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# COLLECTED LIVES

*A BRIEF FAMILY HISTORY*

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COMPILED BY MARY ZERVIGON

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2019



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## FOREWARD

In every family there are people who have lived long enough to remember very different times. As technology advances, or at least changes, time passes and culture changes, these stories become more and more interesting- at least to me. Here are some from my family.

Nanny and Roro lived through very interesting times. And I love Grandfather's description of the cars he drove or rode in.

Sometime in the late 30s or early 40s, my cousin Dick Keller asked my Grandmother (Frances R. Keller, whose contemporaries called her Fan or Fannie and whose grandchildren called Nanny) to write her story. And she did. She stopped in 1941 by asking Dick to tell her if he'd like her to write some more. Apparently, he never did. Or perhaps at 12 years old, he had other things on his mind. I don't think I knew about this before Nanny died in 1960, just after my first child, Alicia, was born. (In fact, Alicia was still in an incubator plugged into the back wall of the hospital nursery. At Nanny's funeral several people asked, "How does it feel to be a mother?" Of course, I didn't know.

I think it was in the '70s that Rosa F. Keller (whose grandchildren called Roro) decided, partly influenced, I think, by Nanny's story, to write hers. Her approach was not like Nanny's. She went to Newcomb to take creative writing. She enjoyed the give and take and found the class critiques helpful. Later she wrote more. And you will see some in this compilation. Not included are her very short bio of Josephine Newcomb, her history of the New Orleans League of Women Voters and some of her speeches. I included only her writing about herself and her family.

Charles Keller Jr. (called Chuck by his contemporaries and Grandfather by his

grandchildren) wrote under very different circumstances. For years I had urged him to write his story and he resisted. Some time in the '70 he tripped in the parking garage of the Louisiana Superdome, broke his knee and was put into a plaster cast the length of his leg. Having little else to do, he began writing his story on a yellow legal pad. By the time he had gotten to his third year at West Point he recovered, the cast came off and the story ended.

Mary Freeman Keller Zervigon







Rosa Freeman 11 years old

MY  
LIFE

O

Rosa Freeman Keller

March 31, 1911- April 15, 1998

VOLUME I

BIRTH THROUGH WORLD WAR II

1911-1945

(written approximately 1977)

(hand editing & corrections by RFK)

version 1/15/93



## Z

I begin as *David Copperfield* began, “I am born In March 1911, of 33-year old parents, their ages the same except for the one month seniority of my father. It was, I fear, a singularly unexciting year. This state of affairs can be good. No depressions, wars, assassinations, or natural disasters so far as I can determine. William Howard Taft was President and that strikes no sparks, either.

My earliest memory Is of a natural disaster, the 1918 hurricane. I was later told that I was too young for the memory to endure, but when I recounted vividly some of the details which no one else recalled, we all realized that Imagination had played no part.

One of my friends recalls her father’s funeral. She was only three when he died and does not re-ally remember her father but can summon the funeral picture with total recall; especially, she says, the tall candles at both ends of his coffin. None of this matter except that memories begin some-where, and perhaps it takes something dramatic for a three-year-old to store It In her mind.

In New Orleans we often date events in connection with hurricanes. They are named now. We speak of Audrey and Betsy and share stories about them in the way that people in other localities remember blizzards, droughts, and earthquakes

## 2.

My family lived in a small house on Hickory Street, but moved to another In the same block af-ter the storm. The latter was a sturdier building, for my father evidently had feared for our safety. The second house was equally small, and I shared a bed with my sister for some years before my parents could afford to add

a sleeping porch across the back of the house. This new space was great luxury for us, though It did use up most of our small backyard, a portion of which was occupied by a wash-shed.

We had no servants - money was scarce - but someone came quite often, I suppose, to do the laundry. The clothes were boiled in large laundry tubs and stirred frequently with a broom handle. They then were hung out to dry and sometimes had to hang in the shed. In damp New Orleans the drying process could take a long time. Next, flat Irons were heated on charcoal braziers for the fin-ishing; one Iron was heated while the other was in use. Our Airedale was well trained and never at-tacked the flapping laundry, though the temptation must have been great.

We really did not need much yard for play space. Most neighborhood families had several chil-dren, and we gathered in the street for play or in larger yards where we always seemed welcome. Automobiles were a recent Invention, so for the most part the street was little used except by deliv-ery wagons which brought coal for heating and cooking, Ice, and other necessities. There were grocery wagons, too, on which drivers brought produce from nearby farms to sell to housewives. The sellers had a method of curving the free hand skillfully around the mouth to create a mega-phone effect while they called out their wares: "I got shallots, corn, okra -- all nice, fresh, and green."

My father's Coca Cola was delivered in wagons, too, and a family friend, "Doc," was the veteri-narian who cared for the horses.

Children rarely left the Immediate neighborhood, so we knew little of public transportation. Our school, Robert E. Lee, was a block away. A grocery store in the same block around the corner from our house was available for meat, fish, and staples. Oak Street was an early shopping center, a short walk from our house, where we were taken for shoes and haircuts. A doctor who lived and had his office on our corner took care of emergencies, so we had all of the essentials close by.

The adjoining block was the beginning of a black (we said Negro) neighborhood. There was po-liteness between us as we passed each other, but no familiarity of any kind. Close as we lived to them, these neighbors' names were not known to us.

Children attended different schools and parents did different kinds of work, so there was no so-cial mixing of any sort. There may have been some hostility, but It was surely not apparent to me. The painful process of social Integration was many years away, but that Is a part of a much later story.

### 3.

Home for me was a very pleasant place. Our father worked long hours and was sometimes away for days at a time, travelling the state in a buggy trying to sell his new, unknown product. He had great faith in a refreshing soft drink that was cheap enough to fall within the price range of al-most everyone, and so clean that new

standards of hygiene were established in the bottling plants. Coupled with his faith in the product was the Important fact that he loathed poverty and was deter-mined to make every effort that his family should be comfortable.

His father, Jesse Freeman, had suffered from a lung disease. It was thought to be tuberculosis, but before the Invention of x-ray no accurate diagnosis could be made. Jesse moved his family to Oklahoma when It was still a territory and people willing to settle it were offered land for the taking. Young Alfred, my father, loved It. For an active youngster of eleven, possession of a pony in an area with no fences was pure delight for him, and the crude style of living even more so.

Jesse Freeman got no better, however, and decided to send his family, Rosa nee Bird Freeman, Alfred, and daughter Annie back to the familiar world of Dalton, Georgia, while he Journeyed even farther West In search of a cure. Medical theories of the time held that the sunshine and even tem-peratures of the far West offered the best hope for lung disease sufferers.

No such cure resulted in my grandfather's case and he died and was buried near San Francisco. One wonders how long It must have taken for his family to learn the news of his death but hear It they did, and Alfred became the man of the family when he was thirteen years old.

He worked at a great variety of Jobs In order to make a little money, while his mother kept boarders, did seamstress work, and preserved food, the only Jobs ladles of her time could do. One of Alfred's Jobs which I loved hearing about was the one in a ladies' store. Ready-made clothes were unknown, so as he described It, a customer would choose her material and pattern, and It then be-came his responsibility to cover the necessary buttons, and assemble linings, whalebones, hooks and eyes, and a "dust ruffle" which was sewn at the hem to protect It from dirt and wear.

He also did general work in a drug store that Included sweeping, arranging shelves, and - what he enjoyed most, soda Jerking. He managed to meet and serve some of the town's leading citizens, who came in for refreshment and congenial company, and to learn how to concoct a new drink called Coca Cola.

#### 4.

How my parents met I never knew, but I do know my father was a travelling passenger agent for Southern Railroad, so Rome, Georgia was surely one of his stops and that was my mother's home town. I remember Rome with joy, though I think that the last time we went there for a short summer visit I could not have been more than six.

The house was very large. Nine children had been born, and seven survived. At the time of my childhood, my grandfather, Richard West, my mother's only sister, Mary, and two brothers, Arthur and Roy, occupied the house. They were enchanting people, for us at least, and seemed to have strong bonds among themselves. On

Sunday while we finished the enormous midday dinner, which followed services at the Presbyterian church, the one telephone which hung on the wall would ring with friends' Inquiries: "Are the Wests having music today?" When the answer was affirmative, the family gathered in a parlor which was not ordinarily used. A mirrored alcove reflected the harp, and a piano stood nearby. Both sisters played piano and sang. Mary was the harpist, Roy the violinist, and Arthur the cellist.

Lively discussions took place: would they play Mozart, Brahms, Beethoven, or whom? They took their places to play, more to entertain each other, I think, than the audience. Neighbors and friends arrived on foot and in horse drawn carriages to station themselves on the wide gallery which encircled the house, to listen and enjoy.

Arthur was very tall, and not until years later when I saw William Primrose, did I see anyone play the cello who dwarfed the Instrument as Arthur did. My great love of the cello is very much a reflection of my love for the handsome, red haired uncle.

Roy was far from handsome. Orthodontists were unknown, and he needed one badly. He lived with us for a while on Hickory Street and worked in the bottling plant. Often at night he removed the violin from Its case, unwrapped It from the purple silk scarf which he kept folded over It, waxed the wood, tightened and rosined the strings, and played for us. Neither uncle ever married and both loved children, so we were as happy in their company as they were in ours.

## 5.

There were other brothers whom we never knew. Orie was a Naval officer who served as the first Governor of Guam. When my mother announced her intention to marry, the brothers decided that she should accumulate wonderful memories before she began her life with her impoverished young man. They properly foresaw a life of hard work after marriage and believed that an adventure, a trip to Guam, would furnish her with stored memories which would enrich her life. When she mentioned the plan to Alfred, he told her that he thought her brothers were right, that she should go (though It meant a year of separation), so off she went. The trip took her overland to the West Coast and then by ship to Hawaii, Japan, and, finally, Guam. Later her memories of it all would enliven our days as she told stories of her journey and sometimes granted us the privilege of playing with her souvenirs.

There were little split-toed Japanese shoes and silken slippers, an exquisite embroidered Japa-nese robe, and the game of GO. We never knew the rules of the game, but enjoyed the wooden board marked off into many squares, the black and white counters made of stone, and the carved wooden boxes which contained them. Other than dolls and skates few manufactured toys were sold, so we were fortunate to have such exotic playthings. I suppose that toys would have been scarce anyway during wartime, when all of the nation's manufacturing energies were directed into other channels, for It happened again during World War II, when my own children



were small.

I have only a few dim memories of the first war: food shortages, War Savings stamps which, to our great disappointment, we were given In lieu of Christmas gifts one year, because, “the Govern-ment needs the money more than you need gifts.” I do have a clear picture of my mother in her Red Cross uniform, a white coverall apron, and a becoming white veil with Its red cross, placed in the exact center of her forehead. I recall, too, her severe case of the flu which-necessitated the removal of my brother and me to a neighbor’s house. It was a lark for us, but an anxious time for our fa-ther, who was trying to care for our mother and sister while many were dying of the disease.

I recall lively discussions of President Wilson, who my father thought was entirely too much of an idealist and whom my mother admired greatly for exactly the same reason. The war’s end was a cause for celebration so Important that we were taken all the way to Canal Street for a parade. We were New Orleanians, so quite accustomed to parades, but we never had ventured as far as Canal Street for our Mardi Gras viewing.

When I was twelve, we moved to Palmer Avenue to a large two-storied house and was given my own bedroom. It was a very small one, filled only with a bed a small table which served as my desk, and one chair, but It was luxury to me, and I reveled in the privacy.

The neighborhood was a spacious one with large houses and yards, and, fortunately, many chil-dren for company - all strange and new, but pleasant. I remained as shy as always, but Dick, the gregarious one, knew everyone In a short time and our house, with ever available cokes and my mother’s friendly welcome, became a neighborhood gathering place once more.

I went to Allen School, an old wooden building which later burned and was re placed with the present structure. When It was time for high school there was only one for girls, Sophie Wright. It was badly overcrowded, so my parents decided to move me to a private school. We called It the Isidore Newman Manual Training School and had a song praising “INMTS.”

The school offered amenities of the kind which public school did not have then: a library, a study hall, a cafeteria, and - one of my chief delights - a gym. We actually did gymnastics in teams and, as it was closely akin to rhythmic dancing, it was a joy to me. The school had choral groups, too, and an excellent music director who trained us and helped us prepare the musical shows which we presented later in the school year. Non-singers handled props and lights, so everyone had some-thing to do. We met dally in an assembly hall for announcements and we often heard good speakers.

Debates were given in this small auditorium, too, and It was a great day when I made the team and won the right to take the side of Arbitration vs. Confrontation.

The War to End Wars had proven to some of us that such a conflict must never happen again, and I think that I, at least, really believed that this might be so.

The school had been founded by Isidore Newman, a German refugee who had had a financial success In New Orleans and was quite advanced in his ideas. The

primary purpose was to furnish a fine education to the orphans who were housed in the large rambling old Jewish Orphans Home just two blocks away. Mr. Newman believed that if these disadvantaged children were to take their place in the world of commerce or education, law or medicine, they should mingle and compete early with other children whose fathers might help them achieve such status. As Mr. Newman saw It, the school should be one of the city's finest, so that families who had wider choices for their children's education would be eager to choose this school. The orphans would mingle with those who would probably be the city's future leaders. His philosophy has worked Just as he foresaw that It would, much to the benefit of our city.

During my few years there, the manual training (carpentry for the boys and sewing and cooking for the girls) was eliminated and the school became simply Newman School.

The assistant principal was Miss Zella C. Christian, a dragon who exhibited an air of suspicion when we presented excuses for school absence or tardiness. She raged at me one unhappy day and denounced me as a liar. We were trusted at home and could never have fooled our mother, so I was shocked enough by the accusation to report the incident and more shocked at my mother's reaction. She marched with me, blazing with the kind of anger she rarely displayed, and confronted the drag-on. Never, she said, has this girl lied to me, and she did not lie to you, either. Once I had lied to my mother at age four or five and was made to feel so guilty and so unworthy of her trust, that the les-son was permanently learned. Mother had forgotten the incident, but I still burned with shame from the memory.

I was withdrawn from Newman then and sent to a totally different kind of school. If my mother had other reasons than the incident for this decision, I never knew them. My sister had graduated from Newman and Dick remained, but boys had no contact with Miss Christian and were not sub-ject to her abuses. Dick's circumstances were in no way similar to mine. He was very bright and would have graduated at age sixteen -- too early for college entrance -- so he left Newman at the end of his Junior year for Culver, where two years of attendance was mandatory. He was an unrepressed type anyway, possessed of too much restless energy and so attractive that he was difficult to disci-pline. In our early teen years, mother asked me to look after him (and occasionally curb his exuber-ances) at social events, I was honored by her judgment of my capabilities and aware of my respon-sibility toward my charming brother, whose popularity always came so easily that he did not have the natural restraints which my shyness and too great sensitivity Imposed.

Unlike Dick, I had to been told early in life that I must learn not to try to help and to understand the troubles of everyone in the world, or the burden would be overwhelming. I was not "to wear my heart on my sleeve," but was to learn to arm myself so that I would not minister to everyone else's wants before my own.

So, my brother and I were entirely different types, and for this very reason valued each other's love and friendship. He fell so naturally into groups and situations where I was glad to accompany him, and at times, restrain him a bit.

7.

My new school, McGehee's, was a completely feminine world, my first, where all the students, and teachers, too, were female. The school was founded and run by Miss Louise McGehee. It furnished a livelihood for her and her sister, Miss Ethel. The school was housed in a residence on Louisiana Avenue and we attended classes in former parlors, dining rooms, and bedrooms. No gym or library or assembly hall here. We brought lunch and bought milk or soft drinks and ate wherever space was available.

There was a small backyard, and though I remember no athletic program, we did play a cramped kind of basketball and engaged in athletic drills on days when the weather permitted them.

Two memories remain now, and they crowd out any others worth mentioning. Miss Louise was a superb teacher and, in her fashion, a disciplinarian. Her pince-nez was cocked crookedly on her too slender nose, frequently removed as she looked at her class, twelve or fifteen in all, to make sure that we shared her passion for English Literature. She commanded our attention and, I think, our love. I have no idea what her credentials were. I do know that Miss Louise was completely and totally in love with the English language and with the literature that it produced. Perhaps now, we would say that she was a frustrated spinster deprived of marriage and brothers or maybe friends. Who knows? I surely do not, but she had her loves and heroes: Chaucer, Shakespeare. Spencer, Pope. Addison and Steele, Hardy, the Bronte sisters - she loved them all, and managed to convey her love to us. Every work, every nuance of every word, was to her, like the music I learned at home, of tremendous importance. Every milestone of English Literature as it expanded during the formation of the language itself, from Beowulf to Chaucer and on to the nineteenth century, was of transcendent importance to her and so it became to us.

If we were given a passage or story or essay (the last is still one of my favorite forms of writing. Did I learn that from her?) to study, we were expected to read and thoroughly understand or, at the very least, be prepared to discuss: possibly not understand, but surely discuss - in class. She had a way of pinching on the glasses, looking at the text, unpinching the glasses, then looking out over the class while brushing back her wispy hair, fixing one of us with a penetrating glance, and asking the definition of a word. Any word - it did not matter - we had to know. We knew that we must be prepared. Miss McGehee would ask: Is it possible to understand the assigned reading matter without knowing the real meaning of every word the author used? Unthinkable. Compared, we may suppose, to an attempt at mathematical computation while being sloppy about figures.

I have earlier mentioned that Miss McGehee was, in her fashion, a true disciplinarian. I cannot remember now what happened if we were late; I never was. My family stirred early, and the trolley car service was punctual and regular, but regardless of these circumstances, at the school any kind of mistrust was

unthinkable. For me a treasured, privilege at McGehee's was that examination papers were handed out, and no questions were asked. We could sit on the front porch - remember, it had been a family residence - or, In the back yard and take our exams. There was no restriction of movement or conversation. If anyone cheated, and a few did, they were shortchanging themselves, not the school, and this was well understood. Perhaps even graduation was achieved unfairly, in some cases, but this school gave us a sense of personal, rather than institutional, honor which was like my training at home. We never got the sense of dishonoring the family by Indiscreet behavior, but not dishonoring oneself was an Inescapable personal responsibility - perhaps even a lifelong burden. The family would be there, and display loyalty, but you alone lived with the mistakes you made.

Maybe my mother was correct in her school decision - how can I know? I loved going to school, every one of them, but McGehee's did have an easy, Intimate climate which I found comfortable and compatible with my needs.

I have one other memory, before I leave my recollections of high school, Involving Miss Louise again. I never was exposed to Miss Ethel, who taught singing only, for whlch I had no aptitude, at least as solo voice.

There was a class, elective I think - though how this could have been possible in so small a school escapes me - In "Precis Writing." Was this English with a stylish French name, or was this something the French gave us? I may tell you sometime, but I must get on with my story or It will never end. It is really all Introduction so far.

In Precis we were required to distill a sentence into a single three- or four word thought, a para-graph into a very terse sentence, and the whole, Into something - sentence or paragraph - the shorter the better, just so the meaning was clear. This method was no way, of course, to read poetry or perhaps history or any kind of romantic writing, but It was a fine kind of training for essays, news, and analytic reports.

After processing the material, we were required (without referring to the original) to translate our notes back into logical thought. I loved this form of mental exercise and even now am often grateful for the training and am conscious of the effect.

We graduated in pink, no less.No virginal white for us, and for a girl with very bright red hair, pink was an unfortunate choice. Blue, green, beige, anything but pink or red, but I was the on-ly redhead and we had a class vote. I do not remember whether I could summon the courage to vote against it but cannot Imagine having done so. Anyway, high school ended. Now what?

8.

None of us was thinking of a career. We were supposed to marry and rear fine families. One could teach school or do some sort of clerical work but there was little else. My parents had a great divergence of opinion about higher education for women. My father considered It entirely useless Inasmuch as we were not preparing ourselves for any kind of job. My mother considered it really basic and

necessary for exactly the same reason.

She reasoned that, if a woman was to spend much of her time alone and was charged with the training of minds in formative stages, she might need all of the available opportunity before that time to furnish her own mind with literature, music, and creative thinking emerging through history so that she might always have food for thought.

My father countered that everyone should learn a saleable skill so that he - or in this case she - could become self-supporting and learn the value of money. But the time for that, of course, was not now for me. I was seventeen and even my father thought there was no real hurry about my earning a living. I really wanted to go away to college. I did not know where, just away. In school we had no counselling, so for me, with no real ambition, the adventure was the reason, - to fly away from the lovely family shelter and see if I could handle my life alone. My father argued that our own Newcomb was a good college and that all I would learn by leaving home was Independence and he thought that I exhibited too much of that already. His opinion was a surprise. I had been taught most carefully by him to handle a monthly allowance and make a budget: so much for clothes, so much for school supplies, so much for gifts, and always, no matter what the exigencies of climate, season or emergency a portion of about ten percent, in the savings bank so that it could be earning whether I was or not. Borrowing was an intolerable thought not even to be considered.

My father disliked the poverty of his early years and wished to avoid want for his children and to provide some ease and comfort for the wife whose love and support was a basic necessity for him. If he could help it, she would not be allowed the grueling life of his own mother, but as money and prosperity became our way of life, he feared the opposite for us. It was possible to make such an easy cushion that we would become softened too early to learn any other way.

Money management I already knew. I had learned also that I must be dependable, on time, though I was never required to report my return after a dance or date, responsible for my own possessions and wardrobe, and up to date in my schoolwork and grades.

He saw all this behavior as sufficient independence, but I wanted to have to fend for myself, so we struck a bargain. If I really wanted college and agreed to attend Newcomb for a year and made what he considered acceptable grades, I could in my sophomore year make my own choice.

What, I asked, were "acceptable" grades? His answer was that if 100 was the highest possible, he would accept, in all subjects, any grade between 90 and 100. It was a pretty tough bargain, but I had gotten myself into it, and we reached an agreement.

9.

I entered the Newcomb music school in the fall of '28 with no thought of a career, simply to learn something which would enrich my life.

The courses were difficult and very time consuming, and our classes met in a variety of places. No building had been constructed yet for the music school. Music majors were required to spend many hours on Instrumental practice and our social life was limited to meetings our sororities re-quired. I liked the work but found the sorority system distressingly silly. Fortunately, I had many friends from public school, convent schools, Newman, and McGehee's. We were expected to make a four-year pledge to Chi Omega, Kappa Theta, or another sorority and to segregate ourselves into small social groups. Yet we were the lucky ones. Some girls were excluded completely and quite wounded as a result, and Jewish girls were grouped into their own sororities. Sororities were small, homogenized groups with little in the way of common Interest and, for me at least, small satisfac-tion.

The year was good in many ways. A particularly fine music appreciation teacher was a highlight, and his instruction has stayed with me throughout life.

10.

I was anxious to be Independent and made the grades my father required, so he kept his promise. Finding an out-of-town school through a guidance counselor was a futuristic concept, so word of mouth was the only way we learned about colleges away from home. Somehow, I heard about Hollins College in Virginia and learned that It had eliminated sororities by vote of the student body. It was the compelling reason for me so, given permission to choose a school, I took Hollins. I went off with great expectations, all alone, on the two-day train trip to Roanoke. It was lovely country, just as Annie Dillard describes It in her exquisite style. It was all new to me and I was soon to see my first real fall, when vegetative growth would stop entirely, and crops would be gathered in prepa-ration for winter storage.

My sister was to be married In late October. Although the student handbook clearly stated that excuses would be granted for attendance at weddings of immediate family, my mother had Instruct-ed me to seek the proper office and obtain the necessary permission very shortly after my arrival. I did what I was told to do and discovered to my great disappointment that I was not to go. Evidently when the book was written no one had contemplated a trip to a place as far away as New Or-leans, and the excuse could not be given for such a long absence as travelling would involve.

I was to be maid of honor and was very conscious that being chosen was Indeed an honor. I was junior by several years to the other members of the bridal party and looked forward to being in such mature company. One groomsman was a doctor and one an architect, and my partner, the groom's older brother and best man, was a lawyer. I had bought a dress and made plans on the basis of the language in the handbook, which now evidently meant nothing.

I cannot now remember whether I wrote the news of my turned down request (air mail was far in the future, so letters were slow) or telephoned long distance my distress was great, so I probably did the latter. In any case, I was allowed to go. Heaven knows what my mother said to the authorities, but matters were righted.



However, the incident left its mark on both the dean's office and me. They must have thought me quite headstrong, and in turn I never really trusted them. The relationship grew a bit chilly.

A footnote is in order here. I loved the wedding! I had to miss my brother's wedding years later and still regret having been absent. My new sister-In-law was eighteen months married before I even met her, and I have not yet visited her part of the country. Few events take one to Forrest City, Arkansas.

There were things about Hollins that I liked Immensely. As I have already mentioned, the area is beautiful, perhaps especially so to one from swampy Southern Louisiana. I recall gentle mountains, lovely woods and streams, and well-marked seasons including my first snow. I had pleasant friendships, too. I would have found the adjustment easier, though, if I had entered with my class as a freshman, rather than a year later.

Some of the courses were good, and I did much of what we called prom trotting - well chaperoned, of course - and enjoyed that part of my education. In other respects, though, either I failed Hollins, or it failed me. I was accustomed to discipline, but there it was the suspicious kind. Strict rules were established - no problem for me - but because we never felt that our honor could be trusted we did foolish things in order to break foolish rules. The college was administered by an eighty-year-old spinster whose ideas did not fit our time and she generated great unrest. Several of us were chosen to be made the bad examples and were "suspended" for the last short period of our Junior year. We all returned the next fall, hoping that good relationships could be re-established, but the succeeding group of rebels were much worse than we. They, too, read by flashlight after "lights out," "skipped daily chapel occasionally," and once in a while took leave of the campus for a movie or date in Roanoke without signing out, but they also cheated on exams and plagiarized work for their papers. The last offense was very serious, indeed, because we signed each paper submitted in a little box to swear that the work was original.

The campus became an unhappy place during my tenure, and I finished my junior year but did not return to graduate. I learned later that the place was shaken badly and many wholesome changes resulted from all of the rebellion.

None of this upheaval bothered me as much as might be supposed. I had not been encouraged greatly to pursue higher education and did not seek a career anyway. Few careers were available to young women in the best of times, and my era was light years away from that. For reasons I never discovered, what became our Great Depression started in North Carolina during my college years, and for us there it was depressing in the most personal sense.

