The scientific personnel were predominately non-locals from all parts of the United States.

After a month or two, the business manager called me to his office and said that after looking over my resume, he thought I was needed in the Accounting Section on a permanent basis if I was interested. I jumped at the chance; I really liked the Lab.

My boss was Agnes Biehler; Audrey was the other employee in the office. I was put on payroll and bonds (all employees were politely asked to buy bonds through payroll deductions). It become a competitive project-- divisions, sections, and departments all vying for the Top spot. I became pretty well acquainted with everyone as it was part of my job to hand deliver pay checks and bonds to each employee; by this time the count had reached over 300.

One night at home I had a phone call from Ed Parker, one of the chemists, asking if I'd like to go out. I gladly accepted, although there was a puzzle-- which one is Ed? In the Oil, Fat, & Protein Division, there were three good looking fellows, all six feet tall, with blue eyes and similar coloring who were close friends and usually together at breaks and lunch. I always had to ask which was who on pay day and bond day. I knew one was married, so it had to be one of two.

The next night was our league bowling so I was hopeful that I'd know whom I'd made the date with. Sure enough, Ed came around and said something about "Saturday night"-- he was the one with the moustache. My Papa had had a moustache, and Mama often said, "Kissing a man without a moustache is like eating eggs without salt."

Ed and I went to the Court of Two Sisters with another couple, Betty Campbell and Earl Roberts, who was the other single handsome one. We had a great time although we didn't go back there until our 25th anniversary.

After a few months Ed proposed, I accepted, and we became engaged. One day a new employee, Vitza Vidacovich, was bemoaning the fact that at 18 she wasn't even going steady. I told her she was too young anyway. "Meet a few boys and have fun before you settle down." She asked me how old I was. When I told her "twenty-six," she exclaimed, "Oh, Esther, you're so well preserved!"

Ed and I were the tenth couple who both worked at SRRL who were engaged to be married, upsetting one of the confirmed bachelors who threatened to quit. But what could one expect? We had little time off to meet any outsiders.

We were married on May 31, 1944, and because of gas rationing, went by train to meet Ed's folks in Wellington, Texas. It was a long ride, more so because Ed had to study for a thermodynamics examination he would have to take as soon as we

returned. He had been going to Tulane at night working toward his Master's degree. We arrived in Childress at 2:00 a.m. where Ed's folks were to meet us as the train did not go to Wellington. Childress is 25 miles from Wellington. (I think we were the only passengers off at Childress.) There was no one in the station. I went to the restroom first, then Ed. Wouldn't you know that a lady came rushing into the station while Ed was washing his hands? I hesitated a bit, but there was nothing else I could do. With my heart flipping, I went up to her, "Are you Mrs. Parker?" She turned and gave me a bear hug. Ed appeared, and we all started laughing. Mrs. Cudd, a family friend brought Ed's mom to meet us. His dad, Pops, was home frying chicken for us. At Mom and Pop's we talked almost until dawn.

Ed borrowed his dad's car for us to visit folks out in the country. Everyone we visited was so friendly. They all wanted to feed us. The Jarrell's were about the third family we visited. Mr. Jarrell was the best looking older man I'd ever seen-- he could have been a movie star. His wife was just as sweet as he was handsome. It was at their place that I had to go to the outhouse. Much to my surprise, a rooster chased me in. Then-- he wouldn't let me out! Each time I opened the door one or two inches, he'd fly up at me. I shouted as loudly as I could, calling "Eddddddddd!" It seemed an hour before he and Mrs. Jarrell came to rescue me. I was so embarrassed; but at the same time, the humor of it made me laugh as I thought of how family and friends back home would enjoy the telling. We visited several more families, including one of Ed's school buddies, Ralph Messer. We went roller skating with him one evening-- the first time I'd skated in fifteen plus years.

Ed got little studying done except on the train going and coming, but he did fine on his exam. Our honeymoon was not very glamorous, but it surely was memorable and very busy.

On V.E. Day, May 8, 1945, when it was announced on the radio that the war in Europe was over, we wanted to tell my mother, not just phone her. When we stopped for a red light at Canal and Broad Streets, our horn started-- in a second horns started blowing all around us; everyone was celebrating. Ed drove on a couple of blocks, then got out and stopped the horn. We did enjoy the racket. Mama was so pleased that we went over with the news.