The stories I was told about my parent's younger years are interesting, especially those about my mother. Her family came from Ireland, Scotland and England (a genealogy is included at the end of this narrative), and came to America about 1760. I have no idea how they migrated to certain parts of the US, but by the late 1800s they were farming in Rosedale, Texas, north of Beaumont, and lived in a big white house near where the road curved over the railroad tracks going north. Mama's mother, (Grandma Fisher), Tack, Uncles Harvey, Clyde and Kyle were all born there, surnamed Jones and their mother's maiden name was Sherman. (The Shermans played an important part later, when the Jones family tried to regain possession of some Anahuac oil property.)

Grandma Fisher (Mary Jones) married George Rowley and moved to Beaumont, on Magnolia Street. George died of complications of the flu epidemic of 1918-19, because he went back to work too soon and suffered a relapse. My mother was the only child of that marriage, and after her husband died, Grandma opened a rooming and boarding house downtown, across the street from the fire station and the Beaumont Enterprise (newspaper) building. She married William Henry Fisher (Pawdy) soon after. Pawdy was from New York City, a carpenter, barber, gambler, and domino, card and dice player without peer. He was so good at it that I remember he could tell what dominos everyone had after the second round of play, and could roll anything he wanted with dice.

Growing up in Beaumont, my mother was friends with a Dr. Paul, a well known family physician with offices on the corner of Orleans and Liberty, across the street from the Kyle Opera House. Dr. Paul was a regular at Grandma Fisher's boarding house, and invited my mother to his office to read in his extensive library whenever she wanted to; she often stopped there on her way home from school.

In the mid 1920s, Dr. Paul practiced social abortion, in cases of rape, incest, and to save a woman's life. Abortion was against the law at that time, and when he was discovered, he was tarred and feathered (literally) by a group of men from Beaumont and Port Arthur, and left to die. (Tar and feathering caused severe burns to the skin.) He was found by a group of Grandma Fisher's, Pawdy's and Tack's friends, brought back to town and hidden at the boarding house. His

friends got medical help for him, and then nursed him back to health. This incident is recalled in a story Marlene wrote for one of her classes at CU ("Rabid") at the end of these memoir chapters. The ages and characters have been reconstructed to make a better story.

There was a lot of newspaper publicity about the tar and feathering episode and the Beaumont police department suspected that the Ku Klux Klan (very strong in Beaumont at that time) was guilty of the crime. In protest of the accusations and to proclaim their innocence, the Klan marched in full force down Pearl Street, from Calder Avenue all the way to the Jefferson County courthouse. Of course, Dr. Paul knew who his tormentors were (some were prominent citizens), but kept quiet.

When he recovered and went back to his medical practice, he began to wear a gun and holster, for protection when he was out on the street. After the incident had quieted down, there was a series of unexplained murders, two well known men from Port Arthur (one was a lawyer) and three Beaumont businessmen. Dr. Paul was always very quiet about his tar and feathering and about the murders, but several months after the murders went unsolved, Dr. Paul stopped wearing a gun. Grandma Fisher, Pawdy and Mama always had suspicions about who had done both crimes, but never discussed it further in later years.

Dr. Paul was not of a personality to own a gun, but Pawdy did. It was a long barrelled English Colt target pistol, very heavy, and originally belonged to Grandma Fisher's first husband. The gun that Dr. Paul wore was a revolver, too heavy to carry and worn in a holster. I have always thought perhaps there was a possibility that the two guns were one and the same. This same gun is the one Pawdy used to shoot the rabid dog in Winnie. The gun was eventually given to me, and years later, I gave it to Ralph Spence, because guns in the house made Marlene nervous.

Mama and Daddy met when Daddy was a roomer and boarder at Grandma Fisher's. He had been discharged from the Army after World War I, where he had been a road builder and heavy equipment operator in Oregon. They were secretly married at the time when one of the biggest events in my mother's life took place.

In 1924, one of Mama's friends (named Vera) wanted to enter the Miss Beaumont Pageant (preliminary contest for the Miss America Pageant), but didn't want to be alone in the competition, and wouldn't enter unless Mama did, too. Mama was not shy, and had a beautiful singing voice. During the years at the boarding house, she collected song lyrics, and sang while Grandma Fisher played the guitar. The people at the boarding house even contributed to her song book collection. So when Vera wanted her friend to enter the pageant with her, Mama consented. It wouldn't really matter; she was not eligible to be a real contestant anyway, because she was married.

To her surprise, Mama won the Miss Beaumont pageant, and went on to the Miss Texas Pageant in Galveston, and won again. Now there seemed to be no way to back out and confess her ineligibility because she was married, and surely she would not win in Atlantic City. They were offering screen tests to all the contestants, an all expense paid trip by ship from Galveston to Atlantic City, scholarships to singing, dancing and acting schools, tickets to Broadway plays. The temptation was too exciting to resist; with Tack as her chaperon, she decided to keep quiet and go. Vera was very disappointed.

The voyage took almost a week. On arrival, she was presented with official pageant documents and the keys to Atlantic City. The Miss America competition activities in New Jersey were very exciting. The judges were notable literary critics and artists of the day (one was Norman Rockwell).

At that time the contest winner was almost pre-ordained. Contestants who were entering for a second or third time were coached in interview techniques and stage presence, and were expected to have the highest moral character. The pageant officials were establishing the contest as the springboard to acting careers in films and on Broadway, and the odds on favorite that year was Miss Philadelphia (sometimes cities as well as states had official entries). Runners-up were destined to win in subsequent years.

Years later, in the 1930s, Mama would see actresses in films and say, "I remember her. She was in Atlantic City." One of the actresses she recognized had the female lead in the Flash Gordon serials, starring Buster Crabbe. She said she regretted her decision not to take advantage of the screen test opportunity, just

to see what might have happened.

After two or three days she and Tack grew tired of contest interviews with judges and reporters, and took a train to New York to see the Ziegfield Follies. From the balcony at the Ziegfield Theater, she saw Fanny Brice and Will Rogers, and turned around when a voice addressed her from behind, "Aren't you supposed to be in Atlantic City?" "Yes, and aren't you supposed to be there, too?" Norman Rockwell was sitting behind her, enjoying the Follies as well.

The cruise back to Texas was accompanied by a hurricane, or at least enough rough sea for everyone except Mama to get seasick. Sometime about now, Mama got interested in Ouija boards, which led to another part of her personality that was most intriguing.

Early on in their marriage, Mama and Daddy were living in a house on College street, east of the eventual underpass. Tack was there, too. In the architecture of the day, the house opened from the outside into a front hall, then to the right through an archway into a living room. Before they moved into the house, the archway had been boarded up in a remodeling project, and Mama and Daddy used the old living room as their bedroom. One night when Daddy was working out of town, Mama was reading in bed; she looked up from her book to see a man standing at the foot of the bed. She was startled but not afraid. He was dressed in a black riding habit and boots, with a long black cape and a tall hat, and seemed to be glaring at her.