On several occasions, a colleague would be summoned to the dean's office and emerge in a state of great shock. We then would learn that her family funds were depleted so she no longer could pay for school. Scholarships were unavailable except for male athletes. Others called in by the dean were informed of a father's suicide, committed so that his family could collect life insurance; all other assets had been wiped out and no longer were recoverable.

In a small college where we knew each other fairly well, these griefs were real to us and our feel-ings of helplessness were very poignant.

11.

What troubled me greatly at Hollins, though, was the anticipation of my father's wrath at my fool-ishness. Mother might not have been able to understand, but she would forgive, turn the corner, and go on to the next thing. With my father, I had made a bargain and I had done poorly with It. I do not know how I expected him to display his displeasure, but I was sure that he would feel It deeply. He, whose opportunities had been so few, could scarcely be easily forgiving of a daughter who had wasted hers.

I need not have worried. Very little was said about any of It. There were no recriminations, and no questions; very little reference, really. I had tried hard in my letters to convey my feelings, but whether my parents understood I never knew. It was enough that they accepted me and closed the chapter. I had a lesson in forgiving and love of an extraordinary kind.

It was late spring when I got home. I healed quickly. Dick came back from Culver in early sum-mer and the family circle became the warm, comfortable arrangement that had always enveloped us.

My debut came next. I was never sure how it was decided upon, but my father had been Invited to be the Rex of 1932 and my parents, who knew little about the typical New Orleans social system, must have decided that the whole family might as well have this season together.

It was fun. I loved the dances and the pretty clothes and the people, young and old. We, the debutantes, were very proper and wrote notes of appreciation for flowers, gifts, and other attentions, and we paid formal calls on the ladies who honored us with dinners and luncheons.

I had never been to a Carnival ball until I became a maid in quite a few and was escorted by con-temporaries of my father for each of those long evenings. In this way I began to know my parents' friends in an almost intimate way quite impossible otherwise. We became friends because we knew each other as social partners in the same way as dates who spend a long evening together. Mardi Gras Day was a grand finale for us, a time of optimal family Involvement. My father was a very re-gal Rex; Dick was in his court; and I was a maid in Comus.

Carnival was all a great bit of play acting and foolishness, and we loved It. I had never imagined that my reserved, shy father could play such games and the rest of us enjoyed watching him take his part so well. He was naturally a dignified man, so his regal bearing was no surprise on this occasion. Mardi Gras Is always a demanding and wearing day for the king, and we were all exhausted when It was over. The quiet of the Lenten season was a most welcome relief for us.



12.

My parents went to the coast for a few days of rest, Dick returned to more serious study at Tulane, and I enrolled in a business school. Alice Logan located it and we went together to take typ-ing and shorthand, primarily from Mr. Mullins. The school was housed in a very large old house at the corner of St. Charles and Seventh. It is still there, boarded up, a cause celebre of preservationists who want it saved from demolition.

Summer arrived early that year, and with It came a night that changed my life completely. I had been enjoying a relationship with a second lieutenant who was In New Orleans to work on the Bon-net Carre spillway. He was very serious about his work, a trait I liked, and highly Intelligent. He came from a world of which I knew nothing, and perhaps the difference added interest, too. His fa-ther was also an Army officer, so they had Lived in a variety of places. We had had pleasant times together but no more pleasant for me than dates with other young men whom I saw often.

It was a Saturday and we were to go dancing at the Country Club where we were sure to meet other friends. It was an Ideal situation for people of the dating age: casual atmosphere, good dance music, and good friends. It was cooler than most places, with wonderfully romantic galleries where we rested between dances and sought such breezes as might blow.

I loved my new apple green organdy dress I chose to wear and looked forward to a lovely evening. And so, Indeed, it was. Something chemical or magical happened, and by the time we got back to Palmer Avenue we were sure that we were in love.

This lieutenant was not the first man who had offered his love - and marriage, too - but he was the first to whom I felt so ready to reciprocate. I was rapturous until I was brought up short by his remark that this love must not be allowed to flourish because he was Jewish, and therefore, of course, we could never marry.

I was very surprised, and my thoughts tumbled through my brain too fast. Could my parents ac-cept this? Could I? I had not been able to accept the Catholic edict that one must pledge children to the church If one married Into the Catholic faith. Could I accept this relationship and what might It mean? There was no time for arriving at answers at that moment. I knew that this young man would be badly scarred, and that should not be able to accept my own weakness if I let this fact change the relationship. The words do not come back to me, but I somehow assured him that religion made no difference. As I lay awake for the remainder of that night, I felt sure of myself and believed that, in truth, it did not make a difference.

My parents were to return from their Gulf Coast weekend the next day and I was eagerly awaiting my mother's return to share my good news with her and, I was sure, cause her the kind of happi-ness which I was experiencing. She listened with Interest to my ravings and rejoiced with me and asked If she should tell my father. It was not necessary; I had to do It with the hope that he would understand.

It was my father, of course, who dealt with the practicalities. "What do you know of Chuck Kel-ler or his family?" he Inquired. He was happy for me, of course, but details were important. My father was a great one for credentials. Starry skies were pleasant, but reality was reality. "By the way," I offered, "he did tell me that he's Jewish."

"Hell," said my father, "that does pose some problems. Have you thought of your children?" I had not, of course, but somehow must have convinced him that the religious background just did not matter that much to me, and he said to me finally, and to my great relief, that he thought that maybe I was "tough enough to take It anyway." Knowing his high standards, I was enormously grateful for his attitude. I could count on my mother for support almost any time, but opposition from my father would have created great difficulties for me. He must have known that, and perhaps he also knew that I was going to make my own decisions on anything as important to me as this relationship.

Thoughts of my father remind me of a fantasy I have about life after death - if there Is one. I would love to be reunited with some of the people who were older and wiser than I was, people whose Influence I have felt so keenly. In my heaven, you see, we would be contemporaries and able to discuss our periods in history and our philosophies from the perspective of a long life and accumulated experience. I was simply not mature enough to know and understand them as fully as now believe that I could.

13.

My lieutenant got sudden orders in early June to report for duty immediately at M.I.T. and to begin the post-graduate education required of engineer officers. It was bad timing for us, for nothing was really settled. We were deeply in love but needed a bit more time before being sure of marriage. And, as my father had pointed out, I knew nothing about the young man's family.

So off he went. The romance which had Just begun now had to wait for a while.

I continued with secretarial school, but I hardly remember why. The Depression was getting very serious, and Jobs were not available even for experienced people. Newcomers to the job market had no reason even to apply. But with school and such work as we did with small children at Alice's Aunt Kitty's play school, the time passed pleasantly.

My mother promised to go with me to Boston in late summer, when Chuck had a pause between summer and winter sessions, so that we might discuss our future. My father objected strenuously, but my mother explained that she had already told me she would go, and she Intended to keep her promise.

We spent a wonderful period travelling between Boston and New York, and Chuck's mother came from Chicago to Join us. She was petite, stylish, and beautiful, and her beauty was Internal as well. She had a great capacity for life, and she and my mother became easily compatible.

Chuck and I were astonished and pleased to see them together. We could spend

the long peri-ods we needed together knowing that our mothers were comfortable without us. Our conversations had to deal with Army life, children - If and when - likes and dislikes. Margaret Sanger's very con-troversial birth control clinic had a branch In New York, and, having made one basic decision about not having a baby in the early stage of our marriage, we needed advice. We did not meet her - she spent lots of time in jails - but the information we needed was the clinical kind from an Impersonal source. It was Illegal in Louisiana at that time for anyone, even one's doctor, to furnish such advice.



Rosa Freeman engagement picture 1932

Chuck gave me an engagement ring and we made plans to visit the Keller's In Winnetka in the fall. In late December we had a large wedding. It was not our Idea, but It gave me an opportunity to pay a grand farewell to my maiden life.

After the ceremony, my father came to make his good-byes and to wish me well and startled me a bit with his remarks. "I don't know this man and you are going into a life a long way away, I know nothing about. Now we expect you to make a good thing of this marriage. Your mother and I have done our best for you, but this ls no longer home; now you create your own."

His little speech was totally unexpected and even shocking. My strong, protective father was put-ting It squarely up to me to make a good thing of my marriage. It was not until many years later when he lay dying and confessed that I had pleased

him greatly that, without actually saying it, sure-ly Intimated that he had once feared that I might fail his test.

He drove off in “Lorenzo” Chuck’s little Ford, to Pass Christian where James, the marvelous family diplomat, greeted us, helped place our baggage in my father’s “Pout House” Where he had Invited us to stay even though his newly stuffed trophies from his Alaska hunt had not arrived.

My parents made a practice of lending their house at the Pass to bridal couples who, in this peri-od, could not afford honeymoon trips, but staying in my father’s “Pout House” was a privilege for us alone. He had built It as a retreat when the big house was full of young visitors, as It often was, and to house the animal trophies. The house had only two rooms, so my groom remained discreetly in the living room while I prepared for bed. I presented myself in my white satin gown frosted with lace and was walking nervously toward him when I tripped on a bearskin rug, fell flat, and ended up in helpless laughter. Chuck came to help me up but ended up on the floor with me, laughing as hard as I was. It was an easy beginning to an awkward moment.

14.

We had three days at the Pass and were joined at the end by my parents. My father had called to ask permission because “your mother feels that she didn’t have the chance for a proper good-bye.” Except for the fact that honeymoon couples are not customarily joined by their parents, the request seemed reasonable enough. My mother had managed Christmas, several house guests who came to be in our wedding, the out-of-town Keller’s, and a large wedding on December 28. She and I had had no private time during the pre-nuptial days. But when I teased her about inviting herself to our honeymoon, she laughed and told me that it was all my father’s Idea. She was tired and ready for rest; he was the one who felt unsatisfied. We both realized that he could not possibly have ad-mitted such sentimental weakness; hence, the small deception.

The rest of our honeymoon was spent on the long train trip to Boston. Our furniture was already moved in, thanks to Chuck’s cousin who lived there, but of course our clothes and the trousseau were in our trunks so there was much more settling in to be accomplished.

Chuck had to report to M.I.T. on our day of arrival, so I drove him across the Cottage Farm bridge and arranged to pick him up later. I went looking for some kitchen equipment. I had no expe-rience with cooking except the coffee making, egg scrambling kind, which we sometimes did after late parties. A waffle Iron turned up as a wedding gift so in New Orleans I had tried to get our cook to teach me how to make the batter, but she was the “pinch of this and the dash of that” sort and no help at all.

My father occasionally had expressed the opinion that my mother should “teach those girls to cook, but she was tired of hard work by the time she could afford

servants and took the position that we were good readers, intelligent enough to learn when we had to. To me, basic kitchen equipment meant a frying pan and coffee pot, egg turner, spoon and knife, and with those implements we began.

I hired Winifred, just off the boat from Ireland and willing to work for very little, in order to eat. She did the cooking, cleaning and laundry, and I trotted happily off to school at Boston University.

15.

I had the notion that if I had studying to do at night while Chuck was doing his, I'd be more likely to leave him alone. It was important to his Army career that he learn everything he was offered at M.I.T., and I wished to cooperate fully. During our fall visit in Boston I had applied to Radcliffe to take a philosophy course - I'd never had any - and a German course that required lots of speaking. I did not like German, but we were planning to go to

in the summer and Chuck had said you handle the German and I'll handle the French and we can go anywhere." I could read the language fairly well, but with my drippy Southern accent, speaking it required more practice. I seemed quite acceptable to the college as a mid-term entering student until I started to write my name on an application for admittance. I said that by the time I got there, I would have a new name, and asked which name they wanted?

The admissions lady's face fell suddenly, and she announced rather solemnly that Radcliffe did not admit married students. I explained that I was not planning to live in the dorms or take part in student activities. I did not even need to be graded; I just wanted to learn these things. But the rule was ironclad: no married students under any condition.

Boston University was a happy choice. I could have been a gun moll, street-walker, anything. My life style, morals, age, sex and color were not their affair. If I wanted to come to school and could pay the fee, that was all that was necessary. There were night classes, too, and B.U. was a huge education factory of the kind I had never known existed: large and impersonal. I love it. I felt grown-up now; B.U. didn't stand "in loco parentis." I studied, went to class, recited when called on, and learned or did not, period.

I had a lot of other learning to do, though. Foods did not arrive in neatly wrapped packages and I never knew how to buy. Foodstuffs measured in pounds, ounces, quarts, and pints weren't too bad, but when I found that spinach was sold by the peck it was too much. I confessed one day to a compassionate clerk that I was a complete boob at this purchasing job, so he undertook the task of teaching me! I learned that shells weighed much more than the peas in them, so in order to get this much edible product it was necessary to buy this much more. The clerk was gentle and did not show any impatience, so I was relieved and grateful.

I confided that my coffee was terrible and making coffee was one thing I had thought I knew. "Well" he said, "you sound like a Southerner." I confessed that indeed I was and learned from my tutor that Southern coffee, even of a national

brand, was roasted differently than that sold in the North. He was happy to order the Southern roast. He had never heard of red beans or okra or pole beans, though, so those did not appear on our menu. Chuck was patient and Winifred filled up the gaps, so we muddled along. We were so tremendously happy that everything was a lark. We laughed a lot and worked hard at making the enormous adjustment to each other that marriage requires.

Saturday nights at the Boston Symphony were our only indulgence. Chuck knew that I would love this, so he had bought the tickets and attended the fall concerts before I got there. In the intelli-gent way he always has examined things, he had learned a great deal from looking and listening and reading the excellent program notes. For me, who knew a lot about music but had grown up in a city with no symphony orchestra, the Saturday night outings were one of the great experiences of my life.

Koussevitsky was the conductor and a genius at program arranging. We heard the classics beauti-fully performed, but also were exposed to music unheard before. He explained that music on the shelf was no experience at all and that though his audiences might not experience love at first sight for all of the new music, we had to hear it before we could judge it. We heard Charles Ives - some of it still a bit strange to my ear - and a lot of Sibelius, who was very new then. The music was differ-ent and haunting. We wanted more and got it - all of the symphonies except one that he failed to fin-ish composing before the season ended.

16.

After the winter season came the Pops and then the Promenade concerts on the bank of the Charles River. But we were gone by then on our trip to Europe - a delayed honeymoon - and the Boston chapter of our life together was finished.

(I had no confidantes here - no mother, sister, or friend - just a husband whom I needed to know. It was, as my father had said, sink or swim.)

\* \* \* \* \*

17.

The European honeymoon was lovely, and after two months of constant companionship we were still compatible, so It was a good experience in that way.

We reported to Fort Humphrey, Virginia in late summer of '33. It was the Engineer School post, now named Fort Belvoir. The quarters were built to be temporary during World War I and were barely adequate. The chimneys were well built, but the frames of the houses were not, and the floors sloped in crazy directions. To hang a picture, one of us pushed against the wall on one side, while the other delicately nailed a picture hook in the other. The winter was an especially cold one; I experienced my first sub-zero temperature; so, we were not really adequately housed, but everyone was in the same situation and It the Army.

The nation was sure that large-scale war would never happen again, so the



Army was very small and poorly financed. We never expected luxury and made our fun: poker games on winter evenings, for instance. Chuck and I had the best poker chips, so our set travelled from one game to another - wherever the fire was warmest that night. Another pleasant pastime was horseback riding in the beautiful countryside.

We gave tea parties for our mothers when they visited, and couples shared our best equipment. Cocktail parties could not be given because It was still Prohibition time and we were serv-ants of our government. Occasionally, though, we did hear of a nearby still and made a great expedi-tion to find some home-made whiskey and indulge in a bit of tipling on the sly. The whiskey was terrible, but the deception was about as sinful as any of us got.

We and all of our friends were beginning our marriages, starting our families, and learning how to live with Army life, so It was for most of us, an interesting time. Some talked of leaving the service. Promotion was slow due to a large back log of officers from World War I, but non-military job op-portunities were few in the declining Depression and I cannot remember any of our Engineer School group who changed careers at that time. We thought we might be allowed to stay at Fort Humphrey's for a while after Chuck finished school there, but foreign service duty was suddenly changed from three years to two and our group of officers was close enough to the Chief's Office to be reached easily. I hoped for Hawaii, rather than the Philippines or Panama - the overseas assignments but our orders came through for Panama.

18.

It was December, and I was quite pregnant, so among many other difficult problems was the mat-ter of finding summer clothes. My mother suggested that I send her one of the maternity dresses that I had already bought, and she would use It as a pattern for a seamstress to copy. The clothes awaited me In Panama and the lovely cottons were most welcome in that uncomfortable climate.

We were advised by some who knew the tropics to leave behind our furniture and rugs, the for-mer because It would not survive the climate and the latter because they would be useless. Winter clothes went into storage, too, except the few things that were essential in the cold weather In New York when we boarded our transport, the Chateau Thierry, a troop ship.

We were troops, so accommodations were simple and quite crowded. We made an interesting stop in Puerto Rico, where we were glad to land and to explore a place of natural beauty but alarm-ing poverty.

Friends met us when we docked at Cristobal and took us to a welcome, beautiful dinner before we returned to our ship and began the Canal transit. We could have taken the train across the isth-mus - many passengers did. But the passage can best be described as magnificent, and since we never had the opportunity again, we were glad that we took it when it came.

19.

Christmas Eve is not a good time to arrive anywhere but that's when we arrived. Again, we were met by friends, who had seen to it that our house was equipped with a bed and such cooking equipment as was essential until our own arrived.

The friends gave us Christmas dinner, too, and made our transition into this strange world possible.

We lived in the Canal Zone, a ten-mile wide strip which bisects the Republic of Panama. We could go both ways, but the Panamanians could not. We needed two driver's licenses, one for the Zone and one for the Republic. We drove on the left. Driving in Panama was a dangerous and un-disciplined business in general, but the change of directions made it a bit difficult for us to learn, and the omnipresent Hivas made matters worse. These were the form of public transportation, as the busses were privately owned, bore colorful names, and ran when their owners were in the mood or needed money.

Money was swapped for stamps, which were valid in the commissaries where we bought every-thing - food, clothes, hardware - all of the essentials of life.

Gorgas Hospital took care of all of our medical needs. I made an early visit, as my pregnancy was six months along by this time and the climate change was quite drastic.

We settled in, hired a servant of Jamaican origin, with all that implied: beautiful language and lovely manners. Her name was Adina- I still have her picture somewhere - and she addressed us as Master and Mistress. We were in our mid-twenties and hardly worthy of such dignity, but we accepted this form of address along with all of the other differences in this new world.

We thought we had lived in a minimum-standard house at Fort Humphrey, but the one in Panama was simpler still. It was elevated ten or twelve feet above ground, a good situation for many reasons. We were high above the damp ground, and we had a place to hang our wash during rainy seasons. It was cooler at that height. During the earthquake we experienced there, the house was quavering, but entirely undamaged.

It had a tin roof - very noisy during hard rain - no glass in the windows, and a very large walk-in dry closet where we stored all of our books and clothes. Large beads of mildew developed over-night on anything left anywhere else.

Refrigerators stood in large cans of liquid ant poison, and we swept the dirt through the cracks in the floor. Such electrical equipment as we took - refrigerator, fans, anything with a motor - had to be adapted to run on a 25-cycle current. It was the current which served the Canal and therefore the Zone as well.

There were newer quarters elsewhere, but ours were built for the French for the unfortunate de Lesseps effort to create the Canal, and the houses were still in use. Comfort was nearly impossible - air conditioning was far in the future - and the weather ranged among varieties of heat. Early January until early April was the "dry" season. The trade winds blew, and though heavy dampness always came at night, we got no daytime rain.



The beginning of April brought showers of increasing duration, lasting until the end of the rainy season of torrential downpours which rarely ceased the whole month of December.

We had never seen iguanas, coral snakes, scorpions, marmosets, or a mongoose, but they could all be found in Panama. I loved the bugle birds whose call I still associate with those nights I got up to nurse after my baby was born, and the great wheeling frigate birds. I was quite familiar with roaches, termites, and ants; we had plenty of those in New Orleans, but none of such size or variety. We frequently moved our dining table as the termites took their meals in the ceiling (the house was all wood) and dropped their residue.

Anyone who saw an ant immediately reported it and was served by specialists: the big ant man or the little ant man. Another variety of ant could cut out small pieces of foliage that they carried over their heads for camouflage. These ants were not noticeable until a slow movement was perceived, and they were said to be able to cut great swathes out of the roughest jungle.

We were never allowed to let water collect anywhere: a top to a trash container, or a child's sand bucket was turned always. Mosquitoes bred quickly, and the Zone was kept quite free of them, for they were the killers which had felled so many of the French.

20.

The foliage in Panama was exotic and beautiful. Acacia, croton, hibiscus, bougainvillea and many varieties of bananas gave color, but countless green plants grew to enormous size and among them was our favorite of tropical plants, then as now, Royal Palms. They stood in stately rows, flanking many an Avenida, and had a look of sleekness which distinguished them from other tropical plants.

Plant growth was luxuriant and rampant, so control of it was a problem. (We took Charles, when he was about fifteen, to see his country of origin and found our Corozal obliterated entirely. A new Corozal of concrete buildings stood, all very neat and tidy, but our little post built of wood had been reclaimed by the tropical growth.)

We ate delicious things from the sea and enjoyed the delights of pineapples, limes, cocoanuts, and avocados such as we have never had since. Each morning on her way to work Adina picked up a few fallen mangoes for herself and for me. Chuck did not like them, but I did - and do.

Everything we ate had to be peeled or cooked to be safe. Thus, it seemed fitting that in this small, well controlled area, we served as guinea pigs on whom frozen foods were tested. Our commissaries sold Birdseye frozen lima beans, green peas, and strawberries, the first foods packaged that way. Though they were not comparable to those we get now, we relished them. The tropics furnished few vegetables, though I do remember beautiful eggplant of a shiny, wonderful purple. We used them along with fruit for decoration and heaped them up on large wooden

trays like those used at the native market. Flowers were unsafe to use indoors, for they all carried ants. Many a newcomer found that out to her discomfort when her dinner table was overrun with the insects.

The post exchange was a place we visited often. There were lovely things to buy: rugs, Cloi-sonné, lacquers from China, rattan furniture and straw rugs from the Philippines, Oriental rugs and English china. In this duty-free Zone in a non-profit store, prices were lower than we could have imagined, so we would have been foolish to ignore such bargains. The word would go out when a shipment arrived, and we would go to examine the latest treasures. We could order some things if we were willing to wait the year that it took for them to arrive and to accept such breakage as had occurred.

21.

We were really very remote from our earlier lives, but most of us made some kind of adjustment. However, some did not, and we simply avoided the complainers. We were there for two years - like it or not - and that can be a very long time to allow oneself to stay miserable.

Mail took a long ten days to two weeks to reach us. Radio washed in occasionally with quite a bit of static. For some reason we received the British Broadcasting Service with more regularity than any other, and through it we learned. one evening of the assassination of our controversial Louisiana Senator, Huey Long.

A group of us gathered one night in the Officers Club, knowing that something of enormous importance was happening in England, but not really believing that Edward VIII would actually abdicate. We hoped, though, to learn of it, if he did. The broadcast was clear that night. The bells rang out their dramatic tones and then we were told that the King would address us. His beautifully cultivated voice then told us of his burden, now become intolerable without "the woman I love," and announced that he would leave the throne to be with her.

As a supplier of news, the Panama Star and Herald was not much help. It carried three or four pages of news in Spanish. By reversing the paper and beginning from the other side, it offered (complete with headlines) a comparable number of pages in English.

I have mentioned the Officers Club without describing it. The name itself, which implies some kind of excellence, is misleading. It was a large metal building called a Quonset hut. It was our gathering place for parties and did have a bar. The club was just behind our house and adjacent to the tennis court, our only recreational facility. The court was paved, so we waited for showers to end, manned our brooms, swept, and then played. When the trade winds blew, playing was tricky. The wind blew lengthwise, so on one side we barely tapped the ball and on the other, swatted with full force.

The reading light on 25-cycle current was terrible, and we frequently gathered at night in small groups for poker or for just talk. We rose very early so the day's work could take place before the fiercest heat, had very late lunch, undressed for

siesta, and played tennis in the late afternoon - weather permitting. We grew so accustomed to siesta and the mandatory quiet hour in our post that the habit was difficult to break later on. Quiet hour was just that: no tennis, no children on the play-ground directly behind our house, and no telephoning. With only screens in our houses, which were quite close together or adjoined as doubles, this was our mutual protection against noise.

My trips to see the doctor at Gorgas were frequent. Becoming acclimated to the tropics was difficult without the hazards of pregnancy, but my kidney history, which included Bright's disease, further complicated matters. The advice in that climate where we perspired almost constantly was "drink water every time you think about it and make yourself think about it."

## 22.

The men went off on maneuvers toward the middle of March, and Milly Wilson insisted that I spend the nights with her. She was the expert at having babies, having had two, and if I needed to get to Gorgas at night, she or Mary Sexton, who shared the double house, could take me while the other stayed with their collective children. People seem eternally confident that babies will arrive early, but I had been told it would come April 6, and so it did.

My mother, bless her adventurous soul, arrived late in March to be with me for the birth, and was overjoyed to see her. She could suggest equipment which I did not know I needed. She became familiar with our circumstances and with my friends - at least, my women friends. I was grateful for her presence and enjoyed the intimate time between just the two of us.

I think we did start for the hospital at night. By that time, the expectant father had been issued a pass through the "enemy" lines to "rejoin his wife who was about to present him with an heir."

We had a strenuous time, my baby and I. It was "natural childbirth," though we did not yet know the term. I had a slight cold and doctors were cautious with drugs in the tropics, so we battled it out with no pain-killers. When Charles and I were introduced, he was a slimy seven pounder, still wearing his umbilical cord. They slapped him and he gave a proper yell and when last I saw him for a while, they were dropping something in his eyes.

He was shortly presented to his father and grandmother in a cleaned-up state and they pronounced him perfect. He and I were both exhausted and needed our rest. We were the only maternity case and got lots of attention. Nurses, doctors, orderlies, and many chaplains came to call. There was no privacy in Gorgas, anyway, and people do love new babies.

My mother stayed the ten days of my required hospitalization and was on hand to help me with the beginning of the enormous adjustment that motherhood requires. She took off one day, insisting that a nursing mother must have a rocking chair.

She was gone too long, but eventually came home, triumphant after a difficult search and some traffic problems. She was unaccustomed to the wild driving in

Panama City and use of the opposite side of the road didn't make the trip any easier for her.

