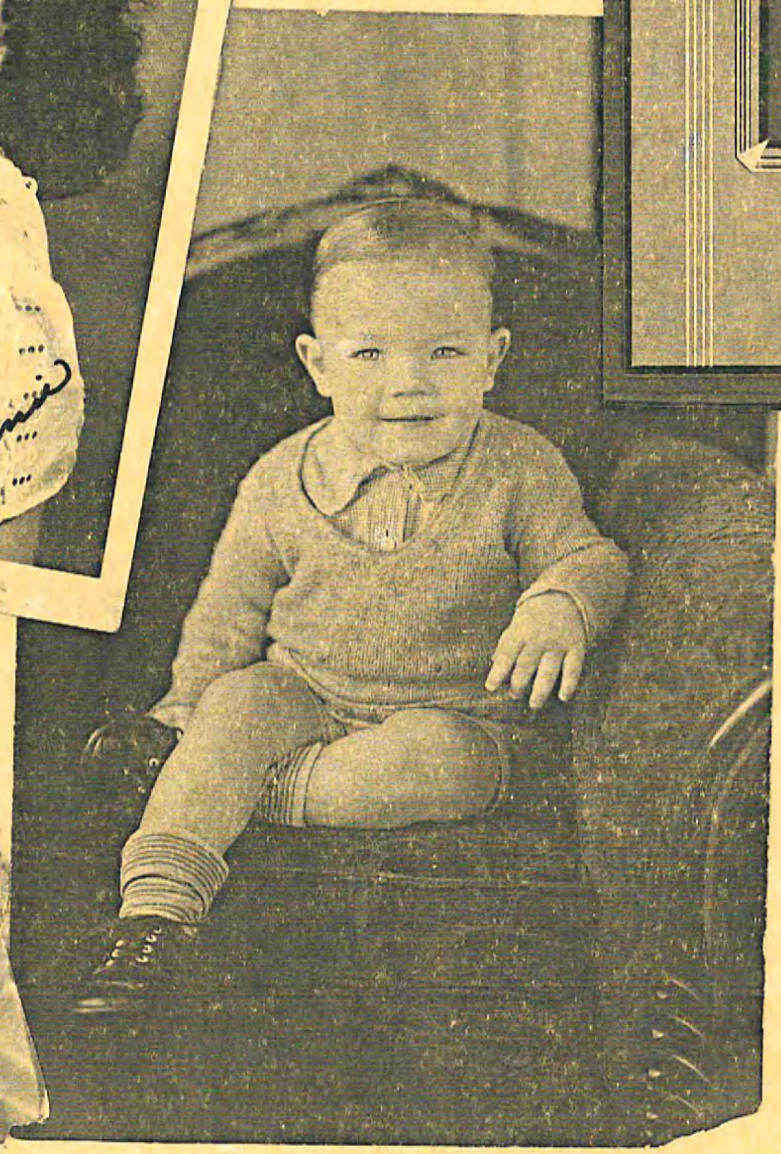

Life and Letters

volume VIIIa

The final topic for this fall semester's **Life & Letters** course was entitled "This Is Your Elder Speaking." Almost unanimously the students agreed that this assignment posed the greatest challenge for them. "I'm not wise." "Surely you're not associating age with wisdom." Yes, you are. And yes, I am. Their defenses are justifiable; but so are mine. I speak as inexperience, the way of the young. I also speak as hope and expectation. Surely aging offers our lives a perspective unlike the paralyzing myopia by which youth is often limited. If it doesn't, then at least an earlier generation has the right to say "I've been there before. This is the way and this is where it has brought me." Don't our lives make the best stories (even the best "advice givers") we can offer, even though they might be (indeed they are!) imperfect pieces of history?

The real power of this endeavor in life history writing lies in listening. When we listen with the heart, we hear those broken bells ring again. We see the faint outline of a friend long gone. We taste the harvest even in winter. And we smell a rose out of its season. The power of these impressions is not a made up thing. It's passed on from generation to generation if we will incline our heart to the wisdom of the ages. When wisdom speaks we must listen with care. We pass these imperfect but wise stories on to you, with love.

-----Joan Stear
USL, Lafayette, Louisiana
Fall 1993

LIFE & LETTERS thanks the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Lafayette General Medical Center for their support. Another thank you (of many) to Rhonda Harwell for helping the editor out of computer snags.