"What do you want?"

He pointed to the closed archway with a questioning expression on his face.

"You don't like the archway closed?"

He turned and walked through the boarded up wall. Mama didn't tell anyone about the apparition for fear of being thought crazy, and she didn't see him again. But one day, Tack was washing her hair in a bathroom that opened onto a porch. She screamed, and when Mama went to see what was wrong, Tack said there was a man standing in the yard beside the porch. No one was there.

"What did he look like?"

"He had on a black riding habit and boots, with a long black cape and a tall hat." And Mama said, "Oh, good! Now you have seen him, too. He was not just

my imagination."

Several months later when they moved out of the house, a friend and black woman who lived across the alley in a room attached to the garage, came to the door when she noticed that they were moving. She was sorry to see them go, saying, "Folks don't seem to stay long in that house."

Over the years, Mama was aware of the presence of past inhabitants of houses, and could pick up cold spots in certain areas of a house. When the history of a house was explored, there was always some unpleasantness that had occurred where she claimed to feel a cold spot. Once we took her to a house on Park Street that we had already studied (but didn't tell her what we knew), and she went through and selected a spot where a built-in pipe organ had once been (and occasionally still was heard playing) and another near a back stairway where a man had murdered his wife (he pushed her down the stairs). She always claimed that new houses were not haunted, but that it was possible to rehaunt a house by using old (haunted) lumber from an old house. It was good to have her go through a house and pronounce it as clean and having a happy feeling. She taught me about ghosts and about not being afraid, but instead to listen for their messages. She also taught me to stay away from Ouija boards, having learned herself that they were not to be trusted, and were an invitation to negative spirits.

She did, however, believe it was possible to tell fortunes with cards, and had a partial deck of cards that she used. (Not all the cards of a standard deck are useful for fortune telling.) She did it for family and friends with much success, but was always careful not to put too much emphasis on negative warnings, fearful that planting a negative idea might cause it to happen.

In later years, Mama began seriously studying hand writing analysis, and was quite good. Again she sometimes avoided telling a person about their negative qualities (or gently rewording them) to keep from hurting their feelings. She sometimes checked written job applications for Milton LaPorte (Brance Krachy), and advised him in selecting employees. She was once reading a story Marlene had written before we were married; looked at her and said "You were sick when you wrote this." She was; it was written when she was going through her divorce. Although handwriting analysis is a science, she often used her intuitive powers

to enhance her hand writing analysis skills. She taught me to use intuitive powers, saying "Pay attention to your feelings, to guide you in your daily life."

Often when I was driving so much for Brance Krachy, I would find myself suddenly alert, knowing that I should slow down or take another route or street. These feelings were always followed by a farmer pulling out on a highway without even looking to see what traffic was coming, or later finding out that an accident had occurred on a street that I had avoided. Marlene and I never started a trip away from home without planning to see ourselves safely arriving at our destination as well as back home.

Paying attention to my intuition expanded into positive thinking. Bringing positive thinking into a meditation practice brought what I wanted (it can for anyone who uses it).

I really don't know too much about what happened to Mama and Daddy in the years following the Miss America Pageant. Jeanne was born in 1927, so Mama was pregnant in 1926. I will add any information I can get from Jeanne.

Daddy was born in Jennings, Louisiana, in 1896. His family originally came from Germany, then to Iowa to farm. (Ruth Ritter Barbera in Napoleonville, Louisiana, has worked on some of the Ritter family background, but has been unable to verify even the history in Iowa. We know Iowa to be a fact, because Daddy told us. His mother's maiden name was Taylor, from England.) They came to Jennings to farm rice. Daddy was the youngest, and had two brothers (Floyd and Bob) and two sisters (Lucille and Ethyl). About 1905, Grandpa Ritter took the family to the Oklahoma Territory, thinking that farming wheat would be more profitable than rice. One of Daddy's sisters, Aunt Lucille, kept a journal of that journey but we have not been able to locate it.

Aunt Lucille was something of a tragic figure to me, because she outlived (at 96) all her three children; a daughter Winnie, who lived her adult life in Ohio and died in her early 40s of cancer. Her two sons were Sidney and Harold; Sidney was the victim of a hit-and-run accident, Harold died in his early 60s.

There was a funny family story about Harold that I remember. When Harold was dating the woman who later became his wife, they picked up a hitchhiker on their way home from a dance, who pulled a gun and forced them to drive about 10

miles down the highway. They were terrified, but because they were quiet and cooperative, the hitchhiker just stole the car and let them go. On their 10 mile walk back to Lake Charles, they decided to get married, and vowed to never pick up another hitchhiker. Thirty years later, Harold had forgotten his vow, and picked up a hitchhiker on his way home from work, with identical consequences. The hitchhiker pulled a gun, put Harold out on the road, and took the car.

I'm not sure how long the family stayed in the Oklahoma Territory, probably a couple of years, and then came back to Jennings, Louisana. My grandmother Ritter must have died before I was born, because I don't remember her at all, but I do remember Grandpa Ritter. He was not as tall as Daddy and had a rounder build. He was quiet, like Daddy; in fact I hardly ever heard him speak. He was slightly stooped and already old when I knew him. He gave up farming and went to work for the canal company, canals being an absolute necessity to rice farming. He lived all of his later years with his children, mostly with Floyd and Bob, his Louisiana rice farming sons.

Daddy's ambitions began with wanting to be a baseball pitcher, and he always enjoyed the outdoors. He was the only son who was in the Army in World War I, and spent his service time mostly in Oregon, where he learned to operate heavy equipment that was used to build roads and bridges. He was a part of the reconstruction of the Mariposa viaduct in the 30s; in fact he was the first person to drive over it after it was completed.

In the late 20s, Daddy became very ill; the illness was later diagnosed as tuberculosis. At that time, the only hospital that treated veterans with TB was in San Antonio, and since he didn't want to go there, the Veterans Administration sent him home to die.

The only treatment at that time was bed rest. Mama found an ad in either the newspaper or a magazine promoting a new treatment; nutrition, moderate exercise (walking) and positive thinking. The ad offered information by mail, so Mama wrote. The doctor answered, telling Daddy what to eat (lots of fresh fruits and vegetables), what diet supplements to take (wheat germ, bone meal, lots of milk), to exercise but not to the point of being overtired, to get plenty of rest and to believe that recovery was going to happen. The doctor ended each letter

with statements like, "Do as I suggest, and you will return to good health." They never received a bill or a request for a donation for the servcies of the doctor.