I loved my new role but was a bit awkward with it. My baby was so slippery in the tub, his cry-ing troubled me, and he was supposed to be fed when the clock said so and not at any other time, and I think I was too anxious about doing everything right. I wanted a good baby, so his father would enjoy him, too.

My task was a bit more complicated than that of some new mothers because my pediatrician de-veloped one of those dreadful skin diseases which could not be handled except with a change of climate and was sent back to the States for a cure.

I coped as well as I could. The government pamphlets were good: I was well instructed by "Pre-natal Care" and then I had "The First Six Months." Adina came forth occasionally to sooth the baby with a broth made of boiling chicken gizzards and whatever herbs she could collect. She reminded me when I grew timid - the pamphlets said nothing about this kind of brew - that she had raised nine children, a rare achievement in her circumstances. So, I listened to the voice of wisdom.

She also reported her dreams of the night before to us quite regularly, which would tell us how to play the lottery. It was rather a convoluted way of choosing a number or a series of them, but it was her way of sharing with us everything which she possessed to share.

23.

This fascinating creature wore her hat when she served breakfast. When I gathered my courage once to ask her why, she replied in her usual dignified way that she did not have time in the morn-ing to dress her hair in a way presentable to us.

Her wisdom was immense, but we were quite disturbed by her habit of kneeling when she spoke to us. Her training had taught her that one never looked down on those whom one served, so we accepted that premise. She was so respected: if I had not done a proper job of marketing, we got the announcement, "Mistress, there is only one 'hegg' for breakfast and of course the Lieutenant gets that, so I'll bring you something else." The caste system was all that she knew. We loved her dearly, and I think she knew it. She sensed my lack of experience and tried throughout our two year stay to help me without seeming to.

We thought of bringing her back with us when we left. She might have welcomed many things about a larger world, but with Jamaica and Panama as her background there was no way to trans-plant her to Milwaukee.

24.

Charles was my delight. When he was about five months old, his father and I decided that all of Charles's grandparents would appreciate a visit to New Orleans. It turned out well. The Freemans and Keller's got along comfortably and my mother, the ultimate housekeeper, loved having us all.

I brought in all of the missed Christmas and birthday gifts for everyone in both families. I had not mailed them because presents which required a trip to the Customs office and a payment of duty equivalent to the purchase price were no great favor to anyone.

The trip took about a month. Ten days up and ten days back on those banana boats left little time for visiting. In the meantime, Charles learned to crawl, so the trip back to Panama was made ar-duous by my constantly being engaged in keeping him within my sight and out of scuppers or from under the feet of other passengers. Throughout the voyage I hoped he would sleep long enough for me to get his smelly laundry washed in a bathtub of a room in the hot depths of that ship.

We both survived, though I was a bit dashed to be told that we could not be admitted to the Zone because my son had not had the required inoculations. No one was admitted without them, but the rule was relaxed when I explained that he was a native, but not old enough when we left for the required inoculations. My promise to visit Gorgas next day and have the baby immunized was accepted.

25.

We look back on the Canal Zone duty as a pleasant time in our lives, despite the difficult adjust-ments. We learned a lot about ourselves and discovered that we could roll with such a drastic change and not just endure but enjoy it.

We stayed a bit longer than our required two years. We were ordered to Milwaukee and decided that our tropical child - now two - could not be easily transplanted to mid-Western winter. Nor could I. We got to Wisconsin in mid-April after a pleasant stay in New Orleans - and were greeted by snowy, ugly weather.

We had to find our own house there, a formidable task. Milwaukee was a city of home-owners, not renters. We did find one of those Tudor'ish houses so popular in that area, all in bad taste. The architect, if one had been used, had not decided whether to be Old English, Spanish, or what-have-you; the colors were distressingly bad, but the house was well-built and in a family type neighborhood. The only aspect of the house I can remember changing, because both of us were offended by it, was the chandelier over the dining table. It was hideous, so we bought a new one, care-fully stored the original, and breathed a sigh of relief at meals.

We bought draperies - a necessity in the bitter weather when every crack leaks frigid air - re-claimed our long-stored possessions, now enhanced by the new rugs and china we had purchased in Panama and settled into an entirely different life

style.

I was soon pregnant again but suffered for a long time a sense of doom about that baby. The feeling could have been due to many changes, but this baby was not to be, and at about six months, I became quite ill and miscarried.

By this time, we had made a few acquaintances, but they were not old friends who come to help in time of trouble, so it was hard for Chuck to find himself with a seriously ailing wife and a two-and-a-half year- old on his hands. It was this period of trouble, I believe, which made him decide that the nomadic life was no longer for us, and he began to speak seriously to his father, and others about prospects of another job in some kind of settled environment.

Eventually we did make friends in Milwaukee, and after I regained my health, gave birth to love-ly little Mary. She was a cherubic baby. There was no strain in her delivery, and she arrived in a state of ease and tranquility. The obstetrician wanted a redheaded daughter like this for himself and he seemed to feel a sense of authorship, too. The Kellers, Strasburgers, Ettingers, and Silber-mans were joyous over a girl in their family. Boys were their lot: children, and grandchildren, too. It gave us pleasure that they seemed to enjoy her coming, as we surely did. She was three weeks old on Christmas Day, and our small family had a fine Christmas that year.

26.

My father, who had never visited us before, was in the vicinity to attend to his business interests and came to see us.

I believe that Army life was completely foreign to him that he was rather surprised at our nor-malcy. Chuck mentioned to him his thoughts about resigning and almost before I knew what was happening, they took the train to New Orleans, and Chuck called me to tell me he had taken a job there - in a bank.

I thought it an unwise decision, fearing that he might be overwhelmed with family that was all mine, and by social customs which might not include him. I reminded him when we had a chance to discuss it that the climate was abominable and that working in a bank was not what he had trained for and he might not ever like it. As a family unit, we were getting along well now, and I really feared living too close to either his family or mine.

None of these issues mattered. He never wanted to see 'another flake of snow' He liked my mother. My father was not really a known quantity to him yet, but Chuck had, I think, respect for this wise, well-seasoned, mature gentleman, respect of the kind we both felt for his father.

In any case he telephoned me from New Orleans to say that he would take the job, so any mis-givings I might have had were stored away. I had joined my life to his and I suppose I realized then - as I surely do now - that at least we would never be friendless and frightened again.

27.

We drove to Chicago in late March in high wind and bitter cold, and Chuck put the rest of us on the train. He was to drive our car down later.

Do I make all of this sound simple? -- it was not. The packing job was enormous and tiring. We were experts by then and knew we had to take inventory of every garment, sheet, blanket, teacup, plate, and whatever that was packed, so that if one crate or trunk was lost, we would have a list of what it contained. Then we faced the job of unpacking on the other end, washing every piece that emerged from the excelsior, pressing all of the wrinkles out of the garments, and getting rid of all those trunks and packing boxes.

That time we had very heavy clothes, ski suits, ice skates, even ear muffs for Charles and "Snug-gle Bunnies" for Mary, (One zipped a baby up in these things so that nothing emerged except the little face which had to breathe. The baby smelled terrible by morning but was unhurt by the cold.)

My misgivings about coming "home" - I guess I still thought of it that way - dissipated when we were met after a strenuous overnight train trip by my delighted parents. My father almost wordlessly relieved me of the sleepy baby; she was heavy for me but not for him. My mother took Charles by the hand and off they strolled. I can now remember no time in my life when I felt so enveloped in an all-embracing love - not just for me but for all of us.

We stayed with my parents in the big house on Palmer Avenue which they still lived in. When Chuck came, we went to Pass Christian to occupy the charming house given to us by my parents which we had never used.

My four-month-old daughter had never experienced warm sunshine and gentle, soft air, so I loved putting her out for a while each day in a charming little sun bonnet to keep her fragile, red-headed skin from too much exposure.

Charles loved the climate, too. He had never been covered on the upper part of his body until af-ter his second birthday, and it was distasteful to him to have to become accustomed to all of the heavy clothes, snow boots, and mittens which were essential in Milwaukee. And everything smelled so good. Jasmine, petunias, oleanders - all gave off fragrances, enhanced by the damp air. April may be the best time in the Deep South; it was truly delicious for us.

28.

In New Orleans we found a nice big old Victorian house sheltered by two lovely old elm trees which would shade us from the hot summer sun. The house needed some plumbing and paint and other things, so our family architect was engaged. The children and I enjoyed the Coast living while the city house was made ready for fall when Charles would enter kindergarten at Audubon School.

My parents' house In Pass Christian was in the same block as ours and was a center of pleasant activity as always. My sister's family was there, too, and she and I began to know each other as ma-turing women, rather than as sisters separated by a significant five-year age gap.



I spoke earlier in this story of hurricanes and it may now be an appropriate time to report that the coastal area which I describe here, then quite old, was entirely obliterated by the hurricane named Camille in 1969? We saw it once after the hurricane and recognized nothing. The building was swept away, the trees were gone, too, and the coastline was changed beyond recognition.

We loved that house and that style of summer living for two summers, but then drastic changed began to occur.

Caroline was on the way, but one begins to take babies in stride and the third becomes much eas-ier with accumulated skill. She was born in October, a very small baby, built like her grandmother Keller - delicate looking, but actually quite wiry and tough. From the first she also had some of the same grandmother's captivating charm and sparkle. I, who used to believe that inheritance was far less important than environment, had to revise my thinking quite drastically as my three totally dif-ferent children came into being. They were different people from the start, and one does well to ac-cept what comes and to try to enjoy and understand.

29.

My mother had her first serious heart attack in January and lay cruelly ill. She always had been strong, dependable, and merry, and it hurt terribly to see her struck down in this way. My father was at loose ends. His well-ordered household and lifelong companion were in turmoil, and he, whom my mother had always described as "a tower of strength," was a frightened individual.

I was useful to them then. My parents had served as a refuge all of my life, but at that time they needed me. If there was any satisfaction in this time of suffering, it was that I was there and pleased to be of some support to them. It was much harder for Dick, who lived in Chicago and could not help in any way while he was receiving rather unhappy bulletins.

We had not lived in a family of aging and dying relatives, so perhaps it was harder for us than it might have been to have our mother's death be our first such experience.

I dreaded telling Charles. He was six, and had loved her very much, as most children did, but I had to face it and do as good a job of it as I could, without giving in to the awful grief which he could not possibly understand. I took him aside and asked for his attention, then made the sharp announcement, "Maw (a pet name which her grandchildren used) is dead. "No way to soften it...might as well make the flat announcement.

My wise little son cupped his chin in his hand, thought about it briefly; then asked if he could see her once more. I said no - he would not like what he saw; it was no longer the person he knew. He then retreated into silence once more, and when he spoke again, startled me by announcing that there was something about this which pleased him very much. In my heartbroken condition, this statement fell strangely on my ears until he followed with an explanation that his sisters were too little to have known her as he did; that he would remember her, and they could not.



I was enormously relieved. There were no more questions and his rather mature attitude eased me over what I had expected to be a very rough spot. Also, I felt his words would have pleased my mother.

30.

Chuck was called back to active duty two months later and to our great relief assigned to the New Orleans Engineering District. He was sent to Baton Rouge, but that was no great problem I did not even contemplate moving this time. He got home every weekend, and most Wednesdays I got a sleep-in nurse and went for a visit with him. Sometime in November, his work in Baton Rouge was completed, and he came back to New Orleans.

31.

When we returned from a walk one beautiful December Sunday, we received a telephone call announcing the destruction of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. We hardly accepted this news at first; we remembered the Orson Welles radio program of the destruction of New York City which had caused panic in the nation some time ago. But we switched on our radio and were so mesmerized by repeated bulletins that only the outraged screams of my baby jerked me back to reality. I had forgotten to feed her.

In just a day or two, the President's thrilling voice, in a message to Congress, related to us all the horror of this "Day of Infamy." He called on the Congress to declare war on Japan, and the respondent vote was a decisive one. Shortly thereafter, Germany declared war on us. The members of our generation, most of whom believed that large-scale war such as the First World War could never take place again, were now to be involved in a much more terrible one.

Many friends came to seek advice from Chuck. He knew the Army, and they did not. Almost without exception they were anxious to find some role in the nation's defense. For some time, we had been appalled at Hitler's domination of much of Europe and his threat to the remaining parts. Jews, at least those who could, were coming to our country for refuge from an intolerable situation, and we learned of a kind of persecution Americans could not imagine. History books relate this well, so I need not do so, but it stunned us to realize that these things were taking place in what we had thought of as a very civilized nation.

There must have been - I know that there were - conscientious objectors but knew none personally. Most of us felt that the kind of cancer that was Hitlerism could fester and grow and infect us all.

I was forced to do some unc customary self-analysis. I, who was made uncomfortable by even cross words - my mother had always found me a bit too

thin-skinned - had to face the reality of ca-lamitous war. Suppose, I reasoned, that my own family was German. I would be the pariah, then. Worse than any Jew, I had made the decision to marry one and have his children. I knew something about anti-Semitism in my own country - the Kellers had taught me that - but here on one's life was threatened because he was Jewish. Such persecution was too horrible to contemplate, and it was in this spirit that I accepted the fact that this war, at least with Germany, was one we must be involved in.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chuck remained on duty in New Orleans until January of '43 and then was ordered to the Galves-ton District. He went over for a day or two, then came home to assemble such gear as he needed for the move. When he returned to Galveston, I went with him.

We had many agonizing conversations. He begged me to stay in New Orleans, where I had a house, servants, family - and very small children. I knew this emphasis on the difficult move was love talk designed for my comfort and safety, and so I set about trying to find a house in Galveston. The commanding officer's wife was a lovely lady by the strange name of Floy. I have never known anyone else with that name, but Floy Saville was unique in other ways, too.

We had just met when I requested her help in locating a house. She understood well: she had jerked up her four children from home and school in Houston and had accompanied her husband. She thought she knew of a possibility and took me to meet someone whose husband was, I think, in St. Louis, but who had been reluctant to move her family to join him there. We must have been quite persuasive, two veteran Army wives who had moved many times. The house was to be mine, and very soon. Chuck was surprised - and pleased - and I returned to New Orleans to collect my children and such possessions as were indispensable. The house was fully furnished, so the physical part of the move was much easier than usual. We knew however, that orders could come anytime so the stay might be short.

Before I left New Orleans, I remember gazing longingly at the exquisite Japanese magnolias, then in full, dramatic bloom, and wondering how much longer we needed to be nomads. There were no vain regrets. I had made the choice this time, but we had, after all, gone back to New Orleans to settle down.

32.

Galveston was a sand bar. There were no large trees and we lived close to the beach where very few plants of any kind grew. Such gardens as existed were planted behind the houses to protect them from the salt spray which discolored the screens and metal fittings. I had expected the place to be like my familiar Gulf Coast, but this was not a protected shore. Instead, it was one of that chain of islands which protected the coast. Some of these since have been claimed for destruction by hur-ricanes, just as Galveston itself had been badly threatened and damaged

some time earlier.

Servants were almost non-existent in this war-swollen community, so I pitched in to do my best. I was an inexperienced cook. Food rationing had not yet been established, so the pickings were pretty slim among the foods in short supply - meat and butter especially. Chuck could not eat the plentiful fish so I did the best I could, mostly using chicken. I am still teased occasionally by my family, who remember a meal in which the chicken turned pink. I was desperate for a new recipe and tried one which used red wine. I must have overdone it somehow.

I got Charles settled in school, the Sam Houston School at the opposite end of the island. The bus stopped near our house, and he loved the trip. We were adapting to our new life fairly well when I blossomed one day with a strange rash which I decided I could not ignore. I gathered up my little girls, whom I had to take everywhere because I had no one with whom to leave them, and I took off for Ft. Crockett to seek medical advice. The doctor diagnosed my problem quickly and in a shocked way told me to go home and call him. It was measles.

He explained by telephone that he had to get me home quickly before I contaminated others. I was to remain in the house, in quarantine, and let no one in or out. I told him that we had to eat, so he allowed Chuck to come and go with provisions, as long as he did not share my bedroom.

Charles had been in school only about a week, and I knew he would be disappointed being cooped up with us. Instead he announced that this was just as well because the reader he had been issued lacked a number of pages at this stage, and he would probably be back in school by the time the blank part was finished by the class. His philosophy often bordered on the mature. I was glad to have him; he was a great help to me, and he enjoyed being the reliable big brother.

I had to accomplish all of my domestic tasks with badly swollen hands, a tormenting itch, and a prohibition against looking at strong light; with this form of measles, one could easily damage the eyes. The illness was unpleasant, but not serious, and must not have been as contagious as the doctor thought. No one else in the family got it.

33.

I found Mary a morning play school and embarked on a Red Cross Course in home nursing. We were encouraged to learn such things. The nation was already short of doctors and nurses; and the situation was to grow worse. There seemed so little I could do to assist the war effort. I did find an all-day Wednesday babysitter and took a job at the blood bank at John Sealy Hospital. Wednesday became my day of liberation. Mrs. Parker, the sitter, arrived in time for me to walk the length of the island to my job where I performed vital work.

Blood transfusion was a new procedure and a life-saving process, so I was glad

to be involved in something that useful.

34.

Orders came in early July for Chuck to report to Colorado Springs, where a new regiment was to be activated. The rest of the family had no place in this scheme, so he went on and we prepared to return to New Orleans. A private, corporal, sergeant, or something drove us back. My clearest memory of that journey was that, even with a troubled mind about what the future held, I again felt at home when we arrived in the area of beautiful, lush vegetation, especially magnolia trees shiny with rain. Home was really wherever my immediate family was, but I felt the familiarity of Louisiana keenly whenever I returned to it.

35.

My father was pleased to have us back. He was experiencing his second major war and dis-liked it intensely. This time his own children were involved, and at a time when he might have wished for some tranquility, he had only turmoil.

My sister's family, the Wisdoms, were in El Paso, Texas because Willie was doing recruiting for the Marine Corps. He always loved selling. My brother Dick was in North Africa. Training learned in Coca-Cola Bottling served him well in the Transportation Corps.

My father came by many afternoons on his way home, and, much as I enjoyed my children, it was a treat to have adult, male company. He brought me news and sometimes a gift of coffee or whiskey. Those days we shared his largesse.

36.

Our stay at home was a short one. In the fall, Chuck notified me that he had found two adjoining rooms in the Broadmoor Hotel: Did we care to come? That was a silly question. I cared very much about holding the family together as long as could and felt rather certain that this separation could not continue. I was sure that, once we got there and in place, I'd surely be able to find a house.

My confidence suffered a blow after searching through every available real estate office and advertising in the local paper, only to learn that each house was full to capacity; some families shared the larger ones, and nothing was available.

I did all of our laundry in the bathtub and cooked on a coffee burner and a sandwich grill that I had brought from home. Nothing new was to be bought in the stores. We saw little of Daddy. The activation of a large new military unit required lots of time. Conditions were far from ideal, but I fell wildly in love with the area anyway.

The skies were cloudless, of a color which I still call "Colorado blue." The sunrises and sunsets were combinations of gold and pink - glorious to behold.

When we got there in late September the aspens were quiveringly, brilliantly yellow. We lived at the base of Cheyenne Mountain and near a small canyon, a state park where I took the children on picnics whenever possible. We all enjoyed the friendly little chipmunks that regularly joined us to share our lunch.

Charles must have been in the third grade by then; his education was becoming a bit disconnect-ed. He attended the excellent Cheyenne Mountain School. Mary was not quite five, the age for kindergarten admission at home, but she was sweet and well behaved, and after a trial of a day or two, the school agreed to take her, too. I was greatly appreciative. We weren't tax payers in Colorado Springs, and they owed us nothing.

I found a nursery school in town for Caroline, and each morning, a large bus would come to collect her before the other children left. We would see on the bus a very small girl, bobbing along, shiny curls dancing, all alone and happy to be where she was. Charles, Mary, and I took the pleasant walk to school together. Then began my house hunting time again.

The living arrangement at that point was better than I had hoped, but it was soon disrupted when Charles developed chicken pox. We were quarantined. The hotel offered us another room, so we spread out a bit, but the rooms were quite small nevertheless, and the confinement required the best of all of us.

Mary came down next. By the time Caroline got it we had acquired still another room. By then we had four rooms and felt almost as if we were basking in luxury.

I kept perishables on the window sill, but we knew winter was arriving when the milk froze, so the tub filled with cold water had to serve as our new "refrigerator" We celebrated a Christmas there - our last together for a while - and kept quite busy making decorations for the freshly cut tree which the housekeeper had sent us.

37.

February brought orders once more. The new regiment was ready for maneuvers preliminary to being sent overseas and was to report to a remote training center in California. No place was available for families, so back we went to New Orleans.

Chuck got a final leave sometime in the spring. Then to his great surprise - thinking he was headed toward the Pacific - Chuck was ordered east. He left for a few days in North Carolina and shipped out in mid-summer for England. No doubt about it: He would stay in place for the duration.

We were the lucky ones, though. Many Army wives had no roots. Thanks to my husband's what? - prescience, good judgment - we had a fairly well-established base.

Charles and Mary were both in school by then. Caroline, always an independent type, wanted to go, too, so I enrolled her in Newcomb Nursery School. They thought she was the brightest child they had ever had. I patiently explained that her experience gave her great poise. Almost since birth she had been adapting to change, and her brother and sister loved teaching her everything they were learning. She was always the littlest one, who seemed to stay ahead just by keeping up.

There was lots of work, even for those of us who were not formally employed. We collected metal, rubber, grease, paper, and all kinds of things and took them to nearby stations. Charles loved doing this: He flattened all of the cans, baled up the paper, loaded it in his wagon, and became the neighborhood delivery man. He loved responsibility and this was important work for a nine-year-old.

I became engaged in the political process. Louisiana had a colorful but poor political history - another story, really. We were busy trying to get people registered to vote and to interest them in government issues, as well as in candidates. I was in the fledgling League of Women Voters, and we had much to do. A bunch of do-gooder women was quite ludicrous to the kind of boss politicians who proliferated then, but we were quite earnest and hard working.

I had never lived any place long enough to qualify for voting. Louisiana had a two-year residency requirement then, so I had a lot of learning to do.

We had a chance to help elect a reform type governor, a respected lawyer from Lake Charles with the unpoetic name of Sam Jones. People in New Orleans never have been really in touch with currents of thought in the rest of the state, but to the great delight and surprise of many of us, Jones was elected. As my first time out in a political campaign, that election was worth the effort. It was also worth the double ear abscess I suffered on election night because I was kept out of the polling place all day by the machine political people. They did not welcome good government type poll watchers, even when they were appointed by a legitimate candidate. Besides, we were women.

Just after my mother's death I had accepted an invitation to fill her vacancy on the Board of Directors of the Y.W.C.A. I had no background for this position and was a bit reluctant to join. Yet I knew my mother had loved the Y., so I decided that it was an entirely appropriate memorial to her to continue the civic work which she had thought important.

The Y.W.C.A. bustled with activity - mostly war related at that time. It served as a wonderful clearinghouse for transient people who were trying to reach service related family members and did not know how to do so. The U.S.O. was quartered there, and WACs and WAVEs who were still not completely comfortable in predominantly male areas stayed there.

It also was a center for civilian defense recruitment and I accepted the job of organizing the effort in the ninth ward. This meant finding a block captain in each block and I had not realized how many blocks there are in a ward. I did not even live in that neighborhood. In civil defense we had to make sure that all of the air raid sirens were in good working order, that black-out precautions were well known, and that firefighting equipment and drinking water were available at central stations at all times.

I learned a great deal from these new responsibilities, but the Y. had an overriding and important lesson for me. As one of an interracial group who met, deliberated, and worked together, I met for the first time Negro women who were self-respecting and well educated, women who could and should have been welcome anywhere. I had grown up in this New Orleans community and never before

had known of the existence of such people. They were the wives of doctors and ministers and teachers, professional people like their white counterparts. Inside the Y., we could work, share, eat, and laugh together, but we rose from our convivial meetings and when we left the building, we returned to our very separate worlds.

They were not acceptable in white hotels, stores, restaurants, or even public places such as parks or libraries. What was worse - much worse - as respectable members of the Young Women's Christian Association they were not accepted in white churches - at least not in mine. We never discussed these issues, but these were my friends, and I began to see things as I imagined they must surely have viewed them.

I knew I would not like to be excluded as they were. Even less endurable than their exclusion, though, was visualizing such a limited world for my children. It was bad enough that they were kept out of privately-owned facilities but worse was my perception that "public" meant "public" for whites only."

The more I learned of these matters the more troubled I became. These ladies had sons and brothers and husbands, too, fighting and dying; they were still in segregated military units. Even that had not changed. Our nation might have been the home of the brave but most surely it was not the land of the free. Were we really much better than the Germans we were fighting? Would these men when they returned settle once more for the kind of second-class citizenship required? I thought not and, I think, I hoped not. These were wrongs, inconsistent with the professed beliefs of our nation and it was high time we set about correcting them.

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If it occurs to you at any time as this story progresses that I am really writing a love story, you are entirely correct. That is exactly what I am doing.

I loved my family, friends, and, later, my husband and babies. Does one learn love by being ex-posed to it, or are we born with a capacity, as we think some are, for learning music, athletics, and other skills?

Hate was the new thing to me, as World War II developed. Staggering thought, that the country of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Goethe, Schiller, and of great medical geniuses, could so deteriorate that it could allow the kinds of persecution which took place there. How was it possible for this to happen in a well-educated, civilized society? The more one thought about it, the more it became apparent that it was, indeed, a possibility in our own country.

Those who pretended that they loved Negroes, really meant that they loved the ones they knew, as servants, because there was no other way. We denied them the use of our parks, libraries, and other public places, and relegated them to inferior schools. Employment opportunities were limited to domestic, for the most part; the only dignified work was teaching.

The "back of the bus" was where they rode, and a Korean visitor of ours who sat behind the "colored" sign was infuriated when the conductor told him to move. He demonstrated that he was surely colored and was told that foreigners sat in front. A black friend with whom I was travelling once, was reluctant to enter a cocktail lounge with me, and when I insisted, and it was acceptable, he said, "We know we



are all right in our place, but in a strange city, are never sure where the ‘place’ is.” This was Washington, D.C.

But, back to the point (my memories do tumble over each other and I am anxious to get on with this part of the story}, what might happen when all of the soldiers who had been drafted for service in the war returned home? Would they – could they - settle for second class citizenship? Could I? Admittedly, life is full of inequities, but could a nation which espoused the ideal of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all continue in the old ways? To ask the question, is to answer it. Things had to change, but those of us who did the changing were often shocked at the difficulties and hate which we generated.