Front Cover (clockwise from upper righthand corner): Ann Lee; Esther and Ed Parker; Anne Comeaux; Bonnie Gillis; (center) John Townshend

LIFE AND LETTERS--Fall 1993
Front row, l. to r.: Lorraine Rutowski; Hilda Faul; Bonnie Gillis; Anne Comeaux; Ruth Falk; Esther Parker. Back row, l. to r.: Ed Parker; Nancy Moreau; John Townshend; Woodson Hopkins; Joe Glorioso; Joan Stear

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A CHRISTMAS TO REMEMBER

by

Lorraine Rutowski

The first Christmas that I remember clearly was in the year of 1937. I was a happy seven year old living in our Loomis Street apartment. At this time, my two oldest sisters, Esther and Clara, and my brother Casimir were working (somewhat sporadically, because jobs were hard to find). Nonetheless, our family was able to afford a few luxuries.

My sisters established a line of credit at a local furniture store, and the parlor, which had been bare, was furnished with a soft Oriental carpet, a plush red velvet sofa and matching chair, lamps, and end tables. It was in this room that we placed our Christmas tree to be decorated.

Now about that tree: every year Father waited until late Christmas Eve to go out and buy it. My sisters waited (exasperated!) with the boxes of Mama's beautiful glass ornaments. Before they could bejewel the tree, they had to convince Father to go and get it. Finally, after much cajoling, he agreed. Father didn't like spending money on frivolous thins, and thought that Christmas was already too commercial. Also, I suspect he waited so long so that he could get one at a lower price, or even free. Of course, the tree he brought home was badly proportioned, but we didn't care. The bare side of the tree was turned to the wall. After Casimir repaired the tree lights and they were arranged, my sisters carefully placed each ornament on the branches; I was lifted up by the strong loving hands of my brother to place the angel on the top. We also had angel-hair and tinsel, which I had placed, on it. We eventually eliminated the angel-hair, as it made everyone's skin itch. The tree was beautiful; even the big ornate trees in Marshall Field's Department Store couldn't compare; to me, our Christmas tree was the most beautiful tree in the world.

Our home was filled with the piney smell of that tree, and from the kitchen came the sweet aroma of Mama's baking. She made big soft molasses cookies and plum-topped coffee cakes. We all snacked on the cookies, sniffing the pungent aromas in the air.

We went to bed that night, snuggling under the fluffy feather-thicks that kept us warm even in below zero temperatures.

When I awoke in the morning, the icy floor touching my warm feet wouldn't be noticed as the anticipation of the coming events would make me

impervious to its icy touch. Soon the fire that Mama had built in the cast iron stove in the kitchen would warm that room.

During the night, presents had been placed under the tree; and I ran swiftly to find the ones with my name on them and to place the red construction paper Santa's (I had made them in school for my family) under the tree. Most everyone in the family had received clothing, books, and phonograph records and utilitarian items, but I, being the youngest, had the treasures of Solomon before me: a baby doll dressed in soft white net, with matching bonnet, a small piano, a nurse's kit, and a wind up trapeze with a ballerina that swung over it. Also, there under the tree, stood a big wooden decorative bucket, with a wooden handle and cover, filled with hard Christmas candy. There was a beautiful tin box of candied fruit for Mama from a favorite candy store downtown.

That Christmas Day, there was a duck sizzling in the oven and potato dumpling simmering on the stove, fogging out frozen kitchen windows. Also cooking was a duck soup, called Chahdnina, which was made from a duck (along with its blood, which the butcher had saved in a jar with vinegar), prunes, apples, and raisins. It was served with dumplings and was a delicious concoction of sweet sour flavor that we gobbled up with gusto.

That night, as I snuggled under the feather-thick, I thought how nice it would be if Christmas would never end; and I slept the deep delicious sleep that only a much loved child can sleep.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

by

Hilda Faul

Psalm 138:8 "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me."

By the time I was five years old, my second born sister, Minnie, the brains in our family, had taught me the alphabet, numbers, even how to write my name. As French was the only spoken language in our home, she had also taught me to speak English fairly well.

While Minnie was away at boarding school, I would practice what I had learned. When she'd return on weekends, she would grade my work, giving me a gold or silver star for my efforts.

One weekend I was given an activity book she had purchased at McManus Mercantile. Minnie wanted me to learn to make pictures before I started first grade. Eager to learn and to please my sister, I would sit very quietly for long periods of time at the kitchen table, out of Nannie's way, and do my homework.

However, when I first started working on my new activity, it was a different story. Hunched over the book I had been given, I tried over and over again to bring to life a dot-to-dot portrait of a dog. I cried softly. I just could not understand why it kept looking more and more like an unraveled ball of yarn.

Nannie gave me orders to take time out. When I finally got back to the book, we were nearing the weekend; I had a deadline to meet. Finally giving up or perhaps thinking I had completed my masterpiece, I carefully closed the book and placed it on my sister's bed to be graded when she returned home on the weekend.

"Honey," she always called me that, "you should draw a line from number one to number two and then follow each number in order," she said.

"Why, Sis?"

"Because the person who designed this picture had a purpose for all those dots When you join them together in proper order, you'll have a complete picture that you can recognize, just the way the artist planned it."