Getting the supplements was not easy; there wasn't a health food store on every other corner, like there is now. Mama wrote to the doctor all the time to report Daddy's progress, and to get information for the next treatment step. About this time, Mama and Daddy started studying metaphysics, and added meditation to the treatment protocol (long before the 1960s when meditation became popular). Meditation became part of his life style and he practiced it daily, for the rest of his long life (he lived to be 96, not bad for someone who was sent home to die at 32). Mama kept the letters from the doctor, I remember reading some of them, but I don't where they are now. The last time I saw them they were yellowing and falling apart.

Because of his illness, he took an almost secondary role in the family authority. He didn't like confrontation of any kind, and rarely disciplined me. When he did, it was verbal; Mama did all the spanking. He wanted peace and quiet. Mama basically was the family leader, although she did go to places to live because of Daddy's work (like Alameda and Houston) where she really didn't want to go. Daddy was always smiling and cooperative; I never heard him complain. He took Mama everywhere she wanted to go.

When they moved back from Pearland in the late 1950s, Daddy got a job with a drainage ditch construction company, and later with Jefferson County Drainage District #6. He should have retired about 1965, but there was no one else who knew the names and locations of all the ditches and canals in the county. He was very well liked and the commissioners wanted him to go out with the crew, so he could show them how to get there. The black supervisors loved him, and when he didn't drive anymore, they would pick him up every morning, and then let him nap in the truck until time to go home in the afternoon. He finally retired when he was 74 years old, in 1970. Kyle and Mark spent a summer or two working for the county Drainage District because of Daddy's influence.

Daddy was gone a lot during his working years, either working out of town or working long hours. Tack lived with us almost all the time, and she

and Mama were a duo of towering strength. Tack was a forceful leader, and extremely beneficial, and to be credited with holding the family together during the depression. She came to my rescue for a few months when Neva left, and I had four children to take care of while trying to make a living as a straight commission salesman.

Tack's influence was felt in a negative way in only one aspect of our lives. When Gary was a little boy, he was beautiful, and Tack's darling. When he needed discipline, Tack would take him away from the situation, like out for an ice cream cone. Gary was taught that he was smarter and better than everyone else, and I think it played a part in the problems he had later in life.

It is impossible to relate my early years without putting them in the places where we lived or at least stayed for short times. The economic situation was serious, but as a child I was not aware of being deprived. Our family was close, and everyone seemed willing to help each other during the depression years.

I was born at Hotel Dieu Hospital, when we were living at 1495 Avenue A, the corner of Avenue A and Craig. My sister Jeanne was 14 months older than me. I don't know how long we lived there, but about that time Daddy got sick with tuberculosis, but it hadn't been diagnosed. In any case, he was out of work, and we went to stay with stay with Grandma Fisher and Pawdy on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Mama told me that while we were there, she took us for walks in the neighborhood that included passing the Brudge Kyle mansion on Sabine Pass, across the street from Hotel Dieu Hospital, where Tack was either in nurses training or maybe working there. (The Kyle house came into our lives again in the 1960s. Marlene's son Kyle was friends with some Kyle family grandsons, Rob and Donnie White, and Kyle went through the house many times.)

After that we went to Hathaway, Louisiana, and stayed with Daddy's brother, Uncle Floyd, a rice farmer, and Aunt Daya Ritter, Fred and Jim Ritter's parents (I don't think Clara and Laura Jane were born yet). Hathaway was a very small town, just a crossroads, with a feed store and a combination grocery, post office and filling station on corners opposite the railroad tracks. About all I remember there was a second story screened porch where we slept. About a mile down the

road from Uncle Floyd and Aunt Daya's lived Uncle Bob (also a rice farmer and Daddy's brother) and Aunt Flo, who had a son, Bobby, exactly the same age as me.

Bobby became a particularly important cousin because he was accidentally drowned in a rice canal when he was about 5 or 6 years old, and Aunt Flo and Uncle Bob watched me very carefully as I grew up, thinking about how Bobby might have looked. Over the years when I saw Aunt Flo, she would say how glad she was to see me, and then comment that Bobby would probably be about as tall as me.

I don't know how long we stayed in Hathaway, but we were back in Beaumont on Euclid Street for a winter and spring. Daddy took us to watch the Exporters, Beaumont's Texas League baseball team; they belonged to the Detroit Tigers then and later to the New York Yankees. We saw Hank Greenberg, before he was famous. They played at Stuart Stadium, on Avenue A, on the other side of Washington Boulevard from where I was born.

The Exporter's were owned for many years by Rube Stuart; Rube had a brother named Jesse, and they had made their money in oil and real estate. The Stuart homes were next door to each other, on Orange and Irma, a block away from our house on Avenue A (we had now moved back to Avenue A, in the same house where I was born.). We played sand lot baseball, football and basketball in the vacant lot between the two Stuart homes, and sometimes if we kicked the ball too far it went into Rube Stuart's yard. He would come out and pick it up and throw it in his cellar, making sure we saw him do it. Athletic equipment was not plentiful, and there was usually not another ball to use, so we would go to Mrs. Jesse Stuart and ask her to go get our ball back for us. She was kind, and always did.

The group that played sand lot ball of all kinds included George Salahab (of later beer joint and gambling fame) the Labues, Cyril and Bobby (Cyril was later a Westend Little League father), Pee Wee Woolman (who later taught me how to play tennis), our next door neighbor's grandson Buddy Lockhart, and Bill Richardson, a doctor's adopted son, and the only person we knew who was rich. He bought candy, soft drinks, cookies and Vienna sausages for the whole team, after the games, at Brocato's Grocery Store.

Mama and Tack never liked Bill Richardson, because he was not very polite to adults, somewhat of a bully to younger kids, and was always flashing money

around. Mrs. Lockhart, having lived in the neighborhood for many years, influenced Mama's opinion against Bill. He had a 12 cylinder Lincoln Zephyr, and would sometimes park it in our driveway. Bill was adopted, and his adoptive parents died when he was about 17 years old, leaving a Mrs. Puckett responsible for managing the Richardson's house, including a maid and a cook, and Bill's allowance, $1,600 a month. Bill said that Mrs. Puckett would never give it all to him, but invested some instead.

This was the beginning of Mama's and Tack's attempts to dictate my social choices, which never worked out. Jeanne listened, chose her friends and did what they wanted, but I didn't. I was never belligerent, appeared to pay attention, then went out and did precisely what I wanted. Paul Selman says I was far better off.

Then we lived on Blanchette Street, with Gramma Fisher and Pawdy, and many others - Shirley, Janice, Tack, Uncle Harvey (Tack and Gramma Fisher's brother), Pawdy's brother Ben from New York, a total of about 10 people. In the back yard were a cow, some chickens and various other pets. This was where we lived when Jeanne refused to go to school.

Because there were only two or three men working to support all those people, there were lots of folks at home during the day. There were constant domino and cards games going on the kitchen. Pawdy and his brother Ben, who had come to Texas from New York in search of work, always got into friendly arguments over these games, only it didn't sound friendly to anyone else. It made the rest of the family nervous to listen to them hollering at each other.