I seem to be getting incoherent, but I am trying so hard to write an orderly, chronological story, and scratch my memory for events and thoughts long past; not an easy thing for anyone at any time, and I keep getting jerked back to the present.

The fact is, I am so much more comfortable in the world that I have helped to create that memory unlocks so many doors; it is similar to attending a funeral. One’s thoughts are all in the past, rather than the Now.

When Verna Landrieu called and asked me if I would introduce Sybil Morial to the luncheon group of people to whom Verna wanted to introduce her, the memories became a flood. What should I say to these people? I do not have to tell them the wonderful things I think about Sybil. No one is ever in her presence without learning her gentleness and intelligence in a very short time. But it does make me remember times that I am glad are over. Sybil and I always came together trying to get people registered to vote, and this in the days when it was extremely hard for blacks to gain the privilege. There were stories, such as the PhD who went to pass the test in Missis-sippi, answered all the questions, and then was told that he must now translate into Greek. He re-plied “Yes, I can do that; it translates: ‘Niggers are not allowed to vote in Mississippi.’” As late as the Lyndon Johnson campaign, the blacks were not allowed to work with us in the main head-quarters but had their own. It was a strenuous summer for me. I spent many hours during the day in the headquarters, and a good many hours at night in the Claver Building with Sybil and Mil-ton Upton, helping with their efforts.

Another time the Independent Women’s Organization, a political group to which I belong, was, I had hoped ready to admit black members. I asked Sybil to bring a group to my house to discuss this with a committee and was shocked when the white women were almost insulting to my visitors. Plainly, the answer was: “No matter how attractive and well-educated you are, you are still not good enough to be in this organization.”

It might be interesting at this point to describe what has happened to me now – it is part of my story, too. I suffered a stroke, now nearly two weeks ago, in May ’77, that has badly damaged my left side. It is great good fortune that it was my left, instead of my right, so that I can still write (and intend to regain my typing skills, too, as I work to rehabilitate myself) In any case, perhaps my re-cuperating time will allow me the leisure to finish my story.

These were my thoughts about making my little speech, and I wanted it all



forgotten, but had trouble leaving out what was so poignantly remembered. It went well, and that is enough for now, in the present.

There were so few places where blacks (we never used that term; it came later. A friend said once, "They used to call us darkies, then Negroes, now blacks, but we are all the same people.") and the rest of us could even begin to know each other. The Y.W.C.A. - not the Y.M.C.A. - was one. Then, as the first woman member of the brand-new United Fund, I learned of another place, an agency called the Urban League.

The president of the board, a lovely lady named Mrs. Cahn, would come in to present the agency budget with a charming twinkly-eyed young black man who had the impressive name of J. West-brook McPherson. It was not much of a budget: office rent for a cubbyhole of an office, one secre-tary, telephone, postage - and "Mac." Bare subsistence was all they needed, but the fact that any-thing of this sort could exist at all gave me hope.

I expressed my interest. In no time at all I was elected to the board of directors and my real education began. There is simply no way to describe the enormous gaps in my knowledge, but Mac was a patient instructor and I soon began to learn much from him.

I did not realize it at the time, but the Urban League had never involved any one of my type. There were rabbis, priests, social workers, educators, and a few Jewish people whose sensitivities were much keener about discrimination than those of most of the rest of us. I was gentile, a member of a prominent New Orleans family, and had wealth and a secure social position. We were the kind of people who usually did not develop sensitivities to the terribly underprivileged. Not ever to know such people is not to learn anything about them, and so it happened with most of us. We had no concept of how it felt to be Negro in a society not ready to accept these people except in menial ca-pacities.

My pulse still pounds a bit faster as I write about that time. I get confused about time and dates and what happened when, except when recall those events like the Supreme Court school desegrega-tion decision or passage of the Civil Rights Laws. Such things were still a long way off then, and only a few "Windmill Tilters" engaged themselves in efforts for change. Those who did were often frightened and uncomfortable, sometimes even endangered by the enormity of the task.

38.

The war ended in Europe, and glorious days of rejoicing followed, but not yet for us. The Pacific War was still roaring, and my hero husband was slated for duty there. I had a really terrible row with Chuck's mother, "Nanny," over this situation. The family used to wonder about me because I never argued with Nanny, who had a way of keeping at you until you did. She said, "Wonderful. You listen to everything I say and then do exactly as you meant to in the first place." This was not exactly true. I learned much from her.

This particular time I was furious and said so. She had telephoned, and when she

called long dis-tance it had to be important. Her message was that she planned to call someone, or several ones, whom she knew well in the War Office and tell them that Chuck had had enough front-line duty and must on no account be sent to the Pacific. I longed to have him home, but he was West Point trained and believed sincerely that when his country needed him, he had to be there. I no longer remember my words, but I must have helped her realize that this man was not just her son, or my husband, but a seasoned veteran with a splendid record who might be a useful cog in the war machinery.

She did nothing, and Chuck, the be-medaled hero, settled the whole thing by tumbling down a mountain at Le Havre while waiting for his homeward bound ship. He smashed his right arm. Poor darling. His outfit sailed, and he was hospitalized. In late August I got that one call that New York City gave all returning servicemen: It was Chuck telling me he was on his way home. Then I had a call from Mobile and knew it could not be long before his return.

The girls and I hung out our flag, slicked ourselves up, and eagerly awaited his approach. Then, from our upstairs porch we saw him. He was a pitiful sight: a woolen uniform which must have been all he had, a face untidy with the growth of beard which he had not been able to shave, a very heavy shoulder-to-fingertip cast which dragged his tired body down and made him look almost grotesque.

I was shocked, but I was pleased to have him back in any condition. (Anxiety of waiting during a war may be just as difficult as war itself, but I do not propose to go into that here.) Mary and Caro-line took one look at Chuck and fled. He was not the nice-looking guy whose picture they saw on my desk, and they were not prepared for what they saw. After a decent interval of welcome, I searched and found them under a bed. I telephoned my sister, who offered to come and take them away for the remainder of the day. Charles was still away at camp, so by the time he got home we had begun our period of readjustment as a family.

39.

Readjustment is not easy. Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but people grow apart, too. Even those like us who loved each other so dearly. Our responsibilities had been so totally different that we had become different, too.

None of this change was made any easier by the fact that Chuck was quite helpless, and I had to bathe, dress, feed, and transport him. Perhaps it was harder for him than for me, but I had other duties, too. luckily, we did not know that this period was to last about ten months. By the time his cast came off Chuck was doing amazing things, even tying his necktie and shoelaces.

The Army would not discharge him until he was over the invalid period, and he could not report back to the American Bank under such circumstances. When he did report Mr. Legier (the president who had let it be known during Chuck's absence that he would begin to turn over the president's job to him upon his return) had changed his mind, and Chuck was offered the teller's job. We called the family

together for Chuck to make the announcement that he would not be going back to the bank. All showed such understanding that after they left Chuck exclaimed to me, "I think they re-ally care!" He liked family support.

Meanwhile, I had embarked on a very busy civic life. My children were all in school and I had time of my own. I was thankful the war related activities were over, but others remained. The principal one was the racial problem which I believed quite passionately must begin to be rectified. I knew that working to that end promised to be uncomfortable, possibly unsolvable, but that I had to give it my best and that by then I could not turn back.

40.

I had gladly followed my husband wherever his career had taken us, and if he had cared to avoid this struggle, we could have gone elsewhere and been free of it. Here, too many people trusted me. He had fought his war; this was to be mine. I think I almost hoped that he would suggest leaving, but he has always been wiser than I have been, so we stayed. We had our roots and we both liked that. There were times when I'd have loved to run away, but our nomad days were over.

41.

Somewhere along the way, we had become very interested in the political process. Few people we knew had served in elective positions, but a wave of reform was beginning, and we were part of it. I was associated with the new League of Women Voters from the beginning. As chairman of admission for the Junior League, I was able to persuade the board that new members should be required to register to vote if they were 21 or older when they became members. The eighteen-year-old voter qualification was a long time in the future.

Chuck became a precinct worker and ran the polling place at Audubon School for years. The League of Women Voters had a project to establish polling places in the schools in order to save taxpayers money and to demonstrate the political process to young children. Not every precinct had a school, but public buildings were used wherever possible. They still are.

42.

And then came Chep Morrison! DeLesseps S. Morrison was a handsome, intelligent, well-educated young man who had already displayed his interest in politics during his student days at LSU and later in the Louisiana House of

Representatives. He had accumulated, moreover, a distinguished war record and was not yet out of uniform when he was approached to run in the forthcoming mayoral campaigns.

Morrison was promised support by some of the respected older members of the community, as well as by some colleagues, several of whom were going to stand for election themselves. The probabilities were few that he could be elected in his first try, but he was young, and it was time to frighten the old time political people who had controlled elections for years -- so presumably he at least could become well enough known to run again.

43.

What no one realized at the time was that women were taking a role for the first time. Even we women did not know that we could make a real difference. The impact of the female vote might not have been felt with a less attractive candidate but had the kind of magnetism for women that the Kennedys had later. He charmed us with his good manners, and we were delighted to exert our efforts for this kind of candidate.

Some of us still carry the memory of the famous "Broom Parade" which was an enormous success. We marched from Canal Street to Lee Circle and back, thrusting our brooms into the air and singing about cleaning up our city. It was a corny idea, but it was fun, and it worked. New Orleansians have always been born paraders, so people along the way fell into step with us in large numbers so that we gave the appearance of a much larger group than we had started out to be.

Nearly all of Chep's supporters were neophytes, so we developed our own methods of campaigning and learned a great deal as we went along. We did not have much time (just six weeks), knowledge, or money-- but zeal and energy we possessed in great abundance. On election night the newly elected Morrison was quoted as saying that the most surprised pair in town were himself and the incumbent, Robert Mastri, who had really not taken the reform candidate seriously. The fifty year-old grip of the "Old Regulars" was broken and the Morrison Era began.

44.

I have participated in many political campaigns since 1945, but there have been no others of such significance. Chep had a genius for getting along with some of the old ward leaders and bosses whom he needed, while blending in his chosen people. We had never known people in city government before; then some of our friends were in it. We really had not communicated with elected officials and then we could. Suddenly, the air seemed cleaner and the future brighter; the "good government" we had campaigned for had become a possibility.

One day I answered the telephone and was surprised to learn that the Mayor was

calling. I hardly knew the man and surely did not expect his call. He had been thinking, he said, about the enormous debt he owed women for his election, and so he would like for me to accept membership on a city board. I showed my ignorance when I confessed to him that I did not even know what boards there were. He patiently mentioned several, and I stopped him at Library Board. I had been a reader all of my life and this board could be the place where I might have some competence for whatever job there was to be done.

Women had never been appointed to city boards before, and I realized quickly that I would be tolerated but not really welcomed. I said little and tried to look nice for quite a while; I was feeling my way and learning my role and becoming quite acceptable “for a woman.”

The main library, located at Lee Circle, had been built, as were so many others around the nation, with Carnegie funds. The branches were similarly financed: Nix on Carrollton Avenue where the Freeman children had gone; Napoleon Avenue; Alvar; and several which are now closed. New acquisitions at the time were the Gentilly Branch to serve a developing neighborhood, and Nora Navra, a facility for Negroes.

I was uncomfortable with this separate facility, but it was to be an attractive building -- all new and with new books as well. The other Negro branches were rather decrepit, old buildings, equipped with old materials, so this branch meant progress of a sort.

The city librarian, John Hall Jacobs, was anxious to establish a branch in the heavily populated Broadmoor section. Unsuccessful attempts had been made to purchase adequate property with the hope that future funds for construction would be available when a neighborhood store came in the market. The librarians and the board made the decision to buy and equip the Broadmoor branch with the money already in hand, knowing that the result would be less than adequate, but -- we hoped -- temporary.

Broadmoor was to be a branch for white readers. The plan had been made long before I became a board member, and I tried to accept it, but could see no logic in it. The building was very close to a Negro government housing project and just a few blocks from a second one. I kept thinking about this illogical situation and simply could not justify this white only designation. One day I made a suggestion to the board. I was not thinking of changing old patterns, I said, but why could we not simply admit all comers in opening a new branch in a mixed color neighborhood?

I had thought that I might expect support or, at least, thoughtful consideration of this idea from two of my old friends who were board members, but the reaction was immediate and horrified. I had succeeded only in making the board uncomfortable, and nervous—or so it seemed at first.

I must have mentioned subsequently this attempt to a Negro friend, who somehow in turn drew others to develop a sense of change and make a different proposal and present it to the board in the form of a petition. It dealt with the music collection which was then housed in the Latter Branch, thus being inaccessible to

them. This was really a radical idea. Latter was situated in a lordly old mansion in a fashionable area of residential uptown and I think the board members were too stunned at first to take the petition seriously. I wondered then, as I have many times since, how oth-erwise kind, decent people could look at, and listen to, the attractive literate people in the petitioning group and still consider them second class.

The library board had to deal with this petition in the form of some sort of answer, and the re-sulting panic was frightening to me. Logic had no role in the case at all; the red warning lights of emotion went on and blurred the members' vision.

We met at night, secretly with no secretary and no minutes taken. The board's prophecies were dire: books and records would be destroyed, for Negroes took no care of things. Staff members were sure to resign in a body, rather than serve Negroes. Donations such as the one which estab-lished the music collection would no longer be made. More arguments ensued, and the meeting went on and on, getting nowhere. Would I explain please to the petitioning group, who were my friends, that if we granted their request it would ruin the library system?

I was, by then, deeply troubled and had decided that I had to resign from the board. I did feel, though, that I owed the Mayor an explanation and went one day to see him. I tried to tell him the whole story and ended with apologies for creating such a terribly emotional civic turmoil.

Others who knew Chep Morrison better than I might have guessed his reaction, though I learned later that he was often unpredictable. My surprise amounted almost to shock when, after having lis-tened carefully and not interrupting once, he took his turn and said, "but you can't stop now -- you are right."

I gulped in astonishment and said, "Mr. Mayor, if you really believe this, I need your help." I told him how we on the board had met several times, that all of the speeches voicing objection were made for me, and that I remained unconvinced. Still another of these clandestine night meet-ings was scheduled and I felt it would prove nothing for me to go. Chep was an ex officio board member and might help to resolve the matter one way or another. I felt greatly relieved that he knew the whole story, and, if I proved too much of an embarrassment, he could have my resignation im-mediate-ly. I had, in effect, resigned already.

I told Chuck what I had done, and we were both quite relieved. I would no longer come home late at night in such a state of emotional turmoil that tears, and nausea would plague me until morn-ing. I had never asked Chuck's advice in this matter, but I did confess as it went along so that he could try to understand my state of mind.

46.

The telephone rang one mid-night. We never have been ready for that, and I was astonished to be talking to the Mayor, who announced that he had been to the Library Board meeting and that "you got everything you wanted."

"Does this mean," I asked, trying to collect my scattered wits, "that both

Broadmoor Branch and the music collection will be available to Negroes?"

Chep said no, not that at all. "It means that the Negroes have access to the whole system. There will be no more segregation in public libraries. John Hall will call you in the morning."

And so he did, to make the same announcement. It was much to the librarian's credit that I never knew his sentiments in the matter.

He was there to take direction from the board, and in true professional style, his sentiments were not allowed to Interfere with the job, of distributing information to a maximum of patrons.

47.

I was worried then. Suppose I was wrong? I had supposed that people who used libraries would be unlikely to provoke trouble, that "public" must begin somewhere actually to mean public. But maybe those others on the board were correct in their assumptions. If people were hurt or If staff resigned, it would be no one's fault but mine.

John Hall and I decided that no announcements would be made.

This procedure might have been a sure way to cause problems, but "how," he asked me, "will they know?" I responded that he should leave that concern to me and offered myself to assist any place where he thought I might ease the transition. He thought this involvement unnecessary. I knew less about librarians at that time than I know now. All these years later, after watch-ing them handle enormously difficult and sometimes dangerous situations with beautiful, profes-sional competence, I am convinced that they can manage almost anything.

I called Mac, the Urban League director, and gave him the news. I expressed my concern that the anticipated problems not develop, and there the matter ended. The transition went quickly and almost unnoticed at the Main Library, which was the principal facility for everyone. People in libraries do know how to behave well! I rejoiced every time I saw a dark-skinned person in a library being extended the same courtesies we all received there.

One branch librarian wrote to thank the board for taking this step, explaining that she was trained to help people learn and now she could let them all come into "her" library. The librarian at the new-ly opened Broadmoor branch told me one day of an enormous black woman who pushed he reluc-tant little boy up to the desk and explained that she could not read or write, but her son loved stars, and could the nice lady find him a book about them. This made the librarian's profession a treasured one.

48.

By the end of summer John Hall called, very excited. He wanted his board members to know that circulation figures for the last period were the greatest in the history of the public library in New Or-leans. When I asked if he knew how much



of this rise was attributable to our new borrowers, he confessed that he had not thought of that point but would see what he could find out. A day or two days later he called back to say that the librarians had said all of the upsurge was due to the new borrowers. "Those Negroes," he said, "are like hungry people who have been denied food."

One library board member had resigned. The change was too radical for him, yet none of the prophesied catastrophes occurred. We did not discuss any more this great change, but I think I was not the only board member who felt relieved at the easiness of the desegregation.

Harry Golden, publisher of the *Carolina Israelite*, was one of the few Southerners who could Joke about changing racial patterns. He said that we would admit Negroes wherever they had to stand -- elevators and stores -- but the line was drawn where they were to sit together with whites in schools and libraries.

His plan of "vertical Integration" was to let them come In and stand up. That would be the so-lution. Well, the New Orleans public libraries everyone could come in and even sit down.

49.

John Hall Jacob's great ambition was to erect a modern Central Library. The old Carnegie building at Lee Circle was designed for another age. It was quite unsuitable and in much too cramped a space for expansion and modernization. The decision was that I should go first to dis-cuss a new library with the Mayor, because "women do these things better than men somehow, and he likes you." Was this the reason, or was it because they thought the errand was a probable waste of time?

I did my best with the clothes and a pretty new hat. Chep liked gorgeous blondes, those of the courtesan type. I could hardly fit that role, but I would give it all I had.

City Hall was at what we now call Gallier Hall, that wonderful old Greek Revival building on Lafayette Square. At a right angle was the Times-Picayune building, and close to City Hall was Marble Hall, a combination restaurant and beer garden and a favorite gathering place for reporters. They knew everything about everyone at City Hall and loved to tell you whatever you wished to know.

The Mayor's "Parlor" was a large room for which no other word would be appropriate. It was a very large drawing room with a lovely white marble fireplace and a high ceiling in the style of old New Orleans buildings. The room was entirely furnished with elegant old Victorian chairs and sofas and marble-topped tables and a huge grand piano.

It is still possible to see all of this, but the room has a kind of museum quality now instead of the clamorous bustle of a modern mayor's office.



We, John Hall and I, waited the hour or more which we learned to expect of this mayor. When we did get to him, though, he was all there. I felt that I was spokesman for a most unlikely cause but explained our mission carefully. He let me go on for quite a time, showing real interest, until I had made the complete case. He thanked me then for such a complete explanation and said, "Now that we are serving all the people of New Orleans, we would be happy to consider this as a priority in our capital program." He was planning a new civic center; could not the library be a part of that? We were triumphant with the Mayor's enthusiasm, we were almost sure to get the new building.

Chep might have liked to have known that when, some years later, I served as Chairman of the Library Board (the first woman chairman of a city board) I relinquished the post to the first black chairman. After Wallace Young's election to the Chairmanship, he asked permission to tell a personal story. I explained that he was in the chair and needed no permission. He told of entering the library at Lee Circle one day when he was quite young and being told politely that he could not use that building and must go to the Dryades Street Branch. "And now," he said, "I am Chairman of the Board." His pleasure was no greater than mine.

50.

The new Civic Center replaced a hideous slum of old, wooden buildings separated only by alleys which ran steadily with water from laundry tubs and bad plumbing. My one excursion there was a disagreeable educational experience.

Yet, lots of people lived in this area. Where were they to go after demolition? They were, of course, poor blacks, and the Urban League was attempting to find a solution for their displacement.

We were invited to dinner one night at the home of the Edgar Sterns to meet Adlai Stevenson. He was, perhaps, the most enchanting dinner partner I ever had. His smile and wit and exquisite use of language were a delight. Lucky me, to be seated next to the guest of honor and I was enjoying every second of it.

Mr. Stern sat on the other side, though, and he was deeply troubled. A favorite servant -- they had many -- had been burned out of her house and could find no place to live. He had not believed this was possible, but with characteristic concern he had taken her on a house hunt. Want ad column in hand, they pursued every lead, only for him to discover that she was correct. Weary of the search, they gave up in despair. I believe he thought that I might have known of something. Instead, I explained to him that I knew of this condition and that the Mayor, too, was deeply worried and feeling quite helpless.

Mr. Stern went to see His Honor and told him of our conversation. Mac, at the Urban League, wanted to poll the Negroes who might have the ability to purchase new housing and see if there was a possible market. New houses were a radical

idea. Black people had always gotten the castoffs -- except in Federal projects for the very poor.

He was delighted to discover that some people were indeed very interested. I informed Mr. Stern immediately and he went back to the Mayor. Chep suggested an undeveloped area adjacent to a new and attractive development called Gentilly Woods. He was willing to get utilities, streets, and transportation if we could finance the houses.

He even suggested that there be a park and golf course. "Public" parks were not yet available to this part of the "public."

Mr. Stern offered to guarantee half of the necessary money if the Keller's would supply the other half. It was a large sum for the Sterns, but an enormous one for the Keller's. I had great faith in the idea, so we decided to risk it.

Credit as we know it was not available to Negroes, so no records of mortgage or bank loan payments existed. We simply had to believe the plan would work.

The property was beautiful, and the plan attractively developed. The houses were to be of excellent quality and good design. New houses had been built for Negroes before, but they were such inferior ones that our kind of plan seemed unreal. Mr. Tureaud, who was then head of the NAACP, told a skeptical group one night, "Don't question the honesty of these people. Mrs. Keller is our friend. You can believe anything she says." To be one of very few trusted whites was a frightening responsibility, but one for which I had assumed the role almost unconsciously.

51.

The Mayor did his part -- and more. He even called a meeting one night of the Gentilly Woods residents and made an announcement about their new neighbors. At that time such an act required political courage of a rare variety. He wanted no problems with this new development and thought it wise to keep them from arising at the start. We were furnishing the kind of new housing never before available to Negroes in New Orleans, and no other city had attempted this, either.

We had a chance to help our city but were pacesetters for the nation at the same time.

Usually Hamilton Crawford, our developer, built a great many houses at once as a way of keeping construction costs low. But we were to sell in an untested market, so the decision was made to build only a few. We had a grand opening day, and, to our great relief, people did come out to see the houses and the first ones sold quickly. Orders followed, and as soon as Chuck and I got back our original capital, we withdrew so that Pontchartrain Park could become a money-making venture.





Rosa Freeman Keller 1960s

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LIFE

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Rosa Freeman Keller

March 31, 1911- April 15, 1998

VOLUME II

CNIL Rights Work

1950s and 1960s

(written approximately 1977)

(hand editing & corrections by RFK)

version 1/15/93



## Z

## INTRODUCTION

The first volume of my memoirs spanned forty years; this volume covers just over a single decade. In a sense, the period surrounding World War II was a juncture between my early years and my politically active years. Where the first volume left off, at the beginning of the fifties, this volume begins.

By 1952, I had been married twenty years to the man who had been an Army lieutenant when I met him during the Depression. I had weathered the peripatetic military life, giving birth to my children in such disparate places as the Panama Canal Zone, Milwaukee, and New Orleans. Remaining in New Orleans while my husband did overseas duty during the war, I was drawn into civic activities, which opened my eyes to the reality of racial inequality. Serving side by side with black women at the Y.W.C.A., I became aware of how they were excluded from places I took for granted. This perspective was an impetus to involvement in the Urban League and to later work for public library desegregation and the construction of the Pontchartrain Park housing development.

As this volume begins, I am caught up in the delicate process of working for racial equality. The period from the early 1950s to the early 1960s is short in comparison to the first forty years of my life, yet so much happened during that time that I have had to be selective in the anecdotes included here.

## 1.

Just about the time I might have supposed that I had learned all there was to know about racial discrimination, something new would come to my attention, and I would feel the necessity for action.

Urban league director J.W. “Mac” McPherson suggested to me one day that it might be worth-while to see If we could get Blue Cross to consider issuing insurance policies to Negroes. He thought that Negro salesmen could find people the white ones would never get to. When I called Ed Vallon at Blue Cross, he was willing to try the idea. I have no idea where Mac found Edgar Taplin, but he was perfect for the salesman job, and at the end of the first year he broke national records for the number of new policies written. Edgar was such a handsome, gentle person, and he was well liked, so the Blue Cross director felt courageous and smart about the change in policy.

I next learned about discrimination in health care. I had a call one day from Mr. Monte Lemann, whom I saw occasionally at large social gatherings and knew by reputation as one of the city’s finest lawyers and citizens. He asked if he could come to see me, and of course acquiesced. By the time he arrived, I was very curious about his errand.

Mr. Lemann spoke concisely, logically, and carefully. He came to see me, he explained, at the request of Hr. Edgar Stern, who was President of the Board of Directors of Dillard University. The board had decided to establish for the first time a board of management for Flint-Goodridge Hospi-tal, which the university owned and administered. Mr. Stern was most anxious that I serve as chairman. I was stupefied. This was a mammoth Job, and the Idea was frightening.

I explained to Mr. Lemann that I knew nothing about hospitals, or medicine, or doctors. I had never even been a hospital patient until my babies were born, and I was reluctant to attempt any-thing for which I had no experience at all.

Moreover, he had told me that the university board was quite unhappy with its hospital and needed lots of help from a new group, making the task even more formidable.

Mr. Lemann said that none of my reservations mattered at all. What Dillard really needed at that time was a diplomat: one who could get people working together, one whom black people trusted and respected. That someone had to be me. He left me with that explanation, telling me I was to hear from Mr. Stern soon. I really dreaded the responsibility. It scared me, but the more thought about the request, the more I realized that I could not say no. I felt compelled to work with Mr. Stern and Mr. Lemann, who were two of the city’s most respected citizens. Mr. Stern I knew already. His wife, Edith, was the daughter of Julius Rosenwald, founder of Sears and Roebuck. Mr. Stern spent all his time administering his wife’s large fortune. No civic activity in which money mattered--what other kind is there- would be considered unless the Sterns were consulted first and were willing to con-tribute. Very little in our city has not benefitted from their generosity: music, museums, educational Institutions,

and hospitals all shared in their gifts. Edith Stern loved politics, too, and helped many an aspiring candidate.