Minnie then opened the activity book to another page full of dots. She put her hand over mine and gently helped me move my pencil from dot-to-dot in proper order. Just like magic a picture of a cat came to life. When

our pencil reached the last number, I squealed with joy. "Oh, Sis! Now I understand how to make a picture."

For the next few weeks I dreamed of becoming a great artist just like the person who had designed the pictures in my activity book. When I completed all of the work in my book, I received another gold star for my efforts.

Today as I complete this paper I think about the dozens of times I've changed my mind through the years about what I really wanted to do when I grew up. I think about all of the black dots in my life. Dark blots of trials, mistakes, hurts, and unplanned events that have cluttered the landscape of my days. So often I have wanted to go from number one to number ten and the skip the stops in between.

I also marvel at the wonders of my life. I reflect on the yesterdays, and I am grateful for the lessons taught. My life has been special, serving a special purpose uniquely my own. All of these experiences connected in proper order have been simply to teach me what I have yet to learn.

I am thankful to the Lord for knitting me together, for gently guiding me and designing the days and events of my life in the way he has purpose them to be, and so I say today, "Lord, now I understand!" Keep knitting this ball of yarn!

VISITING THE COLLEGE IN DENTON, TEXAS

by

Ann Lee

The colleges in Denton, Texas, were always an important part of my life from early childhood. I'd heard Mother talk about working in the Dean's office for two summers while she was going to school at North Texas State Teacher's College to get her teaching certificate. So, during my growing-up years the fascination continued as we'd go the thirty miles from McKinney on Sundays to visit in the CIA dormitory with Auntie's daughter, Libba. In her dormitory, working as "house-mother," or resident director, was an old family friend, Mrs. Standiforth, from Gainsville, Texas, where my Mother grew up. Many Sundays after Sunday school, church, and a good lunch at Mrs. Bigger's Boarding House, Auntie, Mother, and I would drive over to see Mrs. Standiforth, as well as my cousin, Libba.

At seven years of age I always felt a little uneasiness as we walked through those massive doors at Smith Hall on our way to Mrs. Standiforth's office and rooms. Her door would be open, and I could see her sitting there by the window looking so aristocratic, yet quite matronly, in that large wooden rocker--you know, the kind with the carved out claws on the arms. After the usual loving embraces, which caused me to cringe, she'd always say, "This is such a nice surprise, I'm so glad you all decided to drive over." She ushered us in to sit by the window where she said a good breeze was blowing. In those parts of Texas the weather in early September has a tendency to be just plain HOT, but she had a little oscillating fan on the floor that did feel good. Auntie had brought her a box of Millionaire's for which she rave on and on as she expressed her appreciation. I was waiting patiently for my cue to go upstairs to get Libba in her third floor room to bring her down. ALAS! She had signed out! At this point eye brows raised, but Mrs. Standiforth quickly assured Auntie that Libba would probably be back very shortly.

Now I was free to play and jump on the extra wide wooden stairs with enormous banisters to slide on, but I couldn't go up to the rooms. The girls coming down always stopped to visit and some even invited me to stay for supper in the dining hall. I begged to stay for just one peek at the dining hall, but Mother put the "quietus" on that when she said we had to hurry on to visit with Aunt Mary and Uncle Will.

Aunt Mary, my Mother's aunt, was so old looking for her fifty years. She and Uncle Will had lived in Denton on Sycamore Street all their married life in that same old house with the oval glass door. My remembrances of her only go through my nine years cause that's when she departed this world, but my memories of that house haven't faded. I don't think the parlor with all of its period furniture (on its way to becoming antiques) was ever opened. I remember one time when we were there in the "dead of winter." we walked down the long hall in the center of the house into their sitting room in the back where they had a gas space heater going full blast. The door was closed after we got in and there we were melting away and slowly suffocating.

After the visits stopped I began to hear "much ado" from Auntie and Mother when Uncle Will sent word that he had married soon after Aunt Mary's death. So "bye-bye" to all of Aunt Mary's furniture, which had been in Mother's family for generations. No will was found! During those Depression years Auntie and Mother were too busy trying to hold body and soul together to be worried about Aunt Mary's furniture.

On another occasion I went to CIA in Denton to visit my friend from Rusk, Mildred Musselwhite, who lived across the street from Grannie and Papaw. During summer visits in Rusk with my grandparents Mildred and I had bonded as kindred spirits even though she was six years older. So when she "went off" to college so close to McKinney, it was a thrill for me at age thirteen to get to visit her in the dormitory. She was so good about writing letters--giving me a summary of college life. A letter pulls friends together like nothing else.

