



April 1, 2007

As I sit this morning to record my Observational my heart is beating faster than my fingers are moving on the keyboard. Last week I mentioned that March 24th was the 36 anniversary of my induction into the Army. Today was the 36th anniversary of my first full day in basic training. In the military the first few days called Zero Week - involve testing, harassment, medical exams, harassment, haircuts, harassment, fitting for uniforms, harassment, etc.

I'm reminded of Boudreaux going AWOL (absent without leave) during Zero Week. When the authorities capture him and start their questioning he quickly offered that fear drove him from his barracks. He tearfully explained, "On Monday you gave me a toothbrush and on Tuesday you pulled two of my teeth. On Tuesday you gave me a comb and on Wednesday you cut all my hair. Yesterday you gave me some new boxer drawers, I ain't gonna stay here and have nuttin' else cut off."

Back to basic – I was drafted at 23. I was much older than the majority of the folks in my unit. I was a physical wreck – I stood 6'2" and weighed 240+ pounds. I had a waist that exceeded 40". When I left on my draft day no one believed that I would pass the physical – we talked about a party when I got back. I didn't and in retrospect the military was a life changing and most positive experience – it grew me up. I learned two things – how to type and how to fight both served me well.

Today – many see me as a little less than healthy but in fact I'm in better shape than I was the day I boarded the bus to Fort Polk. This morning as I started my walk I flashed back to the first morning in basic training and our morning run or maybe more appropriately waddle. I walk about 4 miles on Sunday's so I decided to jog today instead. I didn't have drill sergeants encouraging me but I am carrying about 25 pounds less weight and 4 inches less girth. It was tough but I committed to do it.

To cool down I start to walk back to the house. I'd made the turn onto Weeks Street but in my mind I'm still reliving war stories from basic. I can remember the obstacle course, pugil stick fights (I took down "Big Al" and was the company

champ), the black plaque shots that knocked out many of the troops, the gas chamber experience, and finally the forced march during our last day of basic.

We walked 7.5 miles in 65 minutes carrying 60 pounds of gear. About half way through this grind, one of the trainees fell. The Commander picked him up and handed him to Ed and me and explained that “he will make it.” He did. War is hell and training is not much better but it makes you a man – you never forget it.

Two blocks from home I heard a scream and saw a man attacking his wife with a long and very sharp knife – I flashed back to basic training. As I moved toward him – he lunged at me and I was able to take the knife from his grip. I swung it at his neck. He yelled “you missed” and grabbed is gun. I smiled and said “shake your head.” Thirty six years ago and today – April 1st is still April Fools Day – enjoy!
April 2, 2007

About 8 or 10 years ago Sheila and I took a Tai Chi class in Baton Rouge. The instructor was a Mr. Miyagi type character that spoke more of the philosophy of his discipline than the technique. On the first night he had us sit in a circle and close our eyes. He said – “Close your eyes, you are 18 – open your eyes, you are 65.”

Tonight Seth and his friend Sonya showed up at our house for his birthday meal. Seth was born 26 years ago today. I can remember vividly the trip to the hospital, the waiting and finally the word that the time was right. I joined Sheila in the birthing area since this Woman’s Hospital was now allowing daddies to be there when their kids were born.

When we entered the room Sheila was committed to natural child birth. One contraction later she was screaming for drugs. Several hours later I was looking for something as well. When Mother Nature’s best efforts didn’t work the doctors grabbed the forceps. The durability of the human body is amazing.

A short time later the doctor said, “Let’s cut.” I headed for the exit. I didn’t like biology in high school or college and I had not desire to sit in another lab. The doctor interrupted my escape when he said – “You can stay and watch this.”

I did – I repeat - the durability of the human body is amazing. Seth was delivered, I was relieved, and Sheila was in ecstasy. We now had two sons – when for years we feared we had none. As Seth and Sonya walked into the house tonight I remember Mr. Miyagi – I’m not 65 yet but when I looked at my baby now 26 years old I realized with the next blink of my eyes I’d be there (if I’m lucky).

We went to the Seafood Connection for boiled crawfish and shrimp. This is a converted drive-in that used to serve beer to teenagers and now serves crawfish and beer to these same folks as senior citizens. Our birthday dinner included boiled crawfish, boiled shrimp, corn, potatoes, and sausage.

Crawfish restaurants are a unique phenomenon. Crawfish are like lobsters with a thyroid disorder. To reverse the metaphor consider a lobster merely a crawfish on steroids or growth hormones. Locals are familiar with the process to get them from the ponds or the basin to a beer tray in front of you. Foreigners are amazed that we take these little creatures and pour them in boiling water and then eat them.