Edgar gave of himself as well. It seemed to me as I became more civically active that no group or committee was too Insignificant for him to participate in. He came to a meeting and listened, and he contributed ideas and time. He was surely the



richest man in town, but he was also one of the most useful in civic affairs. His presence added dignity to many an occasion.

2.

I write these reminiscences as though these citizenship jobs were my chief interest and responsibility, but this was never the case. My family was my primary interest, and I loved spending time with them and being involved with their affairs. School activities were numerous and interesting. I worked with a Girl Scout troop, a time-consuming pursuit, but I thought it was important. Chuck and I felt it was necessary to put our children in a private school for educational reasons, but I wanted them to know public school children, too, and the scout troop was a good way to expand their circle of acquaintances beyond the private school circle; I really knew no other way to do so. Nanny Keller lived alone and did not drive, so she needed time and help and love, all of which I gave her gladly. My father was still living, and he was a wise and good friend. He could not understand at all my interest in problems of Negroes, so we never discussed that subject. Our conversational gap made my attentions to him all the more important.

3.

Whites and Negroes associated hardly at all in those days and was beginning to feel as though I led two lives, shuttling between my personal and civic activities.

No matter how much I might have felt my activities were stretched thin, though, I simply realized that I had to accede to Mr. Stern's request for my involvement, as tendered by Mr. Leman. I explained to them, though, that if I took the chairmanship, I would like to use it as a platform to try to enhance some opportunities for Negro doctors.

The doctors were a long way from being admitted to the medical association and had only

Flint-Goodridge Hospital in which to practice and such continuing education meetings as they could generate for themselves. They were not even allowed access to the library at the tax-supported state university medical school. I was really outraged when I learned this, for they were taxpayers, too.

Flint-Goodridge was a classic case of the vicious cycle of discrimination. The black doctors and their hospital were thought to be inferior, but the doctors were allowed no way to improve themselves. They were completely cut off from the mainstream of medical learning and then castigated for their shortcomings.

Some of the doctors left the city as opportunities began to open up elsewhere,

opportunities which were not available In New Orleans. Such exoduses happened frequently because of discrimi-natory practices. I tried so often to persuade employers to open jobs to Negroes, pointing out that we were making it impossible for the bright ones to stay, and consequently we were sure to end up with only the kinds of people who were unable to make good citizens. Such a logical stance as mine had no effect, though.

The emotional climate in New Orleans was such that progressive ideas of this sort served only to incite negativity in our hearers. Many counter-arguments were advanced, but none of them made any real sense to us.

But let me go back to the subject of Negroes In medicine.

I, of course, realized that I had an enormous amount of learning to do, and I suggested to Mr. Stern that it might be possible to get help by drawing prestigious white doctors onto an advisory committee--or by some similar arrangement designed to bring medical expertise into our ranks. He agreed and promised to make an appointment with the city's most admired surgeon, who had been selected one year as Rex. New Orleans has no greater compliment than bestowing this title, so the doctor's prestige was well established.

To my great distress, Mr. Stern fell ill the day of the appointment, but he did send his assistant to accompany me. I was relieved ' especially as I knew the great doctor believed that women really should amuse themselves frivolously and stay away from anything of importance. I did not know that day but was to learn later that he had a deadly fear of "communism" and was sure, as were many others, that those of us who believed in better opportunities for Negroes were all "tools of the communists," "reds," or at least "pink."

My escort and I opened the interchange by thanking our host for letting us come. We explained Mr. Stern's absence and his concern about Flint-Goodridge, its meaning to the Negro community, and the Importance of trying to help the hospital practice good medicine. Indigent patients could go to Charity Hospital, we went on, but those who could--and would--pay their own way had only Flint-Goodridge. Surely, we wished to encourage the self-sufficiency of such people, and the hospital needed the assistance of white physicians, who would advise the staff doctors so they could keep themselves abreast of changing medical techniques.

I said I hoped that he would help us form an advisory committee, and possibly head it. His name was magic, and we badly needed the kind of leadership he could so easily bring.

I think we were prepared for a polite refusal on the grounds that he had too large a practice or too many other commitments, but we were not ready for the transformation which we witnessed. I re-member a performance of "The Caine Mutiny" when Captain Queeg was being questioned in a courtroom about events which took place on his ship during the mutiny. The Captain changed from a smiling, affable, Ingratiating person into a kind of maniac.

We saw the same thing happening to the doctor. His face began to twitch, his hands nervously moved things around on his desk, his eyes darted around quite

strangely, and he mumbled incoherently.

We got away as quickly as we could and drove around a bit to calm ourselves and to decide how to report this meeting before my companion brought me home. We agreed that the less said the better. We would simply say that the answer was “no” and let it go at that. I think too that we both wanted to forget the ugly Incident as quickly as possible.

We did form a medical advisory committee, though, and the doctors who participated were most helpful with their time and knowledge. I had not been in this situation long before I realized that we must somehow improve the hospital building itself. The structure was good in its day, but that day was long over--a quarter century or better--and few changes had been made in the interim. Air conditioning was by then a wonderful fact of life, but Flint had none. Laboratories and operating rooms badly needed modernized lighting. There were few, if any, private rooms. This hospital had primarily dormitory rooms and nothing as sophisticated as Intensive care. Sick or recuperating, patients shared rooms with six to eight other people, and they were quite cramped and terribly hot during our long summers.

I suggested a fundraising drive because it seemed to me to be a necessity. Mr. Stern was not enthusiastic and offered little help; he said he had used up his fundraising abilities. I was a bit dashed by his response, but the hospital administrator, Cliff Weil, was elated by the idea and sure we could succeed. I felt that we should have a Negro chairman but realized that most of the white donors would not give appointments to this kind of chairman. In fundraising it is truer than in any other situation that “it is not what you know but whom you know” that helps to get the large gifts. We ended up with co-chairmen: the white one worked on his white friends, and the Negro on his. It was the only possible compromise.

#### 4.

Hospitals at the time had access to federal monies for construction through a program which bore the names of its authors. We decided to apply to the state authorities for Hill-Burton funds to modernize and expand the Flint-Goodridge facility. We were turned down on the grounds that New Orleans had all of the hospital beds allowed under the formula for allocating funds. We replied that this might well be true for white patients, but it was surely not true for Negroes. Those who were not charity cases had only Flint-Goodridge. Repeated appeals had no effect, so finally the hospital administrator and I went to Washington to discuss the matter with the proper authorities. They agreed with us and promised to influence the Louisiana people.

We were elated and going back to my hotel in the taxi we could share only in Washington, I suggested a drink of celebration. The day was very hot, and I knew the bar in the Mayflower was air-conditioned. Cliff demurred, but I insisted, so he came in with me. We were seated and gave our order before he let out a sort of nervous laugh. When I asked what was so funny, he giggled and said it was a release of his tension. “The joke among us” he explained, “is that we are all right in

our place, but we're never sure where that place is."

I realized then that it would be some years before could share taxis or restaurants at home. In the nation's capital, we were a curiosity, but no more than that.

5.

We got home and again petitioned the state authorities who handled the Hill-Burton funds. Still no luck. I was furious and said so in a scathing letter to our newly re-installed governor, Earl Long.

More to release my own anger than to expect that my letter would actually be read, I sealed and stamped It, still seething, then walked to the mailbox and mailed it before I could re-read It and possibly change my mind. I then telephoned Mr. Stern to confess my foolishness. He laughed and agreed that we could not be in a much worse position than we had been in before. My anger cooled down. The walls of segregation remained impenetrable, I thought. I would have to try some other approach.

In a few days our telephone rang in the morning just after I had gotten my family in orbit for the day. A very gravelly voice identified itself as belonging to Governor Long. I'd actually forgotten my letter and thought for a second that this call was a prank. Governors are not habitual callers at our house.

He had read my letter, he said, and he was angry. Would I come see him, and when?

I was trembling with excitement from his sense of urgency when he asked if I could be there at nine on Monday morning; this was Friday. "Yes, sir," I replied. "I'll be there."

I reported this conversation to Cliff and told him that I needed him to go with me. He was actually a bit reluctant but did offer to call for me on Monday morning.

We were politely received by the Governor's secretary in his outer office. Very shortly after we arrived, I was taken into the Governor's office--alone. Cliff was never invited in and remained in the outer office during the entire interview.

Governor Long looked characteristically tousled, even though this was his first morning appointment. His necktie was already loosened, and his hair ruffled, and soon after we began to talk, his feet went up on the desk as he stretched his long body into a relaxed position of attention.

He had read my letter with great interest, he said, and it told him things he never had known, and "I've been governor of the damn state before, too!" He guessed it was time to get cracking and appoint a state hospital committee.

During our talk, he called the Charity Hospital administrator and directed him to attend a meeting on Friday. He then turned to me and said, "and you will be first on the agenda."

Cliff and I drove home. By that time, I was painfully uncomfortable physically. I had learned from Cliff that no restrooms or food service facilities were open to him in the state capitol building, so I refrained from enjoying refreshments, too.

I was to learn one more thing that day, though, when Cliff explained his enormous relief at the end of our journey that we had made the trip safely. He was sure that a black man and a white woman travelling together would be challenged, and every time we stopped at a red light or passed near a state trooper, he suffered fears for our safety. We did not see the Governor when we returned on Friday for the meeting. I was sorry, for he was an intriguing personality, but it was proper for him not to be present. Mr. Lemann insisted on going with us that time. He thought, as Cliff did, that it was not safe for me to be travelling alone with a black man.

As Governor Long had promised, we were first on the agenda, and the matter of state allocation of Hill-Burton funds was dealt with quickly and, for us, satisfactorily. Mr. Lemann, whose skill with language and logic was renowned in our city, remained in the back of the committee room and allowed me to make our case. I would have been happy and relieved if he had offered to do it himself, but found myself overwhelmed with our success and with Mr. Lemann's obvious pleasure in it. The victory for the hospital was wonderful, but to have won the respect of such a man was my personal triumph, and it gave me enormous satisfaction.

## 6.

Dr. Peter Marshall Murray was the first Negro president of any medical association when he was elected state president in New York. He was originally an Orleanian, and still returned here frequently, so he had close ties to the city. I was told that he might agree to help with local problems.

I was eager to obtain at the very least library privileges at the state university medical school. I wrote to Dr. Murray and told him I was making a trip to New York and suggested a possible meeting. He readily agreed, and we arranged that I was to telephone him when I arrived, so we could set up a mutually agreeable meeting time.

When I got to New York, I called and informed him that I was in town and would present myself to his office in Harlem at his convenience. He replied that he would prefer to accommodate me and would come to any place I would suggest. This switch was unexpected, and I had to think fast.

I was using my privilege as a member of the Junior League to stay in their section of the Waldorf Hotel, where I knew the lobby was much too crowded and noisy for talk. I could not suggest my own room and really did not know where to go. Then I remembered a parlor which the organization furnished adjacent to a small dining room for use by the members. I asked Dr. Murray to come to the eighteenth floor and told him that I would meet him at the elevator and show him where to go. I was quite sure the attendant would not admit him alone and not

sure that she would admit us together, but I hoped she would be too dignified to cause embarrassment. If a confrontation meant sacrificing my Junior League membership, I would be regretful, but it might be a price I would have to pay.

I was lucky. The attendant looked at us a bit strangely, but said nothing, and we had the sitting room to ourselves. I told Dr. Murray of my hopes and explained that I felt sure that our local medical association might never admit Negro doctors, but that the “public” (that word again) facilities should certainly be made available to them. I thought that on one of his visits to New Orleans I might be able to arrange a meeting with the medical association. Because of his prestige in New York, he might be listened to, and perhaps some changes might be brought about. He liked the idea, and even more, he said he liked the fact that I was willing to involve myself in affairs of this sort. I have never felt like an important person; quite the contrary, I have felt simply lucky in many ways, but only that, no more.

Dr. Murray said that he knew all about me; now he’d like to tell me about himself. His mother had been a domestic worker “and you probably knew the peoples she worked for.” Then she had gotten a job at the newly created Sara Mayo Hospital, which was truly a women’s hospital. It offered services mainly in obstetrics and gynecology, but more importantly it furnished a place where women doctors could practice. Few medical schools did not make admissions very difficult for women, but some women were able to get medical education, and Sara Mayo was the only hospital where they could use their skills.

Dr. Murray’s mother was inspired by this equality of opportunity and decided that somehow her son would become a doctor. She did laundry, and when her health began to fail, and he wanted to stop school and take care of her, she would have none of it. “You might say,” he explained, “that she washed me right through medical school.” His later successes were nothing compared to his graduation from medical school and his mother’s enormous pride in their mutual accomplishment.

We became fast friends that day, and he wanted me to know that if ever I thought I could use him to achieve any sort of progress for Flint-Goodridge or its medical personnel I had only to advise him and he would come to help.

## 7.

Shortly after I spoke with Dr. Murray, I succeeded in getting the state university medical school to appoint a small committee of doctors to meet with representatives of Flint-Goodridge. Albert Dent, then president of Dillard University and Dr. Murray’s close friend advised Dr. Murray that we were ready. Albert Dent was a thoroughly attractive, extraordinarily bright man and a master politician.

On the night of the meeting, I was proud and pleased to be supported in this endeavor by such wonderful people as we had to represent Flint Goodridge Hospital. Mr. Edgar Stern and Mr. Monte Lemann were known and respected

everywhere. Mr. Bruce Brown, who was president of a large oil company, also joined us. When he accepted my invitation in the affirmative, he said he wanted to be there when I “confronted the medical establishment.”

The doctors were decidedly frosty in their reception, but their attitude came as no surprise. They made it quite clear that they had been designated to be there, but their discomfort was obvious. I introduced my group and explained the barriers to local Negro doctors and our hope for at least access to some of the educational meetings or to the medical school library. One or two of our members joined

in and at some point, after that I introduced Dr. Dent (not M.D.) and Dr. Murray and gave a bit of biographical information about both. Dr. Murray spoke and described the great difficulties of keeping up with medical progress when cut off from the mainstream of information. He had a rich voice and a courteous manner, and it was evident that he loved his native city. Dr. Dent added a few grace notes to the talk, and then the chairman of the medical committee spoke in a very curt manner. He must have bitterly resented the whole meeting “And in conclusion” he said (nothing at all had been concluded)

“I still believe that niggers would rather have white doctors.”

I burned and felt that taste of bitter gall. We were dismissed.

Nothing could follow his remark.

The doctors left by one door and we by another. Bruce Brown put his arms around me. I think he was almost as disappointed as I, but he said, “Good try, and don’t give up. Just being exposed to Negroes like these is bound to have changed them in some way.”

These rude rebuffs had gotten to be a way of life for me. So often I had hoped that I could urge an Influential friend to accept membership on the Urban League Board or to open new types of employment to Negroes, only to meet with cool refusal. I very occasionally had a bit of success, so I had to keep trying. The medical committee meeting, though, was a very different experience. I had subjected my Negro friends to a disagreeable insult and Dr. Murray had come all the way from New York for it. Surely, they must have resented such treatment, but they were inured in a way that my white colleagues and I were not, and their attitude was always one of gratitude that we would have made any efforts for them at all. I think I had hoped for a measure of compassion from doctors more than from businessmen, but their prejudices were as bad as anyone’s.

8.

Another uncomfortable memory has to do with my children’s Sunday School. Caroline had accepted the presidency of her youth group. but the membership was dwindling, and she consulted me about some possible ways of exciting the members to renew their interest. They met on Sunday evenings, and the kind of “fellowship” they were offered was not provocative enough.

Chuck and his mother and I were just finishing a course at Tulane in comparative religions which was both instructive and stimulating. Caroline knew this. We had



discussions at Sunday dinner about these subjects.

I had grown up in the same church as my children were attending and had learned very little in Sunday School. I thought that Christianity itself might be strengthened if it were a choice arrived at after thoughtful study which explained other religions. As I write this, the nation of Iran is experiencing a revolution and trying to form an "Islamic Republic." I could not know how impossible the acceptance of Islam would be for me if I knew nothing about it.

Caroline liked the idea of learning about other religions and discussed it with the young assistant minister who served as advisor to the group. He gave his consent, and she was pleased. I gave her names of some friends--a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a Unitarian minister- and she called on each and got their enthusiastic agreements to address the group- in turn.

The series went well. The group grew larger each week and the discussions were lively. She was pleased, and so was the young minister. They were expanding their horizons and enjoying this learning experience.

I suppose it was inevitable, but I had not foreseen that the group might wish to approach the matter of race relations in the analysis of their Christian beliefs. The youth group leaders came to discuss this subject with me. I really wanted to be sure that this was not entirely Caroline's idea. "No," they said, they all wanted it. The church congregation was a very conservative body, and I told them that race relations was an area where they must proceed with caution. I reminded them that they must be careful and take whatever suggestions were given by their advisor. They admired him and could understand when I cautioned them that the subject under consideration was controversial and highly emotionally charged, and the advisor had to decide whether the discussion was possible. It meant introducing a Negro speaker, which I knew would be considered a radical idea.

The young minister again agreed that the group should plot its own course and he was, I think, proud of the excitement and interest the youth group had generated already.

Caroline asked if I would find them a Negro speaker, and I agreed to try. As always in racial matters, I consulted Mac, who offered himself as speaker. I reported this news to Caroline, who was to arrange a date.

I had been careful to explain to Mac that the only Negroes who ever went into that church were janitors or an occasional nurse or maid at a funeral or wedding, so I did not know what kind of reception he might have. He expressed delight at the opportunity and picked me up on the appointed night so that I might escort him there.

Mac was pleased with the reception, and so was I. Caroline's group were bright, attractive teenagers, and it was obvious that they were eager to meet and talk with such a man. The chapel was filled to overflowing, and I took a place in the rear to observe the proceedings and remain inconspicuous.

I do not remember how Mac began his speech or what he said. He was not a handsome man, but he had a light touch and an engaging manner, and he immediately created a warm and friendly atmosphere. Thoughtful questions



and honest answers were interchanged between the audience and Mac, and I was beginning to think what a success this meeting was and how satisfied Caroline would be, when two men came into the room. I recognized them as important church members. They had been attending a meeting of deacons or elders which was just over, and they must have decided to see what had attracted such a large group of young people. Seeing Mac, one turned and departed angrily. The other called out quite rudely to Mac, "What are you doing here?" Mac started to explain what the man clearly did not wish to hear, when the man spoke again in angry tones: "Why don't you just tell these kids that all you niggers really want is our white women."

The effect was electrifying and instantaneous. Silence fell and the young people gulped in astonishment and left quietly and quickly. I got Mac away as soon as I possibly could and made my apologies. I really had not believed that such rudeness could occur in a church- and it had happened in mine. Mac was gracious as always. He told me that the insult was not unexpected and that he had thoroughly enjoyed the experience of the discussion with the youngsters.

Caroline and I embraced and wept a bit when she got home, but we were too scalded to talk about the incident. I do not remember what happened to the youth group or Caroline's stewardship of it after that night. I do remember that the young minister was feeling badly hurt, and he somehow felt that he had to make amends when he came to talk to me about what had happened. He said he had liked Mac and had hoped to make some kind of progress in the church.

He wished to be personally involved in some way in effecting change in racial understanding. I asked him if he thought he could accept membership on the Urban League Board and suggested that he would surely wish to consult the senior minister before giving me his reply.

He thought such a consultation was unnecessary and accepted on the spot. I was pleased. The Urban League Board had had rabbis and priests, but never a Protestant minister.

His membership on the board was far too radical for our church, and he was dismissed shortly thereafter. I heard from him once later, and his letter explained that he had no regrets. He thanked me for my role in his education and told me he felt better situated in his new position.

I grew to expect a negative climate in which to effect social change, but it was more difficult for me to accept hostility in church than anywhere else. Christianity was intended to be a gentle, loving faith, embracing the weak and the poor, but no such good will was displayed in the Protestant churches of the time. Protestants were willing to send missionaries to Africa, but not to the Desire Housing Project, and they surely were not willing to try to understand the yearnings of black people who wanted decent education for their children and access to recreational areas. I believe that these churches are now paying a heavy price: a lost opportunity for a display of Christian love.

I became accustomed to my friends' bewilderment and misunderstanding generated by my engag-ing in something as controversial as trying to bring Negroes into the mainstream of life. That they might share our schools, restaurants, job opportunities, and hospitals was so distasteful to these friends that it was unthinkable. "They" did not want those opportunities and were perfectly happy as they were: this was the myth being perpetrated.

White people even knew very little about the NAACP, which at that time was busily engaged in raising enough money to train its own lawyers who could go into court and test the laws which pre-vented Negroes' participation in public life. The NAACP was using the "American way"--complying with the orderly legal system--but whites who were completely resistant to such social change did not comprehend: their judgment was too clouded by emotion. The "haves" rarely understand the desires of the "have-nots."

But I am getting into deep waters--enough of this. It is impossible anyway to describe vividly enough the hostile feelings harbored in those times on the part of otherwise fine people towards those of us who were involved with black people in other than their menial roles.

Institutional discrimination is easier to describe. A case in point was the request to the Urban League to withdraw from the United Fund. The Urban League did not, so it was thrown out I think "disassociated" was the word that was used. This action hurt me very personally. I was--and still am--such a loyal supporter of the United Fund. Moreover, the group which was convened to make the final decision on the Urban League was all past presidents of the United Fund, and included my husband and dearest friends, some of the city's best citizens.

I was president of the Urban League at the time, so Mac and I represented the board when we were summoned. Would we not, we were asked, "for the good of the community" withdraw from the United Fund and develop our own support independently? In response, we reasoned that our goals and programs had never varied: we were still trying to attain equal education, Job opportuni-ties; and housing for Negroes. What had changed was wrought by the Supreme Court, which had ruled out separate school systems. That action had given rise to white citizens councils, which were poisoning the atmosphere. The voices of reason were few and far between. We did not prevail.

10.

I was honored around that time by the National Council of Social Workers as a follow-up to my having been chosen "Volunteer of the Year" for my part in establishing Pontchartrain Park. I was to appear at the NCSW convention in Saint Louis, and the organization requested that I write down my remarks in advance so that they could be printed after I spoke.

I arrived at the convention with a very troubled spirit, my typed speech in my hand. I was aston-ished at the size of the audience: it was huge. These were

the professionals. Did they really wish to hear from a do-gooder volunteer? My prepared speech began to seem inappropriate, and only one thing was gnawing at my mind--my recent troubles in New Orleans.

I rose when introduced, picked up my speech, and tore it dramatically into small bits. Whatever I had accomplished that had enabled me to win this national award, I explained, mattered very little at that point. I had not been able to save the local Urban League from the hostility of New Orleans' cit-izens--all of whom I knew well and should have been able to influence.

I was asked a number of questions, one of which was whether I would continue my efforts at desegregation. I answered that, of course, I had to--during those times more than ever. I was answered by a roar of approval which ended in a standing ovation. I had never had such success as a speaker and have not since. It was heady stuff.

Many Urban League directors were in attendance at the social work conference, and Mac asked if I would go with him to a meeting to discuss the New Orleans problem. I was by then quite accustomed to mixed color groups, but that was the first time I had been the only white person present. From my solitary vantage point, it was frighteningly obvious that these people lived in a different America than I knew. They did not even expect the law to protect them.

11.

My training in Negro education began when that incomparable pair, Messrs. Stern and Lemann, very earnestly solicited my membership on the board of Dillard University. Just as with Flint-Goodridge, my impulse was to plead excuses. Again, I could not do so with these courtly gentle-men.

Unlike the hospital job, for which I felt totally unprepared, the Dillard position fell within the realm of my expertise. I had long been interested in and active with public school matters and had served on the board of Newman School for several years. I believed that education was bedrock for everything else, and I felt honored to be involved with the university.

I was also enthusiastic because the atmosphere had become comfortable during the Dillard board meetings at which I had appeared as chairman of the Flint-Goodridge board to make semi-annual reports of the hospital's affairs. Because of these visits to Dillard, I had acquired a love of the beautiful green and white campus, and I was fascinated with what happened there.

One particular visit to the campus is most memorable. Chuck and I attended a party at the Dillard president's house for the only emperor we were ever likely to know, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who was accompanied by a retinue of several handsome princes and a group of equally good-looking retainers.

We also met President Tubman of Liberia at a similar reception and with the influx of so many dignitaries on the campus, I had still more of a thrill in store.

Betty Goldstein and I escorted our Girl Scout troop to the Dillard campus to hear Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt speak. We had read of her arrival in the newspaper, and without consulting the other scout mothers (quite possibly because we felt sure that they would withhold permission), we decided that the opportunity to hear the President's wife was definitely worth a risk.

Negroes were not yet allowed to stay in our good hotels, so the Emperor of Ethiopia, the President of Liberia, and others occupied a Dillard guest house during their visits. Mrs. Roosevelt, who was the university's guest, would go no place where her hosts were unacceptable, so she chose to stay in the guest house, Howard House, also.

I was honored by Dillard with a reception in recognition of my award as volunteer of the year. It was held in the recently completed lovely new chapel, built by Keller Construction. Albert Dent was proud of his school and took opportunities such as the events I have described to invite white people to this very self-respecting place.

Most whites had much to learn from this kind of exposure, and I was delighted to be honored there.

## 12.

Dillard University was formed from a merger of two existing colleges, one started by the Methodist Church and the other by the Congregational Church just after the Civil War. Schools of higher education for blacks did not exist then, and these "colleges" were an attempt to furnish the education that should have been available at the high school level and a bit beyond.

When Mr. Julius Rosenwald made a fortune in his adopted country, applying his genius in marketing to create Sears and Roebuck, he decided to help Negroes achieve better education. He made large grants to Negro colleges, which needed help desperately.

Gentle, tactful, and beautifully educated, Mr. Rosenwald's son-in-law Edgar Stern was the perfect agent to effect the merger. Mergers are delicate work, and they are slow, but his temperament was well suited to the task.

James Hardy Dillard must have been a man of extraordinary vision and sensitivity, and somehow--I do not know this part of the history-- he accepted the presidency of the new college. A prestigious Virginian, he was at that time Dean of Arts and Sciences at Tulane.