Pawdy, Ben and Uncle Harvey eventually got some work with the Work Progress Administration (WPA), and took part in building sidewalks and city park construction all over Beaumont.

Then we went to Congress Street with Aunt Lillian and Uncle Kyle Jones (Tack's brother), for a few weeks, maybe because there were too many people on Blanchette and Mama was concerned about Daddy's health. Also Jeanne and I got sick with something (flu or pneumonia, probably). I remember that they cleared out the living room and put beds in for Jeanne and me.

Somewhere in here was a short stint in Amelia, that I remember because the house was near the railroad tracks on the north side of College Street. Jeanne was terrified of the train noise, and if we were playing outside when a train came by, she would scream hysterically; if we were in the house she didn't seem to notice the trains at all. I remember that the house was white, and near Broussard's Grocery.

Then we went to Stowell, Daddy working again, nights, at the rice dryer. There was a house across the street that we considered to be haunted (or at least inhabited by hobos), and one night when Shirley and Janice were there, we heard a noise in the bushes at the back of the house. Mama thought there might be someone trying to break in, so she took us out for a walk, up to the neighbor White's house, about a quarter of a mile away. Mr. White walked home with us, and laughed when he discovered the source of the noise was a cow and a horse, scratching themselves against the side of the house.

In 1934, we lived on Avenue B and Milam, when Jeanne and I started school at Fletcher Elementary, Jeanne having consented to go since I was. We lived there only a few weeks. I remember that we were not particularly happy there, probably because we had never been away from Mama, and had to get used to going to school. Then, because of the depression and hard times, we went next to:

Cottonwood Street, with Tack and her boy friend Miles, and went to Junker school, still in the first grade. On the first day of school (mid-term), Mama caught her nightgown on fire from a space heater, burned her thigh and hip severely. Mama and Tack ran the nurses registry, and Tack was doing private duty nursing then.

Then we moved to Dayton, Daddy got a job with American Canal Co., building canals. We lived five miles out in the country at a pump lift station, and after three schools, I finally finished first grade there.

That summer we moved to Winnie; Daddy was still with the canal company. This was the only time in my childhood where we had outdoor plumbing, with black widow spiders that Daddy would burn out from time to time. It was a big house, but leaked like a sieve, and that summer everyone came (Grandma Fisher, Shirley, Janice), and Pawdy and Miles put a new roof on the house.

One afternoon when all us kids were playing outside, Mama started hollering at us, "Run to the house! Mad dog!" We ran to the back porch and saw the dog coming straight for us, foaming at the mouth. Mama shouted for Pawdy (Daddy was at work), and he came out of the house carrying his gun. (This gun, a long barreled target pistol, had once belonged to Grandma Fisher's first husband, Mama's father, and probably had not been fired in 20 years, when George Rowley fired it to celebrate the end of World War I. The bullets were probably the ones that had been in there that long, too. Pawdy always took it with him if he was going to be away from home for any length of time.)

During Pawdy's military service time in the Philippines during the Spanish American War, he won many marksmanship ribbons and was a crack shot. He leveled the gun and with one shot, hit the dog right between the eyes from about 10 yards away.

I remember there was a dirt road from Tyrell Park all the way to Winnie, and because it rained so often, it was a mess. For some reason, I remember Christmas morning at the house in Winnie. We attended all of the second grade there.

As soon as school was out, we went to McAllen/Pharr, in the Texas valley. Daddy was with another company now, still doing the same kind of canal construction. Jeanne, me, Tack and Tack's dog, Teddy, rode in the back of a pick-up truck on a mattress. During that trip, I had my first-ever stay in a motel. In McAllen, we rented a single story white house, big, with all kinds of lemon, orange and pomegranate trees in the back yard. Our rental agreement included watering the citrus trees, which Jeanne and I did every day. We stayed there just through the summer.

Then we went back to Dayton, and attended 3rd, 4th and part of the 5th grade there. We were in a garage apartment for a short time, then moved next door to Brown's Hotel, a three story rooming and boarding house. Mr. Brown's children and grandchildren all lived at the hotel. Every day, Mr. Brown drove a Model T Ford truck out to his farm. One day, he lost a tire off the wheel of his truck, and drove all the way home from the farm, saying the road was so bumpy he didn't notice.

One summer day, I went to work with Daddy and rode in the drag line cab. We dug up an armadillo on the side of a rice canal, and when Daddy let the bucket load dump, the armadillo went flying across the field. The black oiler caught him, and put him in a wooden crate. I wanted to take the armadillo home, and the oiler agreed, if I promised to bring him back the next day. I think he had bar-b-que dinner reservations planned.

In the 4th grade, I broke my left arm, right at the elbow, when a big kid jumped on my back. The cast put my hand right under my chin, and when the cast came off, I couldn't bend my arm past my waist. The therapy to straighten it out required that Daddy pull down on my wrist every night; it hurt so bad I screamed. He made me carry buckets of water in my left hand. I think that's why I learned to do so many things well with my left hand, like throw a ball or write on a blackboard.

Daddy was still working for the canal company, and everyone loved Dayton. There were lots of children for Jeanne and me to play with, either roomers at the hotel, or Brown children. In 1938, near the end of the 5th grade, Mama was pregnant with Gary, and we moved to Alameda.

The house we lived in was out on the prairie and Mama was very unhappy there. Open flatland spaces with no trees or neighbors always depressed Mama, so they decided we'd go stay with Grandma Fisher and Pawdy on Gilbert Street in Beaumont until the baby came. Daddy went to our school and talked to them about Jeanne and me skipping the last 6 weeks of the school year, and the principal promised we would be promoted to the 6th grade.

After a difficult pregnancy, Gary was born at Hotel Dieu, on July 5, 1939. Jeanne and I loved being with Grandma and Pawdy; Grandma was a great cook, and made banana cake, pineapple upside down cake, and homemade ketchup. A special treat was teacakes, an after nap snack with heavily creamed coffee. No one was ever able to duplicate Grandma's teacakes, even if they watched her make them. Marlene says they taste like my childhood, which can never be recaptured.

Next door to Grandma and Pawdy was Mrs. DeCordova, who had a piano. Her granddaughter Ernestine spent a lot of time there that summer and often played a brand new song, "Deep Purple" on the piano. Ernestine drove an Auburn

automobile, a beautiful, well engineered and expensive make of car ($1,000 as compared to $400 for a Ford) that didn't make it past 1934 and the depression. Mrs. DeCordova came over to our house sometimes, and cheated at Chinese Checkers; she could move two or three marbles at one time. If you were not observant about where the marbles were before her turn, it was not noticed. It really irritated me, but Mama laughed and said "Don't say anything, just let her win."