Another nice experience about this same age happened when a good friend, Frances Wolford, from McKinney invited me to come to Denton to spend a week with her and her mother, who had rented a cottage near the college campus for the summer while she was working on her teaching degree. Instead of eating three meals a day, I think we just went swimming three times a day! Maybe a few nibbles in between!

The summers kept rolling on by and soon it was time for me to make a decision about college. Would I go to Denton or would I go to Kilgore Junior College? Having made so many close friends in the Longview-Kilgore area--the choice wasn't easy. I think Mother really wanted me to go to Denton (so close to McKinney), but Aunt Sissy kept insisting that I could stay with her in Longview and commute the twelve miles on the KJC bus. I've

often wondered how I would have met Johnny if I'd gone to college in Denton!

EARLY MEMOIRS

by

Esther W. Parker

Being the youngest of four, two sisters and a brother, I was very lonesome when school days started. I remember begging--crying--to go with them. I did start kindergarten a bit young at John MacDonough Memorial School four months after my fourth birthday. We walked to school so it must have been close to home

Early in the school year I decided to go home because I had to go to the bathroom. When I got home the back door was locked (we always used the back door rather than track up the parlor all day long). I tried the front, calling Mama. No answer came, so I returned to the back. Mama was upstairs and finally heard me. She opened the door, but I "couldn't wait"! She was embarrassed for me (almost as much as I) and dried my tears as I explained that I forgot where the rest room was at school. Soon after, someone from school phoned to see if I had gone home--they had been searching for me in Nina's, Brother's, and Helen's classrooms, the cloak rooms, all the rest rooms and the lunch rooms. Mama told them she'd just keep me home the rest of the day. I recall all three siblings scolding me when they got home as they told me what a commotion I caused and warned, "Don't ever do that again." I didn't.

Another memory at the same school is of my fifth birthday. It was the custom to have the celebrant sit in an immense chair--I visualize it as an old-fashioned king's or queen's chair with the high heavy carved wood back with high arm rests. The honoree wore a gold paper crown. The students joined hands and slowly walked around the chair singing "Happy Birthday," everybody was smiling. Then we had cookies.

Other fun memories of my childhood are of my brother who was quite a tease. I know Mama got tired of us calling her to make Brother stop. We were two years apart; he was number two. His specialty for me was animals. He convinced me that worms grew up to be snakes and lizards grew to be alligators or crocodiles; he threw them toward me--worms and lizards, that is--even after we became adults! He also told me that na alligator pear (avocado) could sometimes be an alligator egg. I still avoid lizards and worms.

Our backyard on Perrier Street was spacious with three or four trees, two of which were China ball, or China berry, trees. The China ball trees were large, pretty and shady and when in bloom smelled very pleasant--but must have been created solely for boys with sisters. Brother could make the most accurate china ball shooters in town--we were regular targets for his practice. I'd like to try to find the house some day--just to see if it's still there. I know my memories are still rooted in those early days on Perrier Street.

A GREAT GENTLE MAN CALLED PAPA

by

Anne B. Comeaux

My father, baptized Walter Alphonse Becnel, was called "Lool" by Mama and "Nonc Lool" by his nieces and nephews. I called him Papa. Papa was a country baker who not only baked bread daily, but also delivered bread daily from house to house. Some of my earliest and fondest memories surrounding Papa involved his trade. Daily I'd listen for the "googa-googa, googa-googa" of the Model-T Ford truck and run out to meet him when Mama said it was all right once the vehicle had stopped. Papa usually had a sweet treat in one of his pockets, but I knew I was not to search for it until after the hug and kiss ceremony. Often the sweet treat consisted of three Mary Janes, a delicious peanut butter morsel, which sold three for a penny. Sometimes I was allowed to carry a bread basket into the house. Happily we would walk to the house from the baker shop where he parked his truck. As soon as he approached the house, he would remove his hat and greet Mama with a kiss. Never, never was Papa seen in the house with a hat, but like clockwork, the hat, a straw one for summer and a felt one for winter, landed on his head as soon as he left the house.

Going with Papa on the route during summers was considered to be "boys' jobs." We were five boys and five girls in the family. Without any legislation to that effect, it was an unwritten but understood law that the boys helped Papa and the girls helped Mama. (I always loved the out-of-doors, but mundane things like washing and drying dishes, mopping, sweeping, dusting and making order were duties which I tolerated and accomplished as quickly and as well as possible. Notice I said not only "quickly," but "well." We learned early in life that chores had to be done well.) But the boys were growing up and able to obtain jobs, so Papa allowed Walter and Fernand, my brothers ahead of me in age, to take on part-time jobs. He hired a young lad from the area to help him. When the young boy failed to show several times, my chance came. I loved helping on the route It was my time alone with Papa It was my time exempt from dishes, dusting, mopping and other household chores. Papa taught me how to load a basket properly so as not to squash the bread and where to take it. Some areas I'd cover three houses, and he'd go to a business place where I would meet him, or sometimes both of us went to houses after which we met at the

truck. Sometimes I was even allowed behind the counter in a store to stack bread on a shelf. There were gates to open and close, so my supple young body dashed quickly to those chores.