Dillard took the position with the definite understanding that he would serve until a Negro president could be found. Albert Dent proved to be that man, and he surely must have walked proudly in Dr. Dillard's shoes. The college honored Dr. Dillard by taking his name, so his place in history was secured.

This same James Hardy Dillard, who somehow knew Andrew Carnegie, was able

to get from the Carnegie Fund money to establish the first public libraries in New Orleans. He then served as the first Chairman of the Board of the New Orleans Public Library. Dr. Dillard lived only a few years in New Orleans, but he made as great a contribution to our city as if he had spent his whole life here. A fine portrait of Dr. Dillard hangs in the conference room where I attend meetings at the university, and he receives many a quiet respectful salute from me when I see him there.

How can one do sufficient honor to such a man? I had my closest opportunity when I met his son, who serves now on the World Court. I took advantage of the encounter to sing his father's praises. He must have liked that.

13.

Teaching and nursing in those days were the only professions open to Negroes, and only in seg-regated situations. Most of Dillard's students studied in these two fields. A few--very few--went on-to graduate school, which required a great deal of assistance, financial and otherwise. No universi-ties in Louisiana offered graduate programs for blacks, and leaving the state posed insurmountable problems for most.

The educational task facing black colleges was a formidable one.

Many students came from backgrounds in which education was a low priority and higher educa-tion was unheard of. The Dillard faculty used the subtlest means imaginable to teach these young people social poise and respect.

I remember a conversation with a man I met at a meeting in Washington. He was a Dillard gradu-ate and anxious to talk to anyone from New Orleans. He truly loved the place, and when he discov-ered that I was a Dillard trustee, he was delighted. "Everyone knows Dr. Dent," he said, "but do you know Mrs. Dent?" I responded that I did indeed, and he asked me to relay his greetings to her. I promised that I would, and then he explained his great admiration for her. He said that he came from rural Mississippi to Dillard, encouraged by his pastor to continue his education, and guaranteed the support necessary to do so. "I realize now," he said, "that I was studious and bright enough to un-dertake college. I loved the work, and that was no problem."

Then he described what must have been a mandatory appearance at the freshman welcome party at the President's house upon arrival at Dillard. "I had never seen a house like that: a polished floor with beautiful rugs on it and Mrs. Dent's grand piano standing elegantly in the parlor. "There was silver, too, and pretty dishes and flowers everywhere." He told me that everyone looked nice and spoke softly and, confronted with a completely alien situation, he might have panicked. But Mrs. Dent was there. "She never told me what to do," he explained, "but her gentle face and soft touch gave me unspoken directions which made me comfortable and guided me easily.

"And do you think," he asked, "if I had not learned some social graces, that I could possibly now be serving on the staff of the Governor of Missouri?"

He expected no answer; the question answered itself. But I was deeply moved,

for I had been taught such amenities from birth and realized what an enormous load Dillard had carried in helping those boys and girls of college age.

I called Jessie Dent as soon as I got home to give her the superb compliment and asked if she remembered Bill Douthit, class of 1948. In the gentle manner the young man had described so well she said, "No, my dear, I cannot single him out. There have been so many." So many, she meant, who had so very much to learn. Teaching them was the work of the black colleges; no one else was available to do it.

14.

As I will tell in more detail later, the time came when a few of my colleagues and I felt that Tulane University needed to be prodded into accepting black students. A Dillard professor, a Tulane professor, and I organized a lawsuit. The two plaintiffs were both Dillard students. As with so many others, Mrs. Dent was to play an influential role in these two students' lives.

One of the two young women was quite beautiful--when Chuck finally met her, he said, "No wonder you love Barbara; she looks just like Nefertiti." (The lovely Egyptian queen had always been a favorite of mine.) Indeed, Barbara Guillory did resemble her.

The other young woman had not yet learned good grooming and style. She was not unattractive, just dowdy. Pearlle Elloie may have just appeared that way because of sorrow: her baby had just died, and quite possibly she did not care how she looked. She even wanted to withdraw from the lawsuit, but her husband simply refused to allow her to relinquish what would probably be her "on-ly chance to make history."

We wanted everything to go smoothly when the two women were admitted to Tulane after we won the suit. We knew they would do well academically, but we wanted them to succeed socially as well. More over, if reporters took their pictures, we wanted them to make a good impression. Most importantly, we wanted them to feel comfortable with themselves.

The group involved in the lawsuit--all men except me--discussed the matter of the women's appearance very sensitively and someone suggested that I might give some advice to Pearlle. The task was a delicate one, and I felt I was an inappropriate person to undertake it. But Jessie Dent could--and did. She said it was her contribution to all of the work we were doing to get blacks admitted to Tulane.

The next time any of the group saw Pearlle, she looked trim and well groomed, especially because of a well styled haircut. For Pearlle, too, as for the other students who passed through Dillard, Jessie had the perfect touch.

15.

In spite of the serious changes we were trying to effect in society, we had funny times, too. The subject of hair reminds me of a story.

The National Urban League had for some years given awards to outstanding people who had been leaders in effecting changes in racial relations. Usually the award recipients had created better jobs or training programs for Negroes, or they were labor union presidents who had been innovative in some way.

By 1966, when the National Urban League decided to honor Mayor Hartsfield of Atlanta, I had been the only southerner on the national board for a long time. I was asked to present the award to Mayor Hartsfield, who had been quite courageous for a southern mayor. I was delighted to bestow the honor on him.

The meeting was to be held in a Jewish club. Atlanta was miles ahead of New Orleans, where such events were held in Negro restaurants. I was to drive out to the club with a white staff member from the New York Urban League office and with the black female director of the Richmond Urban League. As we neared the club, a light drizzle began, and New Yorker Dean Jones said, "Oh, this terrible weather. I have a new permanent, and- if it gets wet my hair is sure to get frizzy."

The other woman, Vivian, began to laugh and explained, "I just had mine straightened, and it will do the same thing." Afros had not become fashionable yet.

16.

My travels in those days were a rich source of anecdotes. When went to Little Rock for a regional Urban League meeting, Ethel Dennis and I arranged to enjoy the trip together. Whites and blacks could not yet share taxis in New Orleans, but airlines had no color barriers for passengers, so I called for Ethel in my car and we went out to the airport together.

Little Rock was still notorious for having needed federal troops to escort the first teenage blacks to public school. As we approached the city, Ethel asked me how we should behave about ground transportation. I proposed that we act as though there were no such thing as racial segregation and see what happened.

Together we entered the first taxi which presented itself at the terminal, and I was pleased that nothing at all happened to stop us. Ethel was nervous--we were in Little Rock. Sitting stiffly on the seat in the cab, she said, "So this is Little Rock."

If the white driver felt any of the overtones in this black woman's remark, he chose to ignore them.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, "we call it the City of Roses." Ethel softened instantly, and later we joked about the incident. She said we needed people like the taxi driver in the diplomatic service. In a stroke the man had made us feel comfortable in his city.

17.



I should tell my San Francisco story, too, though for different reasons. It just seems to come to mind at this particular time.

I have said little or nothing up to now about the great amount of time and energy which I spent on foreign exchange programs, particularly those involving students. I have explained, though, that the kind of hate so evident in Germany during World War II frightened me into trying actively to prevent such terrible prejudices on my own turf, and I did so in any way I could.

Programs of student exchange were designed to break down cultural barriers: the Fulbright pro-gram was the best known. I felt that, like me, others shared the basic belief of these programs, that if we came to know people from other cultures, we would judge them on their individual merits, and reciprocally they might regard us as friends. After the Tulane University authorities requested my help with the foreign student program, I came up with the idea that New Orleans families would be willing to accept these visitors into their homes, if a structure were established in which they could make such arrangements. Every family that I knew had celebrations at Thanksgiving or on religious occasions. Many had sailboats or country homes, or they held special gatherings where one or two extra guests might be welcome.

I began instituting this plan with friend who expressed interest, and as the student population grew, the program grew to enormous proportions with all the (still) white universities participating.

I was given an office at Tulane and moved into the new University Center along with the dean of students, who was grateful for all of the help he was getting.

As the family hospitality idea spread, I became in demand nationally to explain it for use in other communities. For that purpose, I went to San Francisco and was invited to an exquisite dinner party.

The gathering was small, but I remember only the hostess, a British couple, and two very dark-skinned Indian men. If others were present, they have gone from my memory now. During the evening, the subject of conversation turned, I suppose inevitably, to the school desegregation then beginning in New Orleans. Our city was producing the ugly news of two small black girls being escorted to class by federal marshals while white people shouted and spat at them. The story was front page news all over the world. I was desperately uncomfortable about the situation and said so at the dinner party. One of the Indian gentlemen said, "Please do not apologize--my country practically invented segregation. All we must do now is try to solve the problem, and you are -trying."

Everyone there comforted me and explained that they felt that we had in America the greatest country on earth, and we had to keep it that way. They added that the most remarkable phenomenon of all in this country was our free speech. One could say anything here and not be worried about repercussions.

It seemed strange to me that the British couple agreed so completely with this point of view, and I said so. They assured me that great differences existed between the United States and England and explained that in England one's barber, servant, or cabbie would rarely reveal his real thoughts, but would say what he thought



the person being served wanted to hear. That was difficult for me to believe, but the British couple were so positive that I could not argue. The husband told us that they had been in the United States for a year and could always begin a lively conversation by asking for opinions about politics or baseball. They loved it and felt that with these two subjects for openers they got completely candid answers about absolutely anything.

The lovely evening of the dinner party stretched on into morning when the Britishers and I suddenly realized that we had morning meetings and needed to leave. We shared a taxi and were fortunate enough to draw an enchanting driver. Before he asked our destination, he offered to show us the view from the other side of Telegraph Hill, of course at no extra charge. It was such unusually clear, beautiful weather for San Francisco that he wanted to share the panorama with us. We acceded readily, not wishing to quell such generous enthusiasm. He drove us to a good spot and helped us out of his cab to stand in a perfect place for the view. It was indeed lovely. The picture remains in my memory still.

After we were once more on our way back to the hotel, "Mr. Britain" gave directions and the cabbie, quite fascinated with the accent, asked where he came from "England" he said, introducing himself by name, "and this is my wife. We have been enjoying your country for a whole year."

Then it was my turn. I told him my name and that I lived in New Orleans. The cabbie's manner changed instantly. "New Orleans" he said. "What's the matter with you people? Do you believe in hate?"

I am black (he was--very) and a nobody, but I don't teach my little children to hate people. New Orleans," he almost snarled, "and I used to think it was such a nice town."

I tried to explain that I was just as angry as he was and that I was spending a lot of my time trying to overcome such prejudice, but he was hurt and unable to accept what I was saying. I was apologizing just as I had been at the party the night before. New Orleans was an ugly place--as Little Rock had been earlier.

We got to the hotel and the driver leapt out to help us. He stuck his hand out to shake mine and told me how sorry he was to have lost his temper: "Hope I didn't hurt your feelings?" I shook his hand and said that indeed he had not, and I hoped all of us would live long enough to see an end to terrible prejudice. I ended with "thanks for the view. It was wonderful!" He had given me another chance and appreciated his friendliness. We entered the hotel lobby and the Englishman almost burst.

"All night," he said, "we have been trying to explain to you that with free speech you can solve anything. Guard it well. There is no other place on earth where a black cabbie would say exactly what he thought, with no fear of reprisal, to an obviously privileged lady whom he picked up at a prestigious address. And you do not even consider it strange."

He was right. I did not. Then he went on. "I am writing a book," he said, "and this story gets written tonight. It is too good to keep until morning."

Robert Burns would have loved the incident. That was truly a chance "to see

ourselves as theirs see us.”

18

Because of my work with foreign students, I spent much time at Tulane University and began to have feelings about campus thinking. Faculty members who knew of my efforts on behalf of black people spoke with great frankness about the fears they shared with me concerning the racial situation at Tulane.

Public school desegregation was by then a fact. Every lawsuit in every kind of court had proved that an alternate option to desegregation did not exist. The response, in the language of the day, was “massive resistance.” and that was just what came into play. Locally, the New Orleans school board was like any other, explaining that they “had been to court thirty-six times to no avail.” I shudder to think of the cost in dollars to the school system.

Tulane had not yet faced up to the desegregation issue, and many faculty members worried about it. Some had already left because of it. Others realized that federal funds would be withdrawn from the university before long if Tulane continued to deny admission to Negro applicants. Notice that I am carefully using the word “Negro here, rather than “black.” Tulane was accepting students of many skin colors from India, the Orient, Indonesia, and, yes, Latin America, too. I was working with many of these people from foreign lands, and they were accepted into several local homes.

It seemed quite obvious that the Tulane board would not make the decision to admit Negroes unless goaded. They needed help. A lawsuit was the only way.

I met one day with a Tulane professor and a white Dillard professor who was a very active member of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Both of them were friends of mine, so I knew their sentiments well. Together we evolved a plan. We would get several well qualified black students to seek admission to Tulane--in writing. They would apply to the School of Social Work, a logical place for two reasons: one, no other local school offered a degree in social work, and two, we had good rapport with the dean, who was one member of the faculty who wanted very much to help with our plan.

We knew of two brilliant women at Dillard--the ones I mentioned earlier--who were willing to become plaintiffs in a lawsuit. They were both eager to earn social work degrees and could not manage to leave New Orleans to do so. As planned, they were to write seeking admission to the School of Social Work, and the dean would refuse in letters “because Negroes are not eligible for admission to Tulane University.”

Next, we needed a lawyer. We went to Mr. A.P. Tureau, who had handled all of the school cases for the NAACP and was a good friend of ours as well. He was pleased with our ideas, but he explained that he had his hands full with what he hoped would be the last of the desegregation suits for elementary schools. He was working on gaining school admission for the children of a couple of Indian tribes

who were denied access to “public” schools.

I regretted his unavailability keenly. Mr. Tureau was not only a fine civil rights lawyer, but he was also delightful company. His personality was a rare combination of wit and wisdom that we all could have enjoyed. In his stead, Mr. Tureau suggested a young man who was taking civil rights cases and who was a deeply religious Catholic who felt that his Christianity compelled him to help secure equal rights.

We called on Jack Nelson together. Mr. Nelson told us that if he accepted the suit it would be tricky business for him: a young white lawyer with many family mouths to feed who attacked Tulane for any reason might be badly treated by his colleagues. We knew that. It was asking a lot, we told him, but we were sure that no other white lawyer in town would take this suit, and Mr. Tureau was the only black one who might have.

“Am I to do this for free,” Mr. Nelson asked, or do I get paid?” It was my turn to come up with an answer, for the professors had no money. I guaranteed the attorney a reasonable fee, whatever that would be. He laughed and said, “I was going to do it anyway, but if I am well paid for it, I shall look much smarter in the legal fraternity.”

I thought that day that I might find a few people who would want to contribute funds for this lawsuit, but I did not discover any. Sometimes it is very pleasant to have money; that time was surely one of them for me.

19.

All the preparations for the lawsuit were made except for one, and that one was for me a personal matter. I was uncomfortable. My brother was a member of the Tulane board, as were several of my life long friends. They would not like what I was doing, but it had to be done. Yet I simply could not let them discover who was behind the suit I had to tell them myself.

I went to the board chairman, an attorney, first and was astonished at his reaction. He welcomed the move I was taking. He explained that he had worked hard to bring the board to make the decision to admit Negroes. But Paul Tulane had written a grant when he gave the money to reopen the university after the Civil War for “white male students.” Obviously at the time we were speaking Tulane had more than white male students. One more step--the chairman spoke of a declaratory judgment- on the part of the board was all it would take to have Negroes admitted to Tulane. However, he had not been able to persuade them to take the step, and he was sorry about that. It would have been a simple solution, he said, “but you just do not know my board.”

I then told him the reason I had chosen to tell him about the lawsuit myself: because I thought it was for the good of the university and because I did not want him to question my loyalty to Tulane. He assured me that I would not be doubted, but we did have some uneasy times during the two years we spent in court.

I had one other cherished friend who was slated to be the next Tulane board

chairman. When I told him about the planned suit, he was patently unhappy but, complete gentleman that he was, he thanked me for coming and said little else.

My brother had to be told, and I dreaded approaching him. I really believe that he would prefer to see women stay at home and keep away from matters of real importance. When I told him, he blustered a bit and we let it go at that.

The board of directors had access to some of the best legal talent in town. We had Jack Nelson. The match was the equivalent of David and Goliath--or worse. I was squarely in the middle. The board and administration deplored my part in the lawsuit, and on the other side faculty members would say to me as the suit dragged on, "What's taking you so long?" Two years was a long time to spend on a hot seat, but we won.

20.

As was always the way in such matters, I wanted the change at Tulane to go smoothly, and I feared that it might not. The suit was for all kinds of equality on campus--not just equality in the classroom, for we had learned from the aftermath of some earlier university lawsuits. At other schools, students had been denied student activity cards, so they were not able to participate in campus social life or other affairs. Ours were to be admitted everywhere.

Both young women who had been the successful plaintiffs in the suit lived near Dillard. I wanted them to have a safe haven near the Tulane campus in case they needed one. I had them come over to

our house one afternoon so I could show them how to use it for refuge, for quiet study, for rest, or any other need. I gave them each a key and felt much less fearful for them.

Before television stations had mini cameras, on-the-spot news was covered by means of large satellite broadcasting studios. They were impressive, glass-enclosed vehicles, and they unfailingly drew interested crowds wherever they appeared. I was worried that a crowd would group around one of these satellite studios when the two girls appeared, and some kind of unfortunate incident would occur. The desegregation of Tulane was important news in the community, and emotions still ran high whenever black people were admitted to formerly segregated situations

I wondered if somehow it might be possible to keep the TV satellite away from the campus and thus reduce the odds of a messy incident. It was easy in those times to create a "racial incident" where none existed.

I knew some of the people in television management in New Orleans, but I did not want to ask them to withhold coverage if I was making an unfair request. Neither manufactured nor suppressed news has any appeal for me.

I had an old friend who had been promoted to the position of NBC news director in Washington. He would be able to instruct me properly as to whether my interference would be ethical. When I spoke to him, he agreed with me that if incidents developed, they were news and had to be covered, but he also felt that it

might be wise to try to avoid anything that could provoke confrontation. "Let's try it," he said. "I'll handle the television, but you'll have to approach the press. Who do you know at the Times-Picayune? Can you take care of that?"

I had not thought about the press, but if he was willing to do what he offered--it was more than I had anticipated--then I had no choice. We agreed on our respective assignments and decided we would confer again about their outcomes.

I was faced with calling the publisher of the Times-Picayune to request that he keep his re-porters away from what could be a very big story, and I was not even sure that what I was doing was fair. The publisher was a gentle, gracious man--a great admirer of my father. I used my father's name as my entree when I called for an appointment. He surely must have thought that I was making a solicitation of some kind and said yes, he could give some time that day. I dreaded the meeting, and as usual my stomach churned, my head ached, and my mouth was so dry I could hardly speak.

I gave him my ideas and mentioned that we had all suffered from the adverse publicity the city had gotten when the elementary schools were desegregated. More bad news at Tulane would give us the sort of national publicity we could ill afford. "Would it be possible," I asked, "to keep reporters away until a story breaks, if it does?" reasoned that we could have a bloody mess or, if all went smoothly, the story might be much better later on.

He listened carefully, and his smile stiffened into a pensive, troubled look--not at me, but anywhere else. He said nothing but got up from his desk and paced a while, finally gazing out of the window. His thought process must have been agonizing--his manner reflected that. Then he turned and spoke, and to my enormous relief he accepted my idea. He thought, as I did, that further stories that involved our city had to be covered, but they did not have to be stimulated.

It worked! Monday at Tulane began very normally, and no one was around to ask provocative questions, nor did the television satellite appear to draw the usual curious crowd.

The girls had promised to call me each night. I wanted to be sure they were comfortable, not just tolerated. "Smooth as silk" was the report. They greatly appreciated the ease with which they had been accepted. By the end of their first week on campus, they came to the house to give me a full report and to return the house keys. My relief and pleasure were far greater than theirs.

I think it was the following week that Mr. Tims called me from the Times-Picayune. He, too, was pleased and told me that by Friday he had sent a reporter to Tulane to see how the desegregation was working; he could stand the suspense no longer. The reporter had gone to the classes where the black girls were and said all he saw was a class behaving as college classes habitually do. He reported that there was no story at all. I thanked Mr. Tims for calling me, but I told him I disagreed with what the reporter had said: I considered what had happened at Tulane to be one of the best stories of the whole civil rights battle.

Happily, New Orleans got no black eyes on this story.

21.

I have not wished in this tale to discuss the terrible fear which experienced so often during the struggle for civil rights. The fear was not for my personal safety, although it was in jeopardy a number of times. My fear was rooted in the possible harmful effects on my family. I also feared failure. My responsibility was enormous, and many times I felt like a terribly weak reed.

It is impossible, I know, to recreate the emotional climate about black people which existed then. In the eyes of many, blacks were not really people and should not threaten the existing order. I was told so many times that "they" were happy with things as they were, and I had better quit meddling.

If it had ever occurred to me that someday you would ask for these memoirs, I might have saved more articles and clippings. One clipping I wish I had was sent to me by a friend on the West Coast. The very long newspaper article described the riot-filled, dangerous desegregation of other southern universities. It told how in some cases federal troops were needed to enforce the law, but Tulane had faced the unwelcome change with grace and ease. I saw the story the same way: a wonderful transition. And the reporter added, "For the first time in history this, lawsuit was begun and concluded by an all-white team!" We had not even thought about that aspect of our suit.

The Tulane board chairman came to see me one day about a month after the mid-term admission of the first Negroes. He thanked me appreciatively for my part in this job. He said he had wanted to step down as chairman much earlier but had been unwilling to do so before desegregation had been accomplished. Now he could do so, and he was greatly relieved. Just about a week later, he was killed trying to rescue his wife from their burning house.

22.

I had become the necessary link between blacks and whites. As white people and their organizations reached out to include blacks for the first time, I became a consultant. I knew the Negroes, and the whites needed the advice I was so glad to give, so that they would make the appropriate choices.

The ranks of social workers began to open to blacks, and the Y.W.C.A. and Girl Scouts had created bonds between blacks and whites much earlier. Other groups followed, and they needed to know who the appropriate new members would be. I knew, or could find out, and I enjoyed the task.

When our son was invited to serve on the board of the symphony orchestra, he decided to see that that group would include a black. He, too, consulted me, and I was delighted to oblige with the name of Jessie Dent. She had been a budding concert pianist and had relinquished that career for marriage. She was one of the

few Negroes whom I knew who would go to symphony concerts and suffer the indignity of sitting up in the miserable segregated seats provided for blacks at that time. To Charles delight, he was able to accomplish his task by inviting Mrs. Dent onto the board.

But this is a long Introduction to a tale. One of the strangest requests I had to serve as liaison was a long way out of my field. Otto Preminger, the renowned movie producer, decided to have the world premiere of his new movie, "The Cardinal," in New Orleans. I had a call from his office to say that Hr. Preminger described himself as a "red hot integrationist" He wished to give an elaborate luncheon to introduce himself to some of the city's important people, and he insisted that there be some black guests in the group. Whom did I propose? Answering this question took thought. Final-ly, I called his office back and suggested that if the heads of the drama departments at all of the colleges and universities in the area were included his purpose would be accomplished. I knew that Dillard had a drama department, and I hoped that Xavier did also.

Preminger's staff liked that plan and said they hoped that I could also arrange for Mr. Preminger to address some of the local drama classes; he loved working with students. I was to send the office all of the professors' names and they would follow through. By the way, they said, would I be good enough to attend the luncheon, too? Would I indeed! I loved the idea. I was not only to be the guest of a famous movie producer, but I also would be present when the elegant Royal Orleans Hotel entertained its first black guests.

I have been careless about dates throughout my story, but not in this one. The day of the lunch-eon was November 22, 1963.

Of course, I wore my very best and arrived in a state of great curiosity. Preminger was the perfect host and expressed a warm welcome and many thanks for my help with his visit.

Large still pictures were on display in the room where we gathered for cocktails, and he explained how they fit into the movie. I was the only one present who knew the black guests, so I stayed close to my host to see that introductions went smoothly. Reporters swarmed, and much in-terviewing went on.

We were led into lunch, and a glance was enough to show that we were to have the best. Numerous pieces of silver and many wine glasses were laid at each place, so it looked as though the lunch-eon would last for a very long time.

I was seated between the host and Mayor Victor Schiro, an old friend. I could not help wonder-ing what the Mayor's thoughts might be when seated at a luncheon with blacks. We had discussed the racial issue in the past. He felt, as many did, that he somehow had to prove to me that he was right and that I was confused and misguided.

We began our first course; and though I do not enjoy gargantuan feasts, I was very pleased to be at that one: black diners at the elegant Royal 0.

In a very short time, Richey Dixon, the Mayor's assistant, was called from the room. He was gone only briefly and then came back to get the Mayor, who returned rather quickly in a greatly agitated state. He announced that President



Kennedy had been shot while on a visit to Dallas.

Disbelief was my first reaction--surely the Mayor was joking. But this was not funny. My mind simply could not accept such a jolt. Very soon a television set was rolled in, and the room began to fill up with reporters, all of us staring stonily as the ghastly news was told. No one spoke, but the waiter behind me leaned weakly on my chair, so I moved over to share it with him.

Richey Dixon kept murmuring, "But he gave me this pin on my collar." The President had visited our city earlier, and Dixon had been one of his escorts and had been personally affected. When Kennedy had thanked him graciously, Dixon had noticed that the President wore an insignia from a Marine group in which Richey had also served, and the President had said, "I want you to have this," and he had pinned it on Richey's lapel.

Father Clancy, whom I loved for his gentleness and very handsome, sweet face, looked as though he had lost his sight, and one huge tear ran slowly and uninterruptedly down his cheek.

Of course, nothing was eaten or drunk, and no one said anything; we were all incapable of speech. Perhaps we felt that if we talked about It that would make it real--or maybe we believed that he would not die. One cannot deal with orderly thoughts at such a time.

I remember driving home and noticing groups of people speaking softly together as I passed. Po-licemen had left their posts; trolley conductors were chatting together on corners. People obviously were trying to cling together. Nothing was as it had been; we were all badly shaken.

The President died later that day. Then I think we were frightened. The news was morbidly fasci-nating, and we kept listening, afraid of losing touch lest some other dreadful act take place.

Some hours later, Vice-President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as President on the President's plane, which was to take him back to Washington to assume his new role.