Then we went back to Alameda for the beginning of the 6th grade. I broke my right arm at school that year, fighting with a boy who was bigger than me (I don't remember what the fight was about; I was always lovable). I had climbed a tree to avoid the fight, but the bell rang, and when I jumped out of the tree, he was waiting for me, and we both fell on my arm, breaking it at the wrist. It was a long and painful healing process.

Then we moved to Houston, on Dellafield Street, for a few months, then back to Beaumont, first on Avenue E, then on Avenue A, the same house where I was born, to finish the 6th grade at David Crockett. (We went to three schools that year, 1939-1940).

In the spring of 1940, I was very sick with strep throat, which became a systemic strep infection with a terrible rash. I missed about 6 months of school and almost died, they tell me. Dr. Bybee came every day at first and then 2 or 3 times a week. When I began to get better, my eyes and eyelids were grown together with the scar tissue, my lips were discolored and turned inside out. Tack was there, and helped to take care of me; Gary was a baby. Until that time, I had pneumonia several times, and seemed to be sick often. Because of that illness, I must have developed some powerful antibodies; I was rarely sick afterward, for the rest of my life.

During World War II, Texas was supplying 80% of the oil needed for the war effort. Because there were five refineries in the Golden Triangle (Beaumont, Port Arthur, Orange) Beaumont was considered a possible target for enemy attack, and German U-Boats (submarines) had been sighted in the Gulf of Mexico. There was a strict black-out policy in Beaumont, which meant that everyone had drapes or shades that completely blocked light at night. There was a 10 p.m. curfew; you couldn't even strike a match outside. There were no traffic lights, and only

emergency vehicles could have their headlights on. Every neighborhood had Air Raid Wardens who were responsible for patrolling a couple of square miles every night to make sure no light would be visible from the air. I sat on the front porch and watched for our Air Raid Warden to come by, and often walked a few blocks with him, at his invitation. He could carry a flashlight, but was not to use it except in an emergency (I never saw him turn it on).

In the summer of 1943, I went to work for Mr. Brocato at his food store on Royal and Orange Streets. I stocked and bagged groceries, and delivered in the neighborhood. Many groceries were rationed then, and prices were frozen on many things - rent, food, gasoline. When something became a rationed item, it usually occurred overnight, to keep people from hoarding (hoarders were considered unpatriotic). There was plenty to eat, but the goal was that nothing was to be wasted. Ration books with stamps (a little smaller than a postage stamp) for a designated item were distributed from government offices, and each family had to go get their own ration books. Red stamps were for meat, blue stamps were for canned goods. Cans were made of tin lined steel (aluminum came later), and were recycled.

When sugar was rationed, Mr. Brocato's store got sugar in 50 pound heavy paper sacks. One of my jobs was to repackage the sugar into 5 and 10 pound sacks. I weighed accurately, but somehow there was always a little left over, just a few ounces from each 50 pound bag. I collected this left over, poured it into a small sack, and as a result Mama never lacked sugar.

If a family car was used for the war effort, there was unlimited gas available. Regular allotments for families were very small, about five gallons a week, so I walked to work or to town.

The biggest problem I ever had with rationing was that I once lost a coffee stamp. Mama and Tack were both big coffee drinkers, and one day sent me on my bike for a haircut, with a coffee stamp, and instructions to stop at Brocato's on my way home. I lost the stamp somewhere along the way, and when I got home without the coffee or the stamp, they were furious, and stayed furious for the duration, it seems. Tack, Jeanne and I went back over my path, but we never found the stamp, so Mama and Tack had to curtail their coffee drinking until the next

stamp was available. I was never again trusted with a rationing stamp.

About 7th grade, I met Ray Dunigan. We shared the same interests and became life long friends. He lived on Avenue E and Washington Boulevard, several miles from me, and we both had bikes. We often met at Roberts Park, a halfway point, to play tennis, and I continued to work off and on for Mr. Brocato.

In December of 1945, Ray told me about a job that we could share, a paper route. We would have to get up at 4 am, every day, which was not good, morning not being my best time of day. But we could do this job together, and not have to miss school or give up any time after school, and according to Ray, we would make lots of money; he talked me into it.

It was a large route, in a black neighborhood. In fact it was a route that was being given up by a prominent black family named Price, with four sons. Mr. Price was principal of Hebert High School. During that December, the weather turned foul; there was rain (we sometimes waded in waist deep water), and the customers complained about their paper being wet, and it was very cold. The Sunday delivery was difficult, because the paper was heavy, and we couldn't carry many on our bikes. When the weather was really bad, we used Ray's mother's Buick. We were not making enough money to cover the purchase price of the papers. The customers told us they paid their paper bill by mail, sometimes by the year, information that had not been given to us by the Beaumont Enterprise (newspaper).

After about a month, we'd had enough, and decided to give the route back to the Prices, if they would take it back. When we went to their house, Mr. Price laughed and said he really didn't think we'd keep it very long, gave us milk and cookies, and said they would take it back. His sons had really only wanted a holiday vacation and were ready to take it back.

Those paper route stories were remembered and retold over the years many times, with many laughs and laments on mine and Ray's part and a few detail omissions, like how long we kept it (only a month). I let Marlene believe that we endured sleet, snow, heat, being chased by dogs, and other atrocities for many years before she thought to ask how long we had the paper route. When she was working at Baptist Hospital in the 1970s, one of the Price sons was her patient; he remembered the two white kids who took their paper route for a month one

December.

I got a job at Kresses when it reopened after a fire, (five and dime store, predecessor of K-Mart. The big black marble post on the corner of Fannin and Pearl still stands.) Mary Dunigan worked in the office there, upstairs. Ray was working a half block down Fannin, at the Jefferson Theater, as a ticket taker. When I got off work at Kresses, Ray would let me in free at the Jefferson, and I would watch whatever movie over and over until Ray got off (Sampson and Delilah, and Mildred Pierce). Jobs were very hard to get then, because veterans returning from World War II got first choice. I guess no one wanted to work at a dime store or take movie tickets.

When I worked at Kresses, sometimes the black customers with little children would ask me where the rest room was, but of course, there wasn't one for blacks. So I took them down to the basement, to the restroom for 'Employees Only' and they were always very grateful. Otherwise, they would have had to take their children into the alley. My boss, Mr. Stienhauser, would say, "What do you think you're doing?" and when I told what and why, he would say "Yeah, it's a shame." But he never made me stop that practice.

There was a huge counter at Kresses that served fountain drinks, sandwiches and soup. The kitchen was in the basement and the food came up on a dumb-waiter. At one end of the counter, there was hot dog bar (we built it). Blacks were not allowed to sit at the counter, but they could stand at the hot dog bar and order food or drinks, then take them out of the store to eat. It was a very busy lunch counter and afternoon snack bar.