**With the right amount of beer you can typically get the Yankee at his first boil to stand near the pot when you dump the crawfish so he can hear them scream. A sure sign of a good crawfish restaurant is a lavatory outside of the bathrooms. Everyone knows that you should wash your hands after you go to the bathroom. Smart parents teach or experience crawfish eaters learn that you must also wash your hand before you go to the restroom or suffer that most painful disease – red pepper pee-pee. I hope when Seth opens his eyes and he's 65 he remembers tonight fondly.
April 3, 2007**

In the summer of 1967 I worked as a welder's helper with Mr. Brother. During that summer I made more money than my Daddy, learned to drink beer, worked harder than I had ever worked in my life, and was exposed to the wisdom of the ages.

Mr. Brother was my Uncle Booz's best friend and a certifiable character. He had a philosophical outlook on life that gave me perspective. Remember back a few updates ago when I mentioned the "old bull and the young bull." Mr. Brother was my "old bull" – he taught me to walk down the hill... I know as a young man Mr. Brother never walked anywhere.

One of the many bits of wisdom Mr. Brother shared with me was his definition of marriage – "marriage is like a hot bath – after you been in it a while it ain't so hot anymore." I could share more but I enjoy my marriage and Sheila reads these updates every night. Mr. Brother also talked about when he made his first million he was going to build a statue to a waitress and a bowl of Chili. His pipeline work had sent him far and wide – if he was just a local, I suspect the statue would have celebrated a cup of coffee.

Coffee in South Louisiana is not a beverage – it's part of the culture. Growing up everyone had a pot on their stove from the first thing in the morning to the last thing at night. We had more local brands than German towns have beers – there was Community, Mello-Joy, Seaport, Try-me, and even the God awful Sanka.

When Mamam died and each grandchild could take a few memories from her house – I took her coffee pot. It's a porcelain pot with mineral build up from years of sitting in a pot of water heating on the stove. It was Mamam. When Gragnon's was an active business she'd bring coffee over each day at 9:30 and 3:00. The workers would break for coffee and the coffee would break the Yankee truck drivers – I can remember then wincing at the strength of this caffeinated tar.

Don once told me that Coffee in Louisiana is not a drink – it is a social experience

and a business necessity. Never, ever refuse a cup of coffee he warned. Brenda always had a pot going or would brew a fresh pot whenever I visited. Sunday morning early I was walking and stopped long enough to have a cup of coffee with George and Carol.

Coffee in my day was a simple drink – real men (and women) drank it black – sissies might add sugar and a touch of cream. When the health craze first swept the country – Sweet and Low or other sugar substitutes appeared.

Today – at Starbucks or CC’s I’m still intimidated by my Mamam’s memory – I order a small, medium, or large cup of decaf black. I’ve never had a latte, cappuccino, espresso, etc. and I refuse to order tall, grande, or super grande. I know Mamam would die again if I ever paid \$4.00 for a cup of coffee.

April 4, 2007

Life is good – I know it and you should too. It can be tough but it’s also good. I rarely get sick and don’t like to go to the doctor – at all. Sheila on the other hand is more medical community driven – she will go to the doctor. She would take much better care of me than I do of myself – if only I would let her – if I’d listen and learn.

For the last few days I’ve been struggling with the early stages of allergies – it’s my once a year chronic problem that manifests itself in my ears and ultimately results in a stopped up head. Many dollars in over the counter medicine later, much use of hydrogen peroxide, and antiseptics dripped into my ears, and aggressive encouragement (a.k.a. – nagging) by Sheila leads me to the doctor and a quick “fix” of my problems. I’ll be there at 8:00 a.m. I’ll be fixed by Saturday.

Yesterday I spent most of the day deaf. This is a problem for anyone and more so for someone like me who talks a lot, listens a little, and loves the sound of my own voice. I also made the mistake a meeting Joe for lunch to discuss some business issues. The little place was crowded and we were discussing some sensitive matters that did not need to be broadcast. I felt like the guy in the Verizon commercial because I needed to whisper but with my temporary hearing impairment I didn’t know if I was so I kept asking Joe, “Can you hear me now?” It was frustrating.

After lunch John and I visited with “Big John.” He’s the friend mentioned earlier that was my first insurance industry boss and the reason Sheila and I got together originally. He’s sick – real sick. “Big John” is a bigger than life character that exudes confidence – in himself and vicariously through you if you know him. It was tough to watch him – bedridden, morphine driven, not invincible but vulnerable.

We talked, laughed, exaggerated, and I know for myself and assume for the others cried internally knowing that we’re no longer the young bulls we once were. Now even walking down the hill can prove a challenge and running down is merely a distant memory. While there we told Big John that Bill had died. Bill was a contemporary of Big John – a health nut - a physical fitness freak. He died healthy.