History will, I hope, deal kindly with President Johnson. At that awful time, he must have been more shaken than anyone, but he took control in a manner which demonstrated strength and calm and order, which was exactly what the nation then needed so desperately. His was leadership of high caliber. Government was to proceed on a regular course in spite of its devastating setback.

Sanity began to return after a short period, and the healing process started. President Johnson had, as vice president, become possessed by a passionate anger--



like my own--at racial discrimination. He had visited us at National Urban League meetings on several occasions and had learned much that he had not known before. Like many others, President Johnson had gained a respect for and trust in Whitney Young, who was at that time the attractive, articulate Executive Director of the Urban League.

Rarely does the time come when the perfect person surfaces just when he is needed. Whitney was heaven-sent to establish communications when people were just beginning to listen. He was handsome, virile, brilliantly educated (his father was the president of a college for blacks in Kentucky, and possessed of great personal charm. Lyndon Johnson liked him and consulted him often after he became president and began to construct his Civil Rights Acts and to try to get them through the Congress. The President wanted Whitney in his Cabinet, but Whitney declined, believing that he could accomplish more as National Urban League Director. Nevertheless, the friendship between him and the President remained strong and productive.

Civil rights laws began to get passed and to become effective. They required public places to admit Negroes on a non-discriminatory basis. This policy included theatres, restaurants, and hotels. Imagine the shock waves in the South, where these places had been preserves for "whites only" --always.

The laws which interested Urban Leaguers most, though, were the ones which covered employment, an area desegregated in stages. In the beginning employers of 500 were to have a certain number of Negroes on the payroll. Then, a year or so later, employers of 250, then 100, and so on. In New Orleans, this process meant that categories of jobs would be available which had never been open to blacks before: in large offices, stores, and even banks.

This plan sounded wonderful, but I began to worry about the pragmatics of bringing it about and went one day to discuss this concern with Harvey Kerns, the local Urban League Director. He realized that even people who had some training, in clerical skills for instance, might have difficult adjustments to make when thrust into such completely unfamiliar social situations.

That was part of my concern, too, but only part of it. I was sure that the white people who were already there had equally difficult adjustments to make and that a volatile situation could easily be foreseen.

I knew most of the bank presidents and large store managers in New Orleans, and we decided that we would go to see them and offer our help. Harvey explained that he would find, screen, and refer the new employees and act as liaison. Should there be dissatisfaction, the Urban League would be told of it and would try to resolve any problem. In every case, the relief was almost visible. Employers were not comfortable with this new situation and did not know how to handle it. Our help was greatly appreciated. Blacks and whites had never really tried to communicate before, so a bridge was needed.

The Urban League was a busy place in those days. We organized a training program with borrowed machinery to teach our participants how to check in large grocery stores. We taught them how to be interviewed by prospective employers.

And, perhaps as important as any of the rest of the training were the classes in grooming and office manners which I loved conducting. I had learned some of these skills in business school years before, and more from my mother. It does smooth the path if one learns some gentleness and graciousness, and grooming.

The arrangement worked well and eased awkwardness on both sides. The city was greatly bene-fited by the Urban League's service, and I later was given the AFL-CIO annual award for my part in this desegregation. Chuck and I were co-recipients that year and loved it. He had played a large part for years in good labor-management relations in the construction industry. Never before had hus-band and wife been so honored, and Chuck said that if I got that award and the same year got the annual award from the Junior League, then I must have been doing something right.

24.

By the time President Johnson began his campaign for election, all of the necessary civil rights laws were in effect except one of the most Important of all: voting rights. Passing this law, he said often, was to be the first act of his new presidency. And so, it was. Slowly the whole nature of southern politics began to change. We were all truly citizens, with equal citizenship rights, and responsibilities, too. We lived in a much healthier political climate.

Our current mayor, Ernest Morial, has spanned this whole period. He was the first black to graduate from law school at the state university, he was the first black since the Reconstruction period to serve in the state legislature, and now he is the first black mayor.

It pleases me greatly that some of you who read this rambling account may wonder if some of the wrongs I have described could possibly have existed in the United States of America. I am much happier in this new world, which I had some part in creating. My love of family, husband, and chil-dren was so enormous that I had some to spare, and I am happy with the results of the sharing.





# Rosa Freeman Keller

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## REFLECTIONS

The following is based on questions suggested in the book *How to Tape Instant*

*Oral Biographies, Zimmerman*

1/21/1993



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***What 's the happiest memory that you have from your childhood?***

That's a tough question. I had a very happy childhood. I guess. the most exciting memory for me is being a flower girl in my aunt's wedding- Aunt Annie. I was the only flower girl. I was almost five. And my mother made me a dress- organdy. Do you know what organdy is? White organdy, with a ruffled scarf, that crossed in the front and then became a sash. I think

I have a picture somewhere.

They married here in a new little church up on Carrollton Ave., Presbyterian, of course. That's what they were. They were militantly Presbyterian. Aunt Annie was, anyway.

***What was the saddest time in your childhood that you remember?***

I guess the hurricane which was very early in my life. What was the date of that very devastating hurricane? 1918 perhaps? We had to move. My father didn't like the house we were in because it shook and leaked and all the rest of it. We moved across the street. He'd watched that house and it had weathered the storm. The house is still there- 8010 hickory Street. The storm was exciting; just exciting! The lights went out and we did things we weren't normally doing, of course. School was probably closed the next day, but I don't know that.

***Do you remember when you first experienced death, or had an experience with death?***

No, I really don't. You see my father's family, and my mother's too, lived away, so that when somebody would die, they'd go and then come back, and it didn't touch me.

***What beliefs or ideals do you think that your parents tried to teach you?***

I guess honesty and decency.

***How would they define “decency”***

That’s a good question. I know my father always paid his people on time, even though there were no labor unions. He was strong on that. He’d been poor you see, and he knew what that meant to people.

***Do you think that the decency that your mother tried to instill had a different emphasis to it?***

It’s hard to say. She was home every afternoon when I came home from school and I wanted to tell her things. She was pleasant, and she listened. We had our friends coming in all the time, and that was nice for her. She gave them Cokes, that what she did. Coca-Cola was not completely acceptable. But there was a doctor’s family that lived down the street, Dr. Bethay (sp), I don’t know whether they’re all gone or not, and when they came to our house she’d give them a Coke and she’d say, “I’m sure their father doesn’t approve of this.” Cokes were supposed to have something in them- alcohol or something; cocaine.

***Your parents led by example?***

Yes, very much so; very much so.

***Who do you think influenced your life the most when you were young?***

Probably my mother. And then when I was a young teen-ager my father. He used to take me walking in the evening and tell me all kinds of things. That’s how I know his history. But knowing what happened in someone’s youth does not necessarily make him the person who influenced your life the most. That person could be a teacher or a Sunday School teacher...No. I didn’t have anybody like that. Sunday School teachers were not very big in our lives.

***In what way do you think your mother influenced you?***

Kindness and decency and love of beauty. She had souvenirs- I wonder sometimes what became of them. There was a gong that we used to be allowed to ring. And there was a game called “GO” that had little pointers, some black and some white, and a board. I don’t know how we played it. Maybe we never. knew the game of GO, but we played it anyway. There were little’ wooden boxes full of the counters. These were things she had brought home from the Orient when she went out there.

***What goals did you have as a young person and what goals if any did your family have for you?***

Get through school. That really was very important. And in my time girls got married and had children. That was important.



***What were your teenage years like?***

Well we had gangs of friends. That was the best part. It didn't matter whether you were a boy or a girl. We went off- and picnicked. There was no money, so we'd go home and make sandwiches and we'd go on a picnic to the Park (Audubon Park is "the park") I had one friend who lived out near Lake Pontchartrain, on that bayou that's not there anymore; the New Basin Canal. And out by the lake there were shows. And they had an electric fountain that did colored water. Once in a while we'd be taken out there to see the colors and how they changed, and it was very exciting. But any-time we went anywhere en famille it was a big deal, because we didn't do that much.

There was a bridge on Carrollton Avenue that ran across this canal, and when my mother was teaching herself to drive, that was the only way you could learn in those days, she conquered that bridge. That was the biggest thing in our life! She had run into the house on Hickory Street once and damaged it. And then she grew a vine to hide it.

***What great person have you known in your life? And what was it that made them special?***

Not necessarily a famous person: but a great person. Miss McGehee was the first one, Miss Louise. She was special because she cared so deeply about what she was teaching us. I had been to Newman School which was a good school, and one day my mother jerked me out of there because they said I was lying and she said "Never! My children do not lie."

Miss McGehee's School was an old house. It's still there. It was a ridiculous place, but they didn't have the rules that they have to follow now. She ran the school with her sister, Miss Ethel, who taught music. I'm sure that it would not qualify on any ground in this day and time. We ate lunch in the back yard. There was no place to play basketball or anything. But nobody expected much- certainly of a girls' school.

***What advice would you offer to people who are married and living together? Did you have problems of adjustment?***

I'm sure there were some, but it's hard to remember. I was married to a bossy man who expected me to do this and that- but he was never there. His job was the most important thing in the world. Then he went overseas and was gone for a good while.

***You've just been married 60 years. What advice would you give to people who, assuming they live long enough, are aiming at that?***

How do I give advice about that? Just be decent to each other, I guess.

He didn't like what I was doing part of the time, because he didn't know what I was doing- the race relations part. Until we gave him to Pontchartrain Park. And then he approved of people living in decent houses. That's the first thing that sort of

got his attention.

You had three children.

I had three children.

A boy and two girls.

The first was named Charles after his father- he had to be. And he had to be a boy.

The second was a still-birth, not named.

The second live birth was a girl, Mary, you, Mary Freeman; named after a variety of people. My sister, Mary, was named after an aunt, my mother's sister. My mother had one sister who was twenty years old when she was born. I met my Aunt Mary once. My family used to go to Rome, Georgia in the summer sometime, but I was too little at first. So, I only met her once. And you were named after your aunt Mary, my sister, also.

My mother just hated her own name. Even so I thought of naming a baby for her, Ella. Then I thought "Ella Keller, no that's no good." (she pronounced" the name Ella Kella")

My third baby, Caroline was named for Nanny's mother. This was a way to honor Nanny who hated her name. It was "Frances", and she didn't like it; they never used it for her. She was called "Fan" or "Fanny". And we also gave her the middle name of Freeman. Middle names didn't make any difference. Girls didn't use them after they were married.

*What was Charles like?*

*As a little boy?*

*The question in the book is "What were the children like and how did they differ from one another?"*

That's a good question.

The little boy was a lovely child. He was a really nice child. Obedient- a nice kid. I never had any trouble with him until he was a teenager. You know they get resistant. And he was fussing about his school, Newman School. I said, "Well, I'll just take you out." "Oh no, no," he didn't want that. It was that kind of thing. But he was always a pleasant child. And rather admiring, I think, which makes it nice too.

And the question is what were the children like and how did they differ? Well then you (Mary) came along- he was five when you were born. He was very pleased. I have a picture of you all somewhere you're sitting in his lap and he's so lit up with the trust I had in him. But he loved it. He watched me bathe you and this kind of stuff. He loved having a little sister. And you were a nice child.

And then Caroline came along, and she was totally different. But one more little girl is no great problem.

Charles and I were rather alike then, is that what you were indicating? · No I don't think you were. Maybe you were in a way. You were honest, and decent- nice people. But Caroline was a pain you know. She was always doing things- to get attention I think.

***She was into things? More mischievous?***

Yes much. I can tell you an illustrative story. We were all going to the movies one day. A movie that had cartoons that talked. A Walt Disney. And she lost her shoes and I wouldn't take her. We all suffered. We didn't like that movie much because we left her home but it made the point. She was always losing shoes- burying them in the sand pile: putting them in with the wash. And shoes in those days- you got shoe coupons. You could get two pair a year for children. That doesn't last. That's really not enough shoes. Shoes then were made out of paper, anyway. Shoes were a big prob-lem when 'you all were young.

***When you had children, how did they change your life?***

Well I think they change your life completely. They center everything you are doing. When you go to the grocery you're thinking about the children. It takes your life; in my time it did. You didn't go get a Job or anything like that.

***How do you raise children to be good human beings?***

Well, I just thought to be honest and to be on time. To do that you are honest and decent your-self. There's no other way. It's not what you tell them, it's what you're doing. And for me that paid off.

***When people say, "Think about your children", what stories come to mind?***

I don't know. That's so far back.

One story, when your daddy came home after the war to live, the first Christmas was a big deal. We hadn't had any Christmases for a couple of years. Charles was about six, maybe eight, and he was so pleased to have his father home. And one night he was going up the steps to bed in the house on Audubon Street and he called down, Oh he'd had such a lovely day, he said, it was so nice. There was a lot new in that Christmas for Charles because we were all happy and we were together, and it was nice.

I remember that clearly because we had had such a hard time. During World War II it was really a tough time. You didn't have a car. We lived near Audubon Park, that was the beautiful thing for us. We were there a lot.

***Looking back over your life so far, what was the happiest time?***

That's hard to say. But when you all kind of grew up and got to be grown people and you were turning out nicely I thought, and I think when Charles got married we were really happy about that. It didn't turn out well but we were happy at the time. And Charles graduated from Newman and gave the Valedictory address. It scared the Hell out of me because he was so shy. But he did it beautifully. He was top of his class and I thought that would bother you and Caroline. We were having lunch one day and I said, "This has nothing to do with you all. You do your best. That's all I expect of you. You can't expect to be the top of your class."

***What do you think was the turning point in your life? And how did your life change after that event?***

There have been a number of them.

One turning point was when I got involved in race relations, which was totally un-stylish. And I've written about that earlier.

Another is marriage; and of course, having children is always a turning point- every child.

And we've talked about how life changes after that event.

***Any other turning point that you want to talk about now?***

There were a whole lot of them when I was doing race relations. Your daddy ordered people out of the house and all that kind of thing. I said to him, "Look, either I'm going to live here and do things the way I want to do them or I'm not going to live here." For example he had ordered Betty Goldstein out, and she was a good friend of mine. And he would talk to my race relations friends in a really ugly way and I didn't like it. I said, "These are my friends. And we're going to agree on this or we're going to disagree, but I will leave if you like."

It was sticky, very sticky if you were identified as a race relations person, and you lived uptown. My father hated it, he just hated it.

***Your marriage was important to you and to you and the race relations was important to you. You have said that you would have been willing to choose the race relations over the marriage. But I think you would have felt like a failure if you'd have had to give up the marriage. How did you balance those things? How did you make the marriage work?***

I don't know. But you see there was a war going on when I first got involved. What I could see so clearly, I thought, was that these soldiers we had sent, these black soldiers that we had sent over-seas, couldn't come home and have to ride in the back of the bus and be treated like that. It wouldn't have worked. I said to him, "you fought your war. Now this is mine."

In the end he not only accepted it but embraced the goals.

Yes, he came around, but that all came later. Pontchartrain Park was what helped him understand. Because they literally could not find a decent place to live. People like Norman and Blanche Francis, you know that's just awful. And a lot of them were leaving town; they got jobs other places. Norman would never do that. He said Xavier was his life. It meant everything to him. He still thinks so I believe. There's some kind of lovely bond that this sort of thing sets up between people. And he was one of the best - still is.

***What was the worst time in your life?***

When I found out that you had epilepsy. I mean when I could diagnose it. It was

awful, Mary. You can't remember that. But I can remember taking you to Baptist Hospital, this was before air conditioning, too. I was hot as Hell. I was just suffering. I could see you going through life like this. And Daddy came in and I said, "Let me cry. I'm going to cry." I had somebody I could lean on. That was a very bad time. I had no idea how it was going to turn out.

***And the divorces were hard?***

The divorces were terrible. Charles's divorce was awful. I don't think he ever got over it.

But this is about you. - So, it was not just finding out. It was watching him the whole time that was hard.

Yes.

And losing Charles was hard.

Yes. I think I wrote about that in my little story.

***How do you get over sad periods?***

I guess you just live through it. I used to hate to come home, because everything reminded me of him. That's when I went to school. That turned out well.

Marion Kelley said to me about the death of her child, "People keep saying, 'You'll get over it.' " But you don't.

She said, "You don't. You get used to the sadness, but you don't get over it."

Yes. That's right.

I think Julie did get over it, kind of. Which is good.

***What helps you attain peace of spirit?***

Well, I'm satisfied with the way I've lived. I've made a lot of good friends in the process.

That tells me how you achieve peace of spirit at the end of life. But I'd like you to talk about as well is during your life how you regain peace of spirit if you've lost it during your life. In sad time or turbulent times, what helps you attain peace of spirit? ·

Well, you're faced with a reality and you have to cope some kind of way. It's not always easy. I used to go in the back of the house to cry because Daddy made me. He was furious when I'd do that. And I cried a lot. So, I'd go back there when I made the noise of crying.

But that's what you feel like when you spirit is not at peace. This question is about how you come out the other end- if you are able to put that into words. Is there anything else you want to say, not about the turmoil, but about peace of spirit either

during or after?

Well, I've already told you one thing. I went back to school, which was a marvelous answer. Because there wasn't a soul in the place that knew me or knew anything about me. It was just what I needed. And people would ask me questions, "I can't ask my grandmother this, but I can ask you ..." You know that kind of stuff-which was really very interesting.

***So you're saying essentially-"Re-focus stay busy, be useful"?***

Yes. In some way that didn't involve your son.

***What activities do you enjoy most?***

I love gardening. And I particularly loved it when Carlos got interested. We would garden together. I don't think you know much about that; and you didn't have room for him to garden, so he'd garden here. And we talked about all kinds of things.

I remember I was writing Mrs. Newcomb's history, she was a wonderful gal, and I told him one day, "Mrs. Newcomb never got to vote; because women got the vote in 1920 and she was dead by that time. He was appalled that women had not been allowed to vote!

***You're saying "gardening", but you're also talking about visiting, and thinking and politics and history.***

Yes.





A. B. Freeman



MY FATHER  
& ME

O

Rosa Freeman Keller

MEMORIES OF A. B. FREEMAN

(1881 - 1957)

by

ROSA FREEMAN KELLER

version: Summer '92



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## Introduction

As dinner ended, my father's invitation was often, "All right, sister, how about a walk!" I loved it, and off we'd trot. Tulane University was very near to our house and furnished fine areas for walking with no traffic or stop lights, and many of the buildings which are now on that campus had not yet been built. My father was quite tall and I the shortest of our family and as he strode along briskly, I stretched my steps, occasionally skipping to keep up.

He told wonderful stories and either selected the ones which a girl would like best, or quite possibly those were ones which I most enjoyed so remember best.

## Childhood

He and his mother and sister, Annie, joined his father in Indian Territory, part of which became the state of Oklahoma. Mr. Freeman had been sent to take charge of the office where claims of possession of the land would be filed. He suffered with lung disease and the drier climate of Oklahoma was thought to be beneficial.

It was a paradise for Alfred. Living was quite primitive, and little was required of him. Clothes were simple and fences non-existent. He had a horse and would go galloping out on his own frequently for journeys of exploration. I may have been a bit envious of this. Green spaces were not part of the experience of growing up in New Orleans. There were places to run- the levee being the best. But wide-open space was an unknown for me. Audubon Park, quite near our house, was the largest open space I knew.

## The Young Adult

Mr. Freeman died in 1897 and the family had to return to Dalton. The young Freeman family lived in Dalton, Georgia. The young family now must support itself. My father withdrew from high school, which he had recently entered, in order to find a job where he would be paid. Dalton was far from an affluent community. There had been mines but they were no longer productive, so the inexperienced young man took what he could find. One job was in a drug store where he rearranged shelf displays and swept the floor. There was, too, a soda fountain where he brewed many kinds of drinks. One of the most popular was Coca-Cola, a mildly sweet, very bubbly concoction enjoyed by men who worked in offices and stopped on their way home for companionship and a good drink. Papa said he knew the individual choice of small amounts of Scotch, gin, Bourbon or whatever that each man liked so with no discussion he brewed their Coca-Cola accordingly. A kind of drug store cocktail hour before going home. How the price was decided I never knew.

Another job took place in a store where women chose dress patterns and materials. It was Alfred Freeman's responsibility to measure and cut the proper amount of cloth and to assemble the linings, whale bones, hooks and eyes, and to cover the many buttons needed. There were too, what he de-scribed as dust ruffles which lined the hems of dresses to remove dust as the lady walked along. I who was skipping along in my saddle oxfords, wearing a simple blouse and skirt found all of this fascinating. There was occasionally a wedding dress too and I loved hearing of those.

At some point, young Alfred secured a job on the Southern Rail Road. This for him was a very real adventure. Travel, new kinds of responsibilities, and new people were all very welcome experiences. There was a story about ice, which was frequently sent by rail. A family whose daughter was to be married had ordered blocks of ice with flowers frozen inside but received instead plain blocks of ice. The decorated ice blocks went elsewhere, causing great confusion all around.

Alfred gained very many new experiences and met many people. He loved it.

I gained a warm, wonderful friend once who lived in Selma, Alabama. I visited in the 'twenties and was asked by my father when I got home whether I had ever seen the hotel there which was built to resemble the architecture of Venice, Italy. Indeed, I had. It had been his residence when he stayed in Selma. My friend Alice and I had shared a good laugh at the acquisition of this knowledge. We had been to Venice and saw small resemblance.

One of the stations along the way was Rome, Georgia, where Ella West, who was to become his wife, lived. She was the youngest of a family of nine children. The eldest was a girl, Mary, there were seven brothers, and then Ella, youngest of them.

One knows very little of this kind of parental history, but I gathered a bit as time went along. The Wests, I fear, were unwilling to accept this unknown young man from far away Dalton. One of the sons, Ernest, was a naval officer and at that time was serving as first Governor of the island of Guam. The group of brothers offered

Ella a trip to visit her brother in such a far-off place. My mother discussed this with Alfred, who assured her that he would wait, happily. The opportunity he thought was much too fine to miss, and he explained, quite possibly the kind of experience he might never be able to offer her.

So, she went, overland, of course. There was not yet a Panama Canal. She spent several days in San Francisco in order to achieve clean clothes for the long boat trip. Drip dries were still far in the future. She spoke to her children so lovingly of Hawaii that when I got there, I had a sense of familiarity. Then Japan and the Philippines. We played with some of the souvenirs and I loved walking in the little slippers from Japan and greatly admired the beautifully embroidered satin kimono which graced our piano.

The trip must have been wonderful, surely a rich education for a girl from Rome, Georgia. But she did return, and Alfred was still waiting for her, so the Wests allowed the marriage. My mother once told me a story of a young man who offered marriage and had presented her with a beautiful, oval jade bracelet from a solid block of jade. My mother had placed it in the hand of one of us, who broke it into several pieces. She collected them all and saved them for years, until she felt able to pay the price of repair. When the jeweler told her that it was not real jade her reaction was, "well, I'm glad I did not marry that man!"

1940s

My parents' marriage evidently was a good one. They complimented each other well, though one was a college graduate and the other sadly lacking in formal education. I had no thoughts about this until my father told me during World War II time that he had been invited to become a member of the Tulane Board of Directors but had not replied. I think that he was flattered but felt somehow unprepared. All of the other board members, he explained, were college educated and he felt unfitted, though they were all good friends and worked together in other civic enterprises. We talked about this, at some length and evidently, he accepted my comments that Tulane needed badly his expertise on financial matters. He took my advice, joined the board and very soon became its finance chair-man. He loved the job and the board of directors loved him for his fine work there.

During this same period, I was told that the Governor (Sam Jones) had telephoned and invited him to serve as a Louisiana delegate to the Democratic Convention. Again, to my great concern, he was on the point of refusal. This was something I had always hoped would happen to me. Papa said it made no difference whether he went, Franklin Roosevelt was sure to be nominated again anyway. I very surely hoped he would. There were many other decisions to be made at that convention and I truly valued his judgment. I felt so strongly about it that I offered to accompany him if that proved the only way to get him there. I really meant it too, though I had no plans for my children's care and really dreaded leaving them. I was quite relieved when he decided to go.

There was no television yet and the convention news was never as important as the war, so we were not in very close contact with the convention coverage. I did,

of course, know of the presidential and vice presidential nominees, but little else.

Our telephone rang and it was my delegate father calling from the railroad station. He was home- could he come by and tell me about it. He knew of my deep interest and I greatly appreciated his thoughtfulness.

The story was truly interesting. President Roosevelt was of course nominated. The vice president was another story. The supposed favorite was one Harry Hopkins who was to my father and others quite unacceptable. As it was explained to me, the Texas and Louisiana delegations cooperated in nominating Harry Truman. We knew little about him, but he came from the correct part of the country and possessed a good war record, handling supplies during World War II. He was elected and, of course on hand to replace Roosevelt on his death. I remember telephoning Papa when Truman quite tearfully took the oath of office.

My father did not suffer as many did when Roosevelt died. The thought for me that is really fascinating is how very little attention was paid to the fact that the President was so physically limited. He had suffered cruelly from the effects of polio, but was always accompanied by a tall, good looking, able bodied son. And the press was kind and never emphasized President Roosevelt's frailties. Roosevelt looked quite presidential and his lower extremities were truly under-emphasized. His strengths were featured, and his weaknesses were not. Does the history of the press cover this?- we don't really know. And I never knew until I read Eleanor Roosevelt's book that she drove the president often on important trips where they gathered information which he needed and could not physically gather. The pair had quite obviously worked out an arrangement which complimented both. She did the driving and fact-gathering. He used the information in important ways.

I knew little of this at the time. Life becomes very crowded with three small children and World War II activities. In a port city like New Orleans there was real fear of attack. We heard stories of German submarines coming up the Mississippi River. In any case we felt that we must protect ourselves. I became what was known as "block captain", and from time to time visited each house in our block to check on security regulations. There were to be dark curtains to screen the front of the house, a bucket of fresh water, candles, and at least one working flashlight. In our neighborhood there was fine cooperation.

Streetcars carried one rather than two officials, and many were women, who had not been employed. Women obtained many positions at this time where they had not previously been used.

I should mention here that the war, which was creating opportunities for women, created serious problems for my father. Sugar rationing was one. He handled that by producing as much as possible and shipping half of it overseas to the troops. His local customers, including his children, were allowed half as much as formerly. Cork, which lined the caps of the bottles, was imported from Spain and was therefore unobtainable. Metal, which formed the caps was used primarily for purposes.

Trucks, which had replaced horse drawn vehicles, were dependent on rubber tires, gasoline, machine oil and other supplies which were related to war's needs and

therefore unobtainable. The period was very difficult for soft drink bottlers. This small account surely overlooks many areas. I often must remember that this period encompasses my own years of growth and development.