Before Ray moved to Beaumont, his father had worked for Greyhound Bus Company as a mechanic, in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Raton, New Mexico. They moved to Beaumont about 1938; Ray's dad had two brothers there, Roy and George. Shortly after the move to Beaumont, Ray's father disappeared. His mother had TB, and the only job she could hold was as an elevator operator (she could sit down), at the Goodhue Building on Crocket and Pearl. Ray bitterly resented his father's desertion, and vowed to kill him if he ever found him.

By this time, Jeanne was either married to or going with Paul Selman, who was in the Merchant Marine, a branch of the Coast Guard that transported oil by

tanker along the U.S coast and to Europe. It was dangerous work, many Merchant Marine ships were sunk by German submarines just a few miles off the U.S. coast (that's the reason the Intercoastal Canal was built during World War II, to provide safe passage for American ships from Florida to the Texas Gulf coast).

When Paul's ship was back in port in Port Arthur where all the ships picked up their oil loads at the refineries, Ray and I were sometimes asked to take Jeanne to meet him. Jeanne remembers those trips vividly; Ray would say no, that he disapproved of Paul, but then would get her in the car and threaten not to take her to wherever Paul was, to save her from a bad fate. He pretended the car was out of gas or breaking down, and drive real slow. Because it was below sea level, Port Arthur was surrounded by a levee, and at the end of Memorial Boulevard (the highway from Beaumont), the street rose up to the levee. Then Ray drove fast and it looked like he was going to drive right into Sabine Lake. He did this often, to have Jeanne in semi-hysterics by the time he delivered her to Paul.

Ray and I went to Lamar for about a year and a half, and quit because we ran out of money. In 1945, one of my classes was taught by an avid baseball fan; during our class time we listened to the World Series; the Detroit Tigers defeated the Chicago Cubs. The Cubs have not been to the World Series since 1945; so I can always remember how long it's been.

There was a student center where Ray and I spent a lot of time, with a juke box that endlessly played Perry Como's "Til the End of Time,"; Ray used to say he wished the end of time would come for that juke box number. Another song that played too much was the DeMarco Sisters "It's Been a Long, Long Time." "'Til the End of Time, Reprised" is a significant story included.

The Lamar gymnasium was attached to the student center, and Ray and I played lots of ping pong there, which lead to our telling people years later that at Lamar we majored in ping pong.

Right after our stint at Lamar, Ray enlisted in a program of some kind (I'm not sure exactly what it was) affiliated in some way with Texas A & M, that sent him to El Paso for specialized radio training. Years later I found out that he was really training for a CIA job. He was gone for about six months, and then

came back to Beaumont, I think because his mother was very sick. She died soon after, and he was already dating Mary at that time.

About 1946 or 47, Ray found out that his father was operating a car dealership in Lampassas, about 10 hours (275 miles) from Beaumont. Ray had a gun, and was still determined to kill his father for deserting him and his mother. He had an address, and was going to Lampassas. I told Ray that I was going too; when Paul Selman found out what was going on he decided to go too, although he was sure Ray would not actually kill his father.

Thus, one Friday night, we took turns driving the Buick that Ray had inherited from his mother. We arrived in Lampassas early the next morning and found the house, where Paul and I convinced him to leave the gun in the car while he went in had a long talk with his father. We knocked on the door, his father opened it and said, "Come in, Sonny," almost as though he was expecting him. Inside he met his father's wife and a daughter, about 6 or 7 years old. Ray told us later that he was so angry when he first saw his father that it was a good thing he had not brought the gun in with him.

Paul and I waited on the porch while Ray and his dad talked, and in a while his wife, Nadine, fixed us something to eat. The visit ended with Ray in tears (he cried often about his mother's hardships and death) and Mr. Dunigan expressing his profuse regret. He told Ray that if it was his intent to kill him, then go ahead, but that it wouldn't make Ray happy. In fact it would leave him far more unhappy and destroy another family. We left, with Mr. Dunigan and Nadine both inviting us all to come back, whenever we wanted.

On the way home, Paul and I convinced Ray that he should use his father's guilt to his advantage. Mr. Dunigan's car dealership seemed to be doing quite well, and financially, Ray could use all the help he could get. In the years to come, we went back several times; Mr. Dunigan owned an airplane and took us up for a ride. I bought my first car from him, a 10 year-old 1937 Chevrolet, for $200. Ray thought I was being taken, but I really wanted the car. Mr. Dunigan gave me the title, and I sent him a little money out of each paycheck. Before the last payment was made, Mr. Dunigan sent me a note that the car was paid for in full. Over the years, he gave Ray at least two other cars. One was a Ford coupe,

then a maroon Chevrolet convertible.

The Chevrolet I bought from Mr. Dunigan was good for a couple of years, but then refused to turn right, which required some careful parking and route planning. The seats broke eventually, and if I wasn't careful, I fell into the back seat. I had to put a new engine in it once; I did it myself with the help of Uncle Kyle and his son, at a cost of $40. Working on that car in Ray's garage on San Jacinto Street, we taught Tommy some choice curse words, that he still remembers.

When Ray came back from El Paso, he got a job at Evan's Food Store (on the corner of College and Avenue C), and then helped me get a job there. It paid a lot more than what I was making at Kresses. The manager was Bob Brown, and it was one of Beaumont's first super markets, very popular. One of our jobs was to unload the trucks that came in from Galveston twice a week. Sometimes the friendly black truck driver let us back-up the truck, down the narrow alley to unload.

The truck driver was also a body guard and night watchman for the powerful Maceo brothers in Galveston. The Maceo's were not affiliated with the Mafia, but were the mob-like substitutes that kept the Mafia out of Galveston. They controlled all the gambling and prostitution up and down the Texas gulf coast. We would not have been privy to this information had it not been supplied by the truck driver. One of the Maceo brothers, Rose, owned Texas Coffee Company in Beaumont, (Texjoy Coffee and Texjoy Steak Seasoning).

Ray and I were famous at Evans, and there are so many stories to tell about that time. We knew almost every customer by name, and if one of them was sick, we would deliver groceries to their home, not as company policy, but because there was a need. Evans handled only the dry groceries; the meat market, bakery and produce departments were contracted out.

Neutsie Cullotta (who had two sons; the oldest was Ed, who grew up and married May Mericle, the daughter of a KKK member who picketed at Lamar when it was integrated in the 1950s, and Little Neutsie, tap dancer extraordinaire at Widman's Dance Studio who grew up to be a Catholic priest) had sub-leased space for a meat market. Neutsie and his butchers were very popular. One was Angel;

when asked what the special today was, he always said, "Blue eyed lizard livers." His response to a customer's greeting of "How are you today, Angel" or "What's new?" was always "The worst I ever had was wonderful." Angel gave us bites of cheese and salami, and told Neutsie that the rat's ate it, and that they were getting so big they brought their own knives. One of the seasonal employees was Carlo Busceme, to whom Angel would say, "Let's have a song, Carlo" and Carlo would sing "You've Got That Wild and Wicked Look Right in Your Eyes" at the top of his voice. The customers would ask if the singing ever harmed the meat, and Angel would say, "No, we always keep the cooler doors closed."