A special treat on the route was when we stopped at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wright Poirrier. I believe Mr. Poirrier and his son were farmers because they were home on break most of the time we arrived. The treat was freshly brewed coffee. Mrs. Poirrier always had coffee ready when we arrived or ready within minutes. The family sat or stood around and talked a little as we enjoyed the break. How often I have thought of the courtesy of this family. There was no "first name calling" then. Only men indulged in first names with each other. She was Madame Poirrier to Papa, and he was Monsieur Becnel.

I drew close to this silver-haired, ruddy faced, Celtic blue-eyed man who was my Papa. I admired his quiet patience and understanding which I saw in him as he dealt with his patrons. His kindness was bountiful. I could not begin to count the number of times he obliged his patrons by delivering packages or messages to this person of that one along the route.

The first week that I accompanied Papa on his route brought a surprise. That Friday, when we got home, Papa said, "Well, I guess it's payday." He reached into his pocket and gave me what I thought was a million dollars. I hadn't expected to be paid for doing something that was so much fun to me. After all, I was getting out of dishes and dusting and such chores for which I never got paid.

"Whatever I would have given to the boy (meaning his helper) I'll give to you. You do as much or more than he," was Papa's explanation. With my week's wages carefully stored in my "money jar," I joyfully faced a weekend of "girls' work."

During World War II Papa was asked to deliver the Times Picayune along his route. Those were the days when gasoline, sugar, shoes, coffee, tires and other rubber goods were rationed. Because of the gasoline rationing, it was difficult, if not impossible, to find someone to deliver newspapers in a country area. At first Papa did not accept, but upon being approached a second time, he felt it almost necessary to oblige. I was a little older then, in my early teens, so soon I took over the task of cutting out the headlines of unsold copies, and doing the monthly paperwork required for record keeping. I'm sure this was a load off Papa, and it made me feel grown-up and important. As time progressed, we were allowed to cut down on the "paper-cutting" and simply report numbers.

World War II was also the time of the odious tokens. They took up so much space and jingled so much among other more practical coins. Papa had to have a goodly amount of change for his daily bread business, so the increase of coinage cause by the tokens was a nuisance. Papa disliked tokens, but he endured it for as long as it lasted. The token era, I believe, was short-lived.

The satisfaction I experienced in working with Papa was that of knowing I was sharing responsibility with and for the family. As a child, I felt valued; as a person, I was affirmed; as a worker, I was capable. These things helped me grow into the person I am. For that, I thank my Papa.

THE BEND IN THE RIVER

by

John A. Townsend, Jr.

The two-lane highway called U.S. 98 was to the minds of us boys, namely Robert (Bubba), Richard (Dick) and myself, just a gravel road, and a dusty one at that. Riding down that road only a few days before July 4, 1935, we had encountered more traffic than I remembered on prior trips and seemed always to be in back of a car that kept us moving along half-blinded by the billowing dust cloud created by its movement ahead of us. The 1931 Model B Ford Coupe had no such thing as an air conditioner, so the windows had to be left partly open to let what cool air there might be in the 90 degrees weather circulating through the car. We were hot, tired, and dirty from the continuing fog of dust thrown by the vehicles ahead of us. The grit was even in my mouth, grinding against my teeth when I spoke.

"Hold everything together, boys. We just passed through Tylertown. In another sixteen miles we will be at the river," spoke Mama.

"Oh, boy!" we chorused in reply, and began searching the carry-all for our bathing suits.

We had arrived at our favorite stopping place on the trip to see Little Granny, Rosetta Bush Townsend, and Grandaddy , William R. Townsend, in Sumrall, Mississippi. For the past three summers we had made it a habit to stop for a swim in the Pearl River before reaching their home.

We were nearing our destination, the highway inclining slightly upward to pass across the old metal cantilever bridge over the river. Forty feet below and to the north we saw the white sandy beach where we were headed. The sight brought forth a chorus of delighted yells.

Just east of the bridge Daddy slowed the car, then made a left turn, across the highway, to enter a narrow dirt track that lead downwards toward the river. In a couple of minutes we were excitedly piling out of the car and running to the beach below. The river water flowed crystal clear, fairly swift here at the bend because the channel narrowed to about twenty-five feet for about fifty feet below the beach, then widened to spread bank to bank as it flowed, very shallow, beneath the bridge overhead.