1930s

In any case, time went by and one of the great events which we all enjoyed began with my father's announcement at dinner one night that he had news which he thought my mother might enjoy. He had been called on that day by a rather impressive committee and invited to serve as Rex, King of Carnival, that year. My mother was thrilled and explained to him that he could be excused from the dinner table to respond to the invitation.

He left and we were very pleased to discuss this when he came back. One of his first remarks was to me. "Sister, maybe you should make your debut and we can have some fun."

We knew little about debuts and the like, but with a king in the family, a daughter's debut seemed appropriate. I was told that I could expect little or nothing in the way of Carnival honors. My father had had little participation in such affairs and as he had made little contribution of either money or time, very little repayment was due him. As I knew little about Carnival affairs none of this had any effect on me.

We enjoyed it all. Papa was King of Rex and of Mystic. I was Queen of Mystery and of several others. Dick was a member of the Rex court and I a member of Comus. Their balls took place on the same night, so this caused some confusion in our family. My mother decided to ride with me in the well escorted Comus court which took us to the Pickwick Club gallery to view the parade, and then to the auditorium to attend the ball. This gave her some trouble. As she was requesting a friend to escort her from Comus to Rex she was told that he would take her there but could not bring her back. It was against the rules to leave and then to return to Comus. She was quite surprised but left anyway. That was indeed her husband who was playing the part of Rex and she had promised that she would be there. She got back anyway for the very grand meeting of the courts. This was the very glamorous finale to the whole Mardi Gras affair. My father who was not a real socialite was very tired, so we retreated to the Gulf Coast for a few days' rest. We both needed that badly.

I enlisted in a business school to learn office skills in order to secure a job. I loved it; typing, shorthand and filing were the basic courses. Typing for someone who had for a long while been a piano student, came easily. And filing and shorthand for someone who is quite naturally orderly was no problem either. This which we students believed to be wonderfully modern, reads like ancient history to-day.

I was quite disappointed when my father explained that he could not let me get a job. He feared it would deny a job to a girl in real need and as he said, "I feed you." This was the time of the great depression, which caused serious problems. It needs

to be studied separately from this.

I then worked in a nursery school which paid me nothing, but where I learned a lot. A friend with whom I had attended business school had an aunt who ran a nursery school and it was a very real teaching experience for its instructors. We had no small children in our family, and I profited greatly by the experience. I could rhapsodize here about family life in New Orleans where several generations exist together, but this is not the place for that.

Soon afterwards - this was 1932- I married an Army officer and moved to Boston. In those times- this was 1932- one traveled by train and in order to go to Boston one traveled from here on a two-day journey to New York where one then changed trains to Boston. It was a long uncomfortable trip.

About two months after setting up housekeeping there, I was telephoned by my father who suggested that I go directly to the bank to secure some cash. I rather regretted his instructions, but my wise husband thought that his call was important and that his instructions should be followed. I did just that and the very next day all of the banks were closed! For how long I do not recall, but we were strangers in Boston and Papa was afraid that we might not be able to afford to eat. This was the time of the Great Depression.

This is another long story which need not be told here. In any case our pay checks came in quite regularly and though they were quite small, they were dependable, so we could pay our rent when we needed to, and we could always eat.

We did a lot of moving in our Army years and saw little of my father. We came through New Orleans on our way from Panama to Milwaukee, where we were to be stationed next. My father whom I have described was not much of a visitor, did come to Milwaukee once when his duties took him to Chicago.

My husband had become frustrated with the Army largely because promotion was very slow and after ten years in the service, he was still a 1st Lieutenant

He came directly to here after his visit to us in Milwaukee and my husband came with him. My father had been active with the formation of a new bank and believed that there was a good possibility of a position for Chuck. And so, it happened.

We moved to New Orleans in early spring and it was a delight to leave the still bitter Milwaukee climate and come South to advanced spring in New Orleans. And I loved being in touch with my parents.

Another daughter came along soon, but my mother became very ill soon afterwards so she and my baby never had time to become friends. She died when Caroline was only a few months old

1950s

My father very soon sold his big house and moved to a small apartment uptown. We visited occasionally but he shared festivals with us- birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas Day.

Soon he told me of his marriage to a woman who had served as his secretary for years.

I invited them to dinner one night and we were all, I think, quite apprehensive



about it. They arrived and we were all rather stiffly polite- on our best manners. After a short time, Mary perched on the arm of Domenica's chair and with rapture in her face, of her great admiration of her shiny black hair. Domenica of course, loved it and all of the rest of us softened and enjoyed our newly relaxed feelings. Drinks and dinner went well while we discussed family affairs and began to really know each other. I, and I'm sure my father, felt very grateful to Mary for her welcome to the incoming family member.

The marriage went smoothly and well. My father greatly disliked living alone and Domenica was there to make a home for him. They shared the apartment for a while and then bought a house close to where we Kellers had lived on Audubon Street. He called one day, placing the call himself, and asked if I would come and plant rose bushes at the new location. I was free- the whole family had left and the feeling of freedom from responsibility was quite different from the usual circumstance I put on my walking shoes and met my father and had a grand time digging large holes on either side of the front sidewalk. I planted and tamped and enjoyed it.

Lunch was served at some time and there was only my father and me- no husband, no children, no Domenica, and we had a very pleasant time. I felt very special to have been invited by him and to have a skill which he needed. The rose trees are still there and that always gives me pleasure when I go by.

My sister disliked it all, I was never sure about this. She claimed that Domenica was socially inferior. Maybe she was but social classes had never been a big interest for me. My father was very uncomfortable living alone he was not exactly the gregarious type, so social engagements did not interest him. And Domenica was familiar and comfortable, and he could do much for her- gifts, clothes and trips.

My father took her to Honolulu once and was very curious about all of the idle people who occupied the outdoors there. He found a comfortable spot on the beach, ordered one of those long Hawaiian drinks and watched. This was a strange scene for a daughter who had watched this same man work so very hard and such long hours to imagine.

I comfort myself now that we continued a pleasant relationship. He thoroughly disliked my race relations work and continued to tell me that. I spoke with him about that once, with the suggestion that we could never agree on the wisdom of my activities and that it could destroy our very pleasant relationship. He liked me and my husband too. Our children were precious to him. He had become accustomed to our house and all this seemed very precious to me. "So," I suggested, "let's not discuss race relations." I had no idea of changing. My black friends feared that I would, and I realized that I could not seriously consider withdrawing. I feel sure that my father disliked this idea, but he agreed and was true to his promise, even when we were working on Pontchartrain Park and taking serious risks with "his" money. I felt strongly about the necessity and wisdom of creating fine living conditions for people who had never had them that I surely could not withdraw from this effort. The city needed this housing development seriously and I was confident that it could be done. The story is a long one and I

shall not tell it here, but we had great success with it, and I hope my father knew it.

How does one write a biography?

The period is very different, and the area of the country entirely separated. I who grew up the Deep South am supposed to understand what it was like in Northern Georgia, part of the South which I never knew. This was country of small mountains which were no longer important because gold mining was ended here and had primarily moved to Colorado, a very new and unexplored area of the new world.

When we were stationed in the area, I found that the lives of the transplants from Dalton had contributed to the development of the area. Papa had known that many had left for Colorado but had not known of their success there.

Colorado Springs developed beautifully. There were well designed houses, quite Victorian of course, and even a rather charming opera house. There was much thought that it was to become the capital of the new state, but it was truly hemmed in by mountains which produced gold, but inhibited growth and access- so Denver became the new capital. This is all American history and well documented and needs no repetition here. The romance of it for someone like me was that this was newly explored and developed country. The area where I grew up was very old and comparisons were non-existent.

In any case, it was eventually decided that Denver would be a more suitable capitol, a larger area, more easily accessible and so it was decided.

So, time went by pleasantly until I was called one day with news that my father had been taken ill while on a hunting trip and was now in bed at Ochsner Hospital. I went there immediately and dis-liked what I saw. The tall, strong man was lying under an oxygen tent struggling for breath. There was little that I could do except for daily visits which seemed to comfort him. One day I could deliver my charming red-haired daughter who seemed to be a great favorite of his. She had come home to be a bridesmaid in her cousin's wedding which he knew nothing about.

One day, he threw aside the oxygen tent so that he could hold my hand and "Tell me something." He explained that though he had disagreed with me at times- the race relations work particularly- that he had approved of my strength in doing what I believed to be right and was now quite satisfied with my accomplishments which he seemed to know quite well. I was really amazed at this and very pleased that he would tell me. I felt quite changed and satisfied that he had told me of his feelings. Next day, before I could get to the hospital I was called and told of his death. My sorrow was very real though I had thought him too ill and frail to continue living. I still felt deeply satisfied of his strong approval.

(Different draft- MZ)

The first child was a boy, Alfred Bird Freeman, Jr. who was, apparently, as every first baby is, a wonderfully attractive child. He had reached the interesting age of almost two, walking well and dis-covering all kinds of things now that he was on foot, when he contracted an illness (I believe Mu-niere's disease) and died. My father never spoke of it in my presence, and my mother, rarely. I was the family weakling as a child and truly believe now that my mother simply would not allow me to die. I had serious kidney trouble (Bright's disease), and scarlet fever which killed children in those days, but not me. Sick as I was, I can remember all of my mother's spunk. I was even dipped as they used to dip cattle, while our house was fumigated after the diphtheria.

But this is my father's story, not my medical history, so let's get back to it. The Move to New Or-leans

He was, I think, happy with his railroad job until a manager's son was promoted into the job which he had been promised. This insult he could not or would not tolerate. So, he left the compa-ny.

There was a man whom he had met somewhere, sometime, who was an early promoter of Coca-Cola. By this time, it was sold in bottles. My father approached Mr. Crawford Johnson who told him that the New Orleans bottling plant was for sale, but the previous- and first- owner had failed, so Mr. Johnson did not approve of my father's interest in it. New Orleans, he said, was really a coffee and beer and wine town, so he did not recommend it as a forthcoming soft drink market. Mr. Free-man felt differently. New Orleans was available at a very small price and he was willing to take the chance. He came here some time before my mother and the baby, Mary, arrived. It was a totally dif-ferent world than they had known.

Mother often told me the story of his arrival. He had not known much about the Catholic church or its members. He was astounded early in his time in New Orleans to hear a school cheer, "Infant Jesus! Infant Jesus! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

On another day he had seen a woman with a basket selling plaster representations of saints. The basket was knocked to the ground and much of her inventory shattered. "Two Infant Jesus and four Virgin Marys shot to Hell!" she shouted,



Ella West Freeman

MEMORIES  
OF  
O  
ELLA WEST FREEMAN  
(1881 - 1941)  
&  
A. B. FREEMAN  
(1881 - 1957)

From conversations in November 1992  
ROSA FREEMAN KELLER & CHARLES KELLER, Jr.  
Version: November 1992



Z

MZ: Tell me about Maw. What did she look like? Why was she called Maw? Tell me about your mother; your mother-in-law.

RK: The name was a joke. When we began to get married there was a question. Are you going to be mother-in-law? What are you going to call people? I think it was Papa who said, "let's call 'em Maw and Paw." We thought that was cute, and we did.

MZ What did she look like? CK: She was big, a big woman.

RFK: She looked like me; I looked like her; you look like me; that kind of a thing.

MZ: So, she was bigger than Nanny? CK: She was very big.

RFK: She was a big woman. She was a big woman. She came out of a huge family. She had seven brothers and they were all over six feet. And I still have a picture of her brother, her very tall broth-er that I loved, playing the cello. He would put his feet on the bottom step, get the cello braced, and sit up higher in the steps to play. They were very big people.

MZ: So, what was she like? Did she tell jokes? Did she sing in the kitchen? Did she always go to church? I don't have any idea of what she was like. She was literate- a college graduate. I know that.

RK: You tell her Chuck

MZ What was she like Daddy? You met her as a stranger.

CK: Well, she was very pleasant and very cordial. Encouraged me to take her daughter out and I appreciated that. I don't know. That's pretty far back in the archives.

RK: But there's no one else that Mary can ask.

MZ: Maybe when you think about her you don't remember anything much. When you think about her is there any color that you think about?

CK: Gray.

MZ: Do you think of any tune, any food? If you came in and she was reading a book what would it be? Would she be reading the newspaper?

CK: I don't have any idea.

RFK: I don't remember what she read. MZ: Was she a good cook?

RFK: Yes. She was a splendid cook. And she signed off when we could afford to have a cook come and cook for us.

And one night they were passing something, and Papa said, "Ask Mrs. Freeman how to do that." And she said, "I'm through. All through the hungry times....I've signed off."

MZ: Did she like music.

RK: She was educated in it. Adored it. CK: She played the piano.

RK: There was nothing else. They didn't have radios, things like that. CK: We had radios.

RK: We had, but they didn't. When I visited her family in Rome, Georgia, I saw that they played music every Sunday.

MZ: That part is in the story that you wrote, but, except for the love that you have for her, you don't say much directly about your mother. Did she read for fun?

RK: She read a lot, for fun. Novels. And she read the newspaper. And she was active in the YWCA.

CK: We had two newspapers at that time, no three- The Times Picayune, in the morning and The States, and The Item in the afternoon.

RK: Yes she loved the news

She's very clear in my mind. Now what shall I tell you about her.... CK: She was a big woman....

RK: She was fun. We all enjoyed her. She was a pleasant person.

CK: And my mother came up here that fall to meet the future in-laws. I took the two old ladies and my bride to be out in this convertible- put them in the rumble seat. It was fun.

RK: (laughing) Do you know what a rumble seat is?

MZ: So she was as adventurous as Nanny? 'Cause Nanny was some adventurous.

RK: Very. Very adventurous. She went to Japan. The first woman to go through Japan when she visited her brother, who was Governor of Guam.

MZ: And what about Paw?



CK: He worked. He got up early and was in his office by 7:30 or 6:30 or something mighty early. I don't think he worked very late though. %:30 or so.

RF: He'd come home and stretch out in the chaise lounge and, we thought, sleep for a few minutes. He was home for dinner, regularly.

MZ: And he was tall?

RK: Oh yes. Big as the size of Louis and Richard (6'4", 6'5" or so); they're the sizes that comes out of that family.

The Wests were very large for their time. There were stories about when they attended Annapolis. Their shoes had to be ordered specially; no other Midshipmen were that large.

MZ: Daddy, I can remember you respectfully with Paw about things; including, the one I remember most strongly, is labor unions.

CK: Oh yes.

MZ You thought they had a function.

CK: He didn't think so. Thought they were unnecessary and a burden on the economy. It was not so much a paternalistic feeling about workers as his orientation to the bottom line.

RK: Here was a man who ran his own company all by himself. Had never had enough money in his junior years. Paid his people well. And he resented being told what he had to pay anyone or what the hiring practices would be. That was the difference, Chuck.

MZ: I remember hearing one discussion. I don't remember what Pa said, I just remember the tone of his voice, just that it indicated high disagreement. And what Daddy was saying was when a shop steward comes to see me and says' "This is what the men want," then I know that this is what the men want. He's their elected representative. When someone comes and there is no union, I don't know whether he's speaking for a number of men, for one or two, or only for himself.

CK: I don't remember that discussion. RK: You do remember that kind of thing

CK: Yes. I can remember having discussions with your father and having to be very careful how as to I said things because they could be resented, or objected to, or whatever you want to call it.

RK: They were different generations that's all

CK: And entirely walks of life.

ETC.

MZ: One thing that fascinates me about this family is that in a nation made up of the descendants of farmers and immigrants we don't have a farmer in the lot; that I know of in the last two or three generations.... That's unusual for this country. There are none back in Georgia that you know of?

RK: I've never known any.

MZ: And the Kellers, and Rosenfelds and all were all residents of small to medium size towns and up?

CK: And one of Nanny's brothers was the mayor of Moline. MZ: Moline, Illinois.

CK: Iowa I think. On the River anyway.

RK: That was a whole new world to me when I got married. I didn't know the middle west at all. I never got to Davenport. Nanny and Father lived in Winnetka when we got married. But I used to hear little stories about earlier days. And Nanny's story tells about earlier stuff





# Rosa Norrisa Bird

O

by

ROSA FREEMAN KELLER

for ROSA ZERVIGON

written approximately

1975



## Z

Her name was ROSA NORISSA BIRD and whence it came, I never did know. She came, I do re-member, from Bristol, Virginia and how she and her future husband met is another unknown. Per-haps we should have encouraged our parents to record these things, as you have done with me, but we did not, so we cannot in that way link ourselves to our history. But a story is not all facts and dates. Those are beyond my reach now, but the memories remain.

It surprises me though, even as I write this to realize what a very long time ago it was. It is well over a hundred years ago since Rosa Bird's birth, so that while we commemorate our nation's two hundredth birthday, my own grandmother was born before the United States celebrated one hundred even of existence.

I was only about ten or eleven when she died quite violently with her two-year-old grandson, Al-fred Freeman Sadler, as a result of a cyclone in Anderson, S. Carolina where she lived with her daughter's family. The baby was killed instantly, but she was found on her mattress some distance away from the demolished house. The physical damage and great shock my father believed, has-tened her death and she survived the disaster by only a few months.

Some people's lives seem to be ill-starred and Rosa's, in many ways, was. Her husband had some kind of lung disease - before the invention of X-Ray, they could only guess--and removed the family to Oklahoma where land was available, and people were needed to settle it. The climate was recommended for the young lawyer, but he died either there, or after they returned to Dalton, Geor-gia, leaving Rosa with a 13-year-old son, Alfred, who became my father, and a young daughter, An-nie. Dalton had been a prosperous and literate mining community, but the mines by this time were used up and such other economy as might have existed was devastated by the Civil War.

Rosa had a house and did what women had to do in those times, took in paying

boarders and be-came a seamstress. That she did the latter expertly, I know well from beautifully tailored garments with which she delighted my Christmases. That even this did not suffice meant that Alfred stopped school and went to work at such odd jobs as he could find. His later stories of some of those jobs are tales I love remembering because they linked me to a world which I never knew and gave a warm personality to the sad history of that time.

But back to Rosa. The family made it, but one can only imagine the hard work and self-sacrifice which it must have taken on her part. She was always achingly poor, and this condition sometimes has a corrosive effect. Work and sacrifice were her life and her character reflected it. She was, I think, a true Puritan with all of the marvelous self-reliant strengths and the unfortunate lack of gaie-ty which define the type.

I say all of this, and then I come to my own memories of her which are mine alone and delicious. The baby was to be called Jane just a nice, plain name because my mother did not like her own name of Ella, or her mother's, Olivia, and had already used the name of her only sister for my older sister, Mary. As my mother described it to me, she and her mother-in-law respected and accommodated each other, but were such completely different types that they never established the kind of warmth which I was fortunate enough to enjoy with my own mother-in-law. Whether my birth was a difficult one or not, the fact is that babies were born at home in those days, and we were poor too, so families in such circumstances assisted each other. According to my mother, she was so grateful for my grandmother's help, and knowing that it would greatly please my father, she decided to name the baby Rosa. I think my grandmother, and my father too (he seems to have had no part in the choosing of the name as I recall my mother's account) I considered this a beautiful honor and be-cause my grandmother was so greatly pleased, she was early prepared to love me in an extraordi-nary way.

She sent to me at Christmas, as I have mentioned, coats and jackets of her own design and workmanship and I loved them. The miracle of a new garment made just for me, that really fit-and she so far away-was thrilling to a child who usually wore her sister's hand-me-downs. Birthdays brought small amounts of money and I remember new skates on one occasion and on another, tick-ets for the whole family to a Saturday matinee at the St. Charles Theatre. I think we had chocolate peppermints too. Such frivolity, now that I think of it must surely have been my mother's, idea. Ro-sa Freeman (might have thought it unwise).

In the summer, I was sent twice, I think, to South Carolina to visit. I always travelled in the care of some young woman-usually a school teacher contemporary of Aunt Annie's. Alfred got very little formal education, but his sister ended up as a Latin teacher, and helped thereby to support her-self and her mother until she was married. My grandmother and aunt lived with us during my baby-hood and I was five years old when I was flower girl at my aunt's wedding. It was such a great event in my life that I can recall every moment of it, from the time my mother first began the making of my white organdy dress, until I preceded the wedding party strewing rose petals from a basket to make a lovely path for the bride.



My visits to South Caroline were great fun. I was proudly exhibited to assorted relatives and friends and usually given little treats wherever we called. I was allowed to help with the baby of the family and have a vivid memory of helping him learn to walk. My grandmother did the cooking--on a wood burning stove which had to be fired up before I was awakened in the morning, one day to find the last few strawberries picked from the kitchen garden, at my place. There were enough for only one serving and I, as the grateful recipient. It was a real joy to have such loving attention, and when I returned home, to recount all of this.

After my grandmother's death, very little was recovered from the totally destroyed house, but he had somewhere a pair of earrings with two small diamonds in each. Where she got them or how they managed to come through the cyclone, I have no way of knowing. I do know that my father was pleased to have something of hers to give me, and the only things of value that Rosa Bird Free-man had ever owned. Earrings were not proper for young teen-agers in the twenties and he had them placed in a little ring, which I treasured and wore for many years. It is all that is tangible that remains of my grandmother. The intangibles were more important to me, though and I have enjoyed writing for Rosa Zervigon, who bears our name and now owns the ring, this short memory story.



# Rosa Freeman Keller

O

DILLARD UNIVERSITY



## Z

**M**y involvement with Dillard University began first at the related Flint Goodridge Hospital.

I had been approached one day by Mr. Monte Lemann, a member of the Dillard Board of Trustees and after a good deal of history, asked if I would become the first president of the hospital board. There had never been one and Dillard now keenly felt the need.

I was amazed by the request and explained to Mr. Lemann that I knew almost nothing about hospitals, or doctors. There had been none in our family and my own experience was limited to three births and one miscarriage- no great learning experiences there. This fact held no interest for him. I had indeed been a very early activist in matters of race relations, so it was thought that I would be well able to work easily with the complications which this situation caused at the hospital. Patients and hospital personnel were all black, but black doctors were not allowed in the medical association. No black students could attend Louisiana Universities. Nor, most startling to me, were they allowed access to the state university medical library. So, the hospital worked quite alone, in a community which contained two very large medical schools and many hospitals.

I accepted the role with the hope that I would be able to make some kind of useful contribution there. The administration and I were expected to appear at the Dillard Board of Trustees meetings twice a year to give our reports and so we did. At some time, I was invited to become a member of the University board, and though my life was enormously crowded at the time, I accepted. Mr. Edgar Stern, the board chairman and Mr. Lemann were for me two of the most highly respected members.

Again, there was much to learn and new people from many other areas of the country with whom to work. A Board of this kind contained membership from two church bodies must surely be a bit unusual. This was the result of the merger of two schools begun by different religious denominations and the affiliations continue still.

I held very high hopes of helping Flint Goodridge and for that reason made some bad, but innocent, mistakes. In attempting to attract top flight personnel to our board of medical affairs, I called on Dr. Alton Ochsner. His name was widely known, and his prestige was well established. The experience was a frightening one. I knew many racists during my years of work in that area, but Dr. Ochsner was one of the worst. All black employees of his hospital were sent to Flint Goodridge for medical treatment! I never shared this story before but was very frightened by his behavior and avoided contact with him after that. We built a dignified and serviceable medical board without him.

One of the really lucky, useful people there was the Dean of Tulane's Medical School, Dr. Max Lapham. He was kind and gracious and enormously helpful in our concerns.

As time went on, a successful fund drive enabled Flint Goodridge to add a badly needed new wing with fine facilities, to modernize the existing building and to thoroughly air conditioned the entire structure.

\*My association with Dillard has served as a rich educational experience for me. Board members and department heads withdrew for several days to the University of Chicago to try to decide how to handle the Supreme Court school desegregation ruling. That was a fine experience and a productive one. We decided on university size, and course offerings, and really welcomed the opportunity for self-examination.

The University since has grown stronger and wiser. I rejoice in my association there.

\*At another time, I heard that the first state medical association in the country had elected a black president and he had been a New Orleanian! The state was New York and I had planned to attend a meeting in New York City, so I wrote to Dr. Pete Marshall Murray requesting an appointment. To my delight he telephoned me one day. I gave him the arrival information and told him that I would call him after I got there. Planes were not nearly as well timed then as now and especially in snowy weather. I did call Dr. Murray, fully expecting to meet visit him at his office, but no, he wanted to come to me at the Waldorf-Astoria.

This was a surprise. I was not sure that a white woman and a black man could comfortably visit in the lobby- too noisy any way I told myself. I was living on the floor reserved for Junior League members. Taking a black man there was most assuredly not routine, and I felt sure that it would cost me

my membership, but the room was quiet and comfortable. The duena looked us over when we entered. It was necessary for me to identify myself, but happily we were allowed to pass.

The visit was fine and productive. Dr. Marshall and I learned about each other. A white woman from the Deep South who worked closely with black people was a very real rarity. He described to me that he had “been washed through medical school”. His mother who worked as a hospital laundress was not very well and he wanted to stop school to care for her. But her dream was for her son to become a doctor, and so he did. He did not return to New Orleans but remained in the New York area, where he achieved the kind of success not available in his native city.

I had been attempting to secure for black doctor’s access to the university library and to some of their very instructive meetings. They would sit in the rear of the room and remain inconspicuous but be able to hear the lectures. That was denied too. Blacks were simply unacceptable.

Dr. Murray suggested that if he came for a visit we might be able to arrange a meeting with the L.S.U. Medical School authorities and possibly achieve some kind of change. I agreed with high hopes, as always.

I arranged the meetings. They could not be well refuse to meet with the President of the New York state medical association. Dr. Dent was willing to attend, as was Mr. Stern and a good friend and member of our hospital board, Mr. Bruce Brown, who was a prominent member of the business community, whom I was pleased to have.

We had talked about many things before I raised the subject of sharing library materials and medical meetings.

The atmosphere froze and the doctor who was acting as chairman addressed Dr. Dent and Dr. Murray. “I can’t understand this. Why would a nigger want a nigger doctor anyway?” We all stiff-ened, and the meeting ended with that. It was frightening to me and I got clear of the room before I began to cry. Mr. Brown embraced and comforted me with “well, thanks for trying any way.” I felt a bit better.



Rosa Freeman Keller and friend dressed as ‘Twin Beds’  
at fancy-dress Ball in 1927