Another seasonal employee was Lloyd Harper (who was also a well-known football player at Beaumont High School). One summer, Lloyd helped to organize a sand lot football team. We played some of the members of Hebert High School's (one of Beaumont's black high schools) football team on the school grounds at Fletcher Elementary School on Avenue E and Milam. They never let us win, but Lloyd would say that they were not well organized, or didn't have a coach, or committed too many errors, so that we won on a technicality. They were so much better than we were; it was a lot like playing the football version of the Harlem Globetrotters. Lloyd named us the Fletcher High Wildcats. Ray was on that team, as were a couple of other Evans employees, and some of Lloyd's friends.

They had one player, named Richard, who had no position, but stood in their backfield and screamed directions: "Watch out! Don't run that way, they're coming that way." One day we didn't have enough white kids to play, and talked Richard into playing for us. He didn't want to, but finally conceded, saying that playing for the losers would teach him humility.

The Evans store was in a small L-shaped strip center that included a cleaners and a barber shop. The gentleman who owned the cleaner shop was Jewish, and he loved ham. He would buy ham from Angel, who was Catholic, and ask him to mark it as something else on the outside of the wrapper. Angel would say "I'll take in the back and bless it for you, and then it will be okay for you to eat it." If we bought ham to take home, Angel would always ask if we wanted the Kosher kind or the regular unblessed.

One Evans customer drove in from Woodville every couple of weeks and always

stopped by the meat market to hear a new joke from Angel. When he finished telling her one, she always laughed and said, "I almost kicked the slats out of my cradle the first time I heard that joke." What made it funny was the always-the-same dialogue.

We got a coffee break twice a day, and we tried to go with Neutsie, because he always picked up the check. We went to the Thames Drug Store next door to Evans, and if we came without Neutsie, we tried to get them to give the check to Neutsie the next time he came in, but they would never do it.

Another Evans employee was Frances Mazzagetti, and on Saturdays, Ray, Frances and I would have races to see who could check out the highest figures at the end of the day. Any customer who thought I was too fast to be accurate was told to go home and check it himself, and it would be corrected later, but that right now there was a contest going on, and I didn't have time to talk about it. And the customer would laugh and go home.

After much debate about the possibility of customer reaction to stocking beer, it became a grocery item about 1949. It was put on the same aisle with bread, cookies and crackers, and one of our customers was so afraid that he would be seen by a member of his congregation in the same aisle with the beer, that he would make us go pick up bread for him. He was infuriated when he found that we occasionally slipped a 6-pack into his grocery cart when he wasn't looking. He complained, but the manager was never able to find out who did it.

One of my talents was being able to write the specials on the inside of the windows (protected from rain), backwards, in big letters, so that it could be read from the outside. It's a talent I have retained, although not so useful now.

These Evans stories were so often retold that Marlene and the kids heard them many many times. They grew to be a family laugh, especially when we would run into former Evans customers, who would greet me, start to recall an Evans incident, and then would look at Marlene and say, "You know, Evans was no ordinary grocery store." No kidding! Once at Vic and Al's Restaurant on the circle, we ran into a cash register repairman who recognized me, and the same verbal exchange took place. He was a little kid who came in to Evans with his mother when I worked there.

When Mama and Daddy moved to Pearland in 1947, Tack and I stayed at the house on Avenue A for about a year, and then we moved down the street to the Keeley's garage apartment. Grandpa Keeley was the Franklin auto dealer in Beaumont during the 1920s and 30s; the car manufacturer and the dealership were victims of the depression. Grandpa Keeley had a nervous breakdown and was never able to work again, and the car in the garage was all that was salvaged from that time. It was a huge wooden car, with wooden spoked wheels. It was fancy inside, with leather seats and a big wooden steering wheel. It had an air cooled 6 cylinder engine with individual pistons outside and on top of the engine block. They were still driving it when Tack and I lived there in 1947; I have never seen one like it since. Later, Tack and I moved back in with Gramma Fisher and Pawdy on Gilbert Street.

That move to Pearland was the first time that Gary had ever been away from Tack. She had been very protective of him during his early years; when he needed discipline, she took him to get an ice cream cone instead. Gary was taught that he was better and smarter and more handsome than anyone else, so when Tack was left in Beaumont, he began to have problems at school in Pearland. Each time there was a problem, Mama would change schools, letting Gary believe that the problems were the fault of the schools. By the time he was a teenager, Gary was unmanageable. He dropped out of high school after they came back to Beaumont, and did nothing. He eventually took a GED and went to Lamar, earning a Masters degree in history and political science. During those years he was very abusive to Mama and Daddy, but Mama still protected him; when she asked me for help, I gave it, but it always backfired to being my fault because Gary was upset.

After he got his Masters degree, he tried to teach junior high school at David Crockett, but the kids terrified him, and he lasted less than a semester. He worked for a short time at Goodwill and at Schlesingers Nursing Home, but couldn't handle the self discipline that a job required. He had spells of political tirade and yelled at people. Mama persuaded him to see psychiatrists, but he was smarter than they were, and learned how to say what they wanted to hear.

Ray and Mary were married about 1947, and lived in the apartment above the

Rush's (a Beaumont motorcycle policeman) and then bought a house on San Jacinto Street. We were a threesome, and although Mary arranged various dates for me, none were serious. Ray and I were still spending a lot of time together when Tommy was born about 1948 or 49. We were both still working at Evans.

I met Neva when she had a part-time job at the Thames drug store next door to Evans. Her mother Valda worked there too. Neva was still in high school then, at St. Anthony's. We were married in January of 1950, lived in a house on Orange and Prairie, and I went to work that summer as a book keeper for Don Smith, who offered me twice as much as I made at Evans. (Don Smith built rice dryers and grain elevators.) After that I went to work for Mr. F.C. Smith, no kin to Don, although Don bought belting and supplies from him. Don introduced me to Mr. F.C. Smith, who was looking for a combination book keeper and salesman.

Those five years with Mr. Smith were interesting. He was very conservative Dutchman, who thought the battery would be used up if the radio was played, and I couldn't convince him that it wouldn't use up electricity to play the radio if the motor was running. He would get furious at me for playing the radio. He also didn't believe in paying me for holidays, or that a car needed a heater, and wouldn't put one in the company car, a 1949 Ford.