In a minute Daddy came running across the beach to do a belly-buster in the water, splashing us boys waiting beside the river. I lunged off into the swift current, immediately forced to paddle furiously just to stay beside the

beach. There was really not that much danger for the depth of the water was only up to my chest, but if swept off my feet I could float very rapidly down to the shallows where we would find Mama. She was deathly afraid of the water, but on more than one occasion I had known her to wade off into chin deep water to pull out one or the other of my brothers.

The water was cool, almost cold, and very sweet to the taste, very refreshing. Soon I was swimming upstream to the wide side of the beach. Daddy told me to go with the flow and keep my head up. To my surprise, after only a few duckings, I found I could swim both ways, the current no longer my crutch I needed to stay afloat.

After about an hour of play we were called out of the water. Mama had some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches made that we boys inhaled. We reluctantly dressed to resume our journey. As we headed back up the narrow track to the highway all of us boys were peering from the rear window at the bend in the river. Just minutes after we were back on the highway we saw a sign reading "Sumrall 25."

SACRILEGIOUS

by

Joe Glorioso

Our clever tutor, demanding editor and everlasting friend issued instructions for the meeting convened for U.S.L.'s fall semester's writing candidates enrolled in "Life and Letter" expressly for the purpose of assessing their fitness to qualify for and be anointed as members of the sacred society of "REMEMBERERS OF GLORIOUS PASTS" (RGP). Our instructions were two fold: a carefully written, edited and typed account of an event of each member's past for publication in "Life and Letters," Volume VIII, and a reading of that account before an audience of their peers and of invitees.

Each RGP was given a scrimpy five minutes to read his chosen tidbit out of a generous past to the audience. If the audience's applause was magnanimous and enthusiastic, then the RGP could reasonably claim that the first barrier to anointment was successfully hurdled.

As instructed, the typed tidbit for publication must not exceed two pages, double spaced. That will be difficult. Imagine a story of a wedding that at the end of the second page the reader finds the minister asking the bride, "Do you take this man?" The sequel to be continued in Volume IX.

I don't think I'm worthy of anointment.

What is an ambitious RGP candidate seeking anointment going to do under a five minute time limitation and a two page space assignment? Especially when the best this RGP has ever done was ten minutes and six pages. I could subvert, at least, bend the system. I could read very fast. I could type the words on the pages, edge-to-edge and top-to-bottom. Could it be that I'm too old to sabotage a respectable system and to feel comfortable as a subversive?

When I pondered the situation in which I found myself, two relate questions haunted me: What is too old? What the hell is old?

As an enlightened scientist investigating an unenlightening subject, I put twenty-five bullets in one demographic gun and fired off a survey. The unbiased population included ME, MYSELF, and I.

I will share with you that which my elegant survey revealed:

- When climbing a flight of stairs each step needs moments of rest that are counted in gasps and puffs per step.

- When attempting to sit you shuffle backwards until you feel the edge of the chair pressing against the back of your knees and suddenly flop heavily down, britches meeting cushioned seat, muttering, "Ahhh."

- When four discrete movements are needed to rise from a recliner--grip and pull forward on the recliner's arms, land and slide, lean and slide, lean and slide--until you can stand almost upright unsteadily on legs tenuously attached to aching feet.

- When you pleadingly cry out in desperation, "I fell down and can't get up."

- When you wear your hearing aid in your pocket instead of your ear.

- When you cannot remember where you left your glasses and need a friend to tell you they're on your nose.

- When you want the telephone directory to be printed in large print, not diminutive elite.

- When you, without fail, bump your head on the car's door frame while getting behind the driver's wheel, assuming you have a current driver's license and are still driving.

- When you earned a "55 Alive/Mature" driving certificate and promptly backed over your garbage cans and headed over your neighbor's flower garden.

- When you engage in comparison shopping for price and absorbency to decide whether it will be Attends or Depends.

- When Depends becomes part of your "going-out-tonight" apparel.

- When bed pads become just another piece of conventional bedding.

- When you are reminded that the function of the little handle on a prominent bathroom fixture is a means of exchanging clear, clean water for dangerously polluted water.

- When your toenail clippers are not long enough to reach your toenails or your arms are not long enough.

- When body restructuring, enhancement and implants no longer interest you, even if Medicare does pay.

- When your most frequent and important social event with friends and newly found acquaintances if gathering around a coffee urn in Delhomme's funeral home.

- When you are finally convinced that reincarnation is real and a right guaranteed by the highest authority.

- When you must choose between a onetime purchase of a miniblender and an oft-repeated purchase of many small jars of Gerber's.

- When you laboriously make a grocery list and cannot find it while in the grocery store.

- When the register clerk collects your money for groceries and you walk out without your grocery bag.

- When the bag boy has to run out to hand you your groceries and you think Piggly Wiggly gave you a bag of free groceries.

- When you are introduced to your great grandchildren and you cannot remember to whom each belongs.

- When you are warned that the Showtime movie contains explicit sex and frontal nudity, but you fall fast asleep.

- When you paid $3.75 to hear the growling, groaning and snorting of dinos in Jurassic Park to wake up to see the movie credits scrolling across the big screen.

- When you enroll in "Life and Letters" to write your memoirs only to succumb to the bedeviling scourge of writer's block.

If you wish, you may check yourself against the results of my unbiased, elegant survey. If you checked off 100% of the indices, you must seriously consider reincarnation as a second religion. If you checked 75%, pay up all your insurance, including your burial, spend your children's inheritance and sign a living will. If 50% is your level, retire pronto, live the good life, see your cardiologist twice a year and put your estate in order. If you checked 25% you're too young to die.

If you're wondering about me, I ain't old at all. But I have a real big problem. I can't read this paper in five minutes. My three pages are much to long to be part of volume VIII. Besides my three pages are not memoirs, which makes them ineligible. I will not hold my audience responsible for my failure to be anointed as a member of the sacred society. No matter. At times, you see, I am inherently prone to be somewhat sacrilegious.

EARLY REMEMBRANCES

by

Bonnie Gillis

May 12, 1926, Nookie and I were at Grannie Hall's house across the street from our house in Electra, Texas. We had been there a long time. I knew something was going on because Dr. Parmley's car finally left. I ran over to see. My oldest sister Rea, who ruled the household, met me at the front door. "Mother had another stinking baby girl." Number nine, Frances Ella. I loved and adored her. All her life I felt like she belonged to Nookie and me.

I ran back across the street to tell Grannie and Nookie. Grannie wasn't surprised and showed us a bassinet and lots of pretty little baby clothes. "You two must help your mother take care of this baby and give her lots of love."

When Frances was old enough, we bathed her often. We dressed her in her Sunday clothes and took her for long walks in her stroller. With no pre-packaged baby food, she ate what we did. When she was big enough to sit up, Mama pulled her high chair to the table. If Daddy was home at meal time, Frances sat in his lap and he fed her whatever he was eating. Table food must have been okay because we were never sick, and we were all healthy.

Years later when I had my two little boy babies, we lived across the street from Mom and Dad on Ray and St. Thomas in Lafayette. With my picket fence and lots of help, love and care, I was truly blessed. One day one of my babies was sick. I called Mother to ask her what to do for him. She said, "Honey, you better call your pediatrician. I don't understand these modern babies!"

A SOPHOMORE CAPER

by

E.D. Parker

In the school year 1932 to 1933, I was a sophomore at Texas Tech in Lubbock. Two of my grammar and high school classmates and I lived in an apartment (in fact, two apartments at different times) and conserved our meager funds by batching, that is, cooking our own meals and making our own beds--and beer. My roommates were Herb (Herbert) Lindsey and Fuz Phillips. Fuz's real name is Harris, but a not too bright nor charming classmate, Glen Anderson, had dubbed him Fuzzy, or Fuz, because Glen couldn't distinguish between Harris and Harry. There was another fellow in town, Harry Hall, whom everyone called Fuzzy, or Fuz, for short.

Herb, a talented musician, who played a tuba in the high school band, and majored in pre-dentistry, became a school teacher and band director after graduating (those were the Depression years, and funds for dental school were not readily available). Herb finisher his career as a junior high math teacher in Lubbock and died of Alzheimer's disease in 1989 or 1990. Harris, who played the drums in the high school band (and was good at it), also majored in pre-dentistry and chemistry, obtained a job with Sears Roebuck in Dallas after graduation. He did not go to dental school either, presumably for the same reason Herb didn't. Harris and his wife Esther, who still live in Dallas, exchange Christmas cards with us annually. Incidentally, I also played in the high school band. I played the baritone horn so ineptly that G. Ward Moody, the band director, demoted me to the peck horn, alto that is. Guess I was born with a wooden ear.

Another actor in the tale I'm about to tell was Harold (Scruty) Watkins, another Wellington High graduate, who finished a year before us. Harold and I never became close friends, even though at one time we lived next door to each other. The Watkins family was an interesting one. There were Mr. and Mrs. Watkins (Fred and Marie) and their three children, Harold, the oldest and about my age; Dale, a red headed, good natured young man who would later become Dr. Dale Watkins; and Nell Marie, a blonde daughter and the youngest. Fred, a hard drinker, who, according to Harold, consumed a half gallon of moonshine per diem, operated a combination pool hall and domino parlor. Marie was an attractive woman with a friendly smile and charming personality. In 1929 when the Graf Zeppelin flew around the world

it passed over our house at night. Marie Watkins, who had been sleeping on their screened back porch, came to the fence and tried, without success, to wake Joe and me, who were sleeping in our back yard. Even though I knew nothing of it at the time, I have never forgotten Marie's neighborly gesture.