One of my customers while I was at Smith Belting was the Jefferson Theater, one the first air-conditioned buildings in Beaumont. The third floor level had offices that were rented to prestigious businesses, an architect and a CPA, accessed by a hidden elevator located in the lobby. The projection room was located on that third floor, and could be reached via the elevator or from the upper balcony. Smith Belting also furnished belt parts for the projector, and while waiting to install some belts, I once watched a film from the projection booth. They used a flat belt to drive the blowers and compressors that heated and cooled the theater. The belt had to be taken off after 11 at night when the theater closed, repaired, and then put back on the next morning before the theater reopened.

I often thought about Ray's time at the Jefferson and how many hours I spent there watching movies. When I walked the return air ducts, (which were huge concrete tunnels in the basement, big enough to stand upright in), and later when

we joined the Jefferson Theater Preservation Society, it seemed like a lot of my life had been spent at the Jefferson.

Ray was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS) about 1994; I had a chance to spend some special time with him a couple of months before he died in 1996.

I met another special person and lifetime friend, Ralph Spence, while I was working at Smith Belting. He was Maintenance Manager at Hotel Dieu Hospital, and bought belts and bearings and other machine parts for the hospital. When I called on him, we went across the street to the White Cap Cafe. Ralph was a real genius at design in electrical and mechanical engineering, and our talents were extremely compatible (He did not like dealing with sales, the public or most other engineers). Our friendship grew over the years, and when he went to work for Mabry Foundry about 1961, we were able to do more projects together because Mabry needed parts for their equipment that I could sell them.

Ralph always had a side business of his own; one was assisting his step-father Joe Terry with an oil field insert sharpening and manufacturing firm. When Joe died, Ralph inherited all the machine shop tools; he opened a shop south of College Street, off Lindberg, where he made chain parts and conveying equipment that I sold to Kirby, Allen Peavy and Owens-Illinois. Ralph came in to Brance-Krachy a couple of times a week, and we'd go to the Pig Stand on Calder and draw engineering pictures on paper napkins. When I asked him how he knew something, he would say, "I think I read it in a book somewhere."

He never threw anything away, and his garage was full of stuff he collected, often from junk piles other people put at the curb to be hauled off. He had plans for all those things, but never with any priority. He once bought a set of spark plugs for his car, putting them in the glove compartment until he got around to installing them in the engine. But there was no hurry, since the car seemed to run better with the new plugs in the glove compartment.

As a part of these conversations, we shared stories about growing up in Beaumont. Ralph's father was a professional gambler with Mafia connections, and was gone a great deal (he was shot and killed in the early 1930s, leaving Ralph and his mother well off, financially). Ralph grew up on Liberty Street, near old

St. Therese Hospital, and was a genius even then. He built radios and bugged people's houses. He was only about eight years old at the time, and I asked him if he thought maybe he had been reincarnated, like Mozart. He said "No. I can't afford to make God or the devil mad." He dropped life sized dummies from the oak trees in front of his house, into the street in front of cars, just to scare the drivers and see how they would react. He and his mother ate out a lot and he had food poisoning several times. He always thought chemical food preservatives were wonderful, and thought he probably would have died without them. He loved Beaumont's heat and humidity, and once during a particularly long stretch of rainy days, I found him outside his shop, holding his hand out to catch the rain. "Thank God! I was afraid my mildew was going to die."

It was hard to keep Ralph on any kind of repetitious task. He was bored as soon as he did something once. He invented or improved many engineering ideas for oil field and conveying equipment, but was never interested in having anything patented, thought it was too much trouble. He might have to put on a suit and go see a lawyer. He told many stories over the years about his adventures at 19 in the Navy's Construction Battalion. On islands in the South Pacific, he built runways during the day and the Japanese blew them up every night. One day the Army gave everyone a gun and announced that they were now combat engineers instead of construction battalion engineers. They would then be moved to another island, usually one that the Navy had been bombarding for several days. In one of these island moving exercises, he was accidentally deserted for about two weeks. He disembarked from the front of a landing craft, headed into the jungle for cover, and turned to see the landing craft backing away from the beach. They had landed on the wrong island. Fortunately, all the Japanese on the island were dead. He was afraid that he might be shot when the Marines came back to secure the island, so he hid out in the edge of the jungle, and when the Marines approached, he turned his back to them, fell in, and then waved them on ahead.

He repaired and operated an electrical generating power plant on an island in the Philippines, and became great friends with the local mayor, who provided him with special privileges, protection from the local thugs, and all the food

he wanted. Without Ralph, the town and the surrounding area would have had no power.

Ralph Spence was a smoker for many years, had more than one heart attack and quadruple by-pass surgery. In 2002. Ralph Jr. called one day to let us know that his dad was in the hospital, seriously ill. I spoke to him on the phone and he died a few days later.

When I worked at Smith Belting, it was in Mr. Smith's backyard, beside the garage and behind the house. We repaired leather belts there, and one day when Mr. Smith and I were working on a belt, a bottle of highly flammable leather glue fell off a table, broke and spread toward a space heater. It caught fire like gasoline; the old shop, permeated by years of rosins and rubber products, went up in flames instantly. We saved the office books and the typewriter, and the firemen saved the garage and the house. After the fire Mr. Smith sold the business to George Kinnard, Electrical Machinery and Repair, on the corner of College and Wall. I went along with the sale, as manager of the belting department.

Neva and I moved to a house on Park Street and Washington Boulevard, across from City Hospital, where Donna was born in July, 1951, Duane in February, 1953 and Diane in January, 1955. Susan was born after we bought the house on Jenny Lane (near the Lindberg underpass), in February, 1957, the same month I went to work for Brance-Krachy.

At that time, Brance-Krachy Beaumont was a small (Ralph Babineaux, Tom Moss, Milton Laporte and Tom Chambers) sales and power transmission company on Railroad Avenue. I had met Ralph Babineaux during our competitive years at the paper mills and barrel plants and various petrochemical plants in the Beaumont - Port Arthur - Orange area. When Tom Chambers quit, they needed a knowledgeable belting and power transmission person. Ralph Babineaux knew I was capable, and asked me to come in and talk to store manager Tom Moss, who offered me a job. It was my first experience in straight commission sales; each month began from 0 money, there were no draws on salary allowed, and since pay day was on the 20th of the month, my first paycheck came after seven weeks with no pay. 37 years later, the system was still difficult.

The remainder of these memoirs will be combined with Marlene's memoirs, set down in what can best be described as a diary - things chosen to recount by both of us, and written as we grow older together.

WHERE ARE THE FISH?—Donna Ritter, 6, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. G. Ritter, 765 Jenny Lane, is practicing her casting at a pond in Central Park. She will be a contestant in the annual Fishing Rodeo sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. The contest will start at 9 a. m. Saturday at the Optimist Camp on the Sour Lake Road. The rodeo is open to all children between the ages of 6 and 12. Prizes will be awarded for the biggest fish, the smallest and the most fish caught by one contestant. The contestants must use cane poles with a line no longer than the pole.