To return to main story, Marie, who worked in a beauty parlor, had given her son, Harold, a box of henna hair dye, a greenish gray powder, apparently made by grinding the leaves of the henna plant. Harold, also a sophomore, apparently didn't want to dye his hair, so he passed the package on to Fuz Phillips. Well, the three of us roommates decided it would be a shame to let it go to waste, so we decided to dye our hair. To use the concoction we needed to mix it with water to form a paste, then apply it to the hair for varying lengths of time depending on the shade of red desired. We tried the goop on Herb first since he was an easy going fellow and didn't mind being a trail blazer. After about thirty minutes, he washed his hair, and sure enough, it had a slightly reddish tint. We didn't think it red enough, however, and when Fuz's turn came up next he left the henna on a little longer. His hair did come out a little redder than Herb's, but I still didn't think it bright enough. Consequently, when I took my turn I left it on still longer, and my hair was indeed a brighter red, somewhat redder than I intended. There were certain variables that were not properly evaluated: the tests were made inside, under subdues light, the hair was still wet when first observed, and both Fuz and Herb had darker hair than I.

This tale happened near the end of our sophomore year, and it took most of the junior year for our hair to grow out and return to its original color. I took a lot of ribbing from my classmates about my red hair, especially those taking organic chemistry. R.C. Goodwin, head of the chemistry department and a natural red head, was teaching the class. My fellow students accused me of seeking brownie points with the professor. This escapade would certainly appear to justify the name sophomore, at least in part. The word sophomore is derived from two Greek words: sophos, meaning wise; and moros, meaning foolish.

WORLD WAR II

by

Nancy Moreau

I was beginning my tenth month of nursing school in Greenville, South Carolina, on December 7, 1941. Asleep in the nurses home since I was on night duty, I was awakened by loud voices and radio broadcasts. After questioning the students in the hallway, I learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. We were all shocked by the news.

My brother, James, already in the National Guard, was mobilized into the Army. He spent two years in the Aleutian Islands, and after a short leave was sent to Europe in January, 1945. My younger brother, Pete, was drafted into the infantry. He spent two years in Europe. Being in foxholes for long periods of time, he developed foot problems from wearing wet boots for days. He was one of the fortunate ones. My cousin, Aubrey McGill, 19, was killed with other Marines on Iwo Jima.

These events hit home, but I was still forced to deal with day to day routines. Our nursing school program was accelerated. The only R.N.'s were supervisors or instructors. We students manned that 500 bed hospital. We had two one-half days per week. Our hours were 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with two and one half hours off in between. We had at least four hours of class Monday through Friday. No grade under 85% was accepted. Night duty was 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., six days a week; Sunday was 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., no night off.

Mrs. West was our night supervisor; Mrs. Norris, her assistant. Mrs. West was very attractive, with long red hair, naturally curly, worn in a bun on her neck. Mrs. tolerated no sloppiness, demanding that our hair be placed in a net off our uniform collars, shoes polished, and our uniforms starched and clean. Very little escaped her eye. She was one of the fairest, strictest supervisors we had. Only on wards having forty patients were there two students. On adjoining wards, students relieved each other for midnight supper.

I remember giving my first bed bath on Miss Caldwell's Ward F. I was a preclinical student. Miss Caldwell was new, from the East Coast, and unaccustomed to preclinicals wearing a cap. She thought I was an older student. She came into the room after probably about one hour and said, "My gawd, aren't you through yet!" She helped me pull up the mattress.

She had hoped to assign me another bed bath She had scared me to death, but later I found her to be a good supervisor. We spent three months on each specialty service after completing our preclinical time.

In the operating room, we learned to circulate first, tying the nurses' and doctors' gowns without contaminating, seeing the lights were adjusted, obtaining anything needed during the surgery. Mrs. Woodside was the supervisor. Not much escaped her eagle eye. When we finished our O.R. training, we were thoroughly skilled at it.

The first major surgery I scrubbed for was a gallbladder with Doctors Bates and Cashwell. All of a sudden I felt weak; the room began to spin. I took long deep breaths, my vision cleared, and all was well. Mrs. Woodside kept a close watch until the end. She, too, was a very strict and fair supervisor. She always picked patient and understanding surgeons for our first case.

We worked hard and played hard. When we came off duty at 7 p.m., we shed that uniform and headed for Roy Young's, a block and a half away. There was a juke box, a few booths, a small dance floor. We danced until a few minutes before the 10 p.m curfew. The housemother hovered near the door, making sure all of us were in. Most of us made that curfew. The few who didn't appeared before the student council. Probably four or five of our class were dismissed for various reasons. Two dropped out of their own accord.

We were the first class to take our state boards before graduating. We felt very special knowing we were already R.N.'s.