On the way home I focused on life and the scarcity of it. I pondered my life – a mother who is aging and not fearful of dying but rather terrified of losing her freedom, mobility, and independence. A mother in law who lived a tough life and today carries those scars and I suspect the same feelings and concerns as Momma.

I thought about Sheila in the twilight of a fabulous teaching career. She has gone on an extended medical leave from a first grade teacher's job at Pesson Elementary School. This follows 30+ years of delivering education to kids and drawing the best out of them. She has "burned out. To paraphrase the old country song, "she fought the system, and the system won. Life can be tough - yesterday was one of those days but life is also good – Big John, Bill, Momma, Lela, Sheila and friends make it so.

April 5, 2007

Some days finding topics for this observational is like searching the refrigerator for something to eat. There are lots of possibilities – some good, some not so good, some spoiled, and some items merely beg the question "why did I save this in the first place." The good news about Cajuns is that we've built great dishes out of leftovers and as was explained earlier – even spoiled foods can be made edible with the right seasoning. Think what a sad world this would be without Gumbo or Jambalaya.

This introduction allows me to throw together some things to make an entire "dish" for today. Sheila was a good cook in the old days. As the kids grew up it became less of a necessity and less of an interest on her part. Today she's quick to explain that she hates cooking and she's no good at it. Believe the first part of that line.

When we were planning the renovations to the Warehouse she kept telling Jairo an architect how much she hated cooking and how she wanted a very small kitchen. After several monologues on the evils of food preparation – Jairo, ever the creative guy, suggested "Sheila, we'll just put in vending machines." Sheila liked the idea.

The day our kitchen appliances were installed (I talked her out of the vending machines) Floyd stopped by the house. He relates well to my lack of control and a wife who doesn't cook often. He looked at the shiny new stove and asked Sheila – "what that black and silver thing over there – "a spacer between the cabinets?"

Well back to my search for a topic. As I was cleaning out my e-mail file I looked at a picture Charlie had sent me of his grandson. The kid's cute – real cute – he'll have to carry a DNA sample in his pocket to convince folks Charlie is his grandpa. Charlie was the guy that helped us get the warehouse built. He's retired - a vet, a hunter, fisherman, a construction consultant, master cook, BS artist, the husband of Marlene, and an occasional visitor to New Iberia when he's not at the "camp."

Marlene is the keeper of Charlie. She refuses to admit it but most of us believe she receives a federal grant to care take him. Marlene is the pipeline through which this

cute kid's DNA flowed. Marlene is New Iberia's social butterfly. She is where the action is – she loves to dance, talk, visit with people, party, and care take Charlie.

During construction phase of our house, Charlie would often sneak off to the camp and come back with exaggerated stories of fish caught, ducks killed, beers drank or real stories about some of the “wacko” members of the camp. Included was the story of one member that was being screamed at by a boss. This individual never reacted he merely played with two pills on his desk. When the angry boss finally asked about the pills the “screamee” merely said “the doctor gives me this pill so I won't kill myself and this other one so I won't kill you” – end of discussion.

You may have seen a picture on the Internet of an oil storage tank used as a residence and thought – what's this? Guess what – that's the camp (in a can.)
April 6, 2007

Road trip! Slade is the adventurer in our family. He'll drop anything, anytime, or anywhere to go to a concert, visit a friend, or sleep under the stars. On the other hand I'm happy on the porch of the Warehouse. Every once in a while however I get excited about a road trip because of a capitalist term called “a paying client.” On Wednesday I drove to Natchitoches on such an excursion.

Shortly after noon as I approached Alexandria I needed lunch. I left I-49 and headed east at Lecompte for a quick bite to eat at Lea's. If you are ever going to or though Alexandria from South Louisiana Lea's is a necessary part of the trip. It is like a stop at Customs in a border crossing. It's something you have to do.

Lea's is I imagine like a cloud in heaven – it's a simple white facility, consistent, you can relax, and you feel better after you've stopped. The interior and exterior have not changed in the 50+ years that I've been going. The menu is a blackboard announcing the plate lunch du jour and the one alternative order – ham sandwiches.

These are the sustenance of your stop – the ambrosia (food of the angels) or the religious experience portion of this stop however is the pies. Lecompte is celebrated as the Pie Capital of Louisiana and if I ran the galaxy - Lea's would be the Pie Capital of the universe. These are divine. I won't even attempt to explain their quality – suffice it to say if you ever meet a terminal diabetic with a death wish – tell them Lea's is the place to end it all. When you've got to go – go with a smile.

As a boy Lea's was run by a Colonel Sanders type character – Mr. Lea - that waltzed between the tables like a strolling violinist at a fancy restaurant. He didn't need a musical instrument to entertain however to captivate his audience – he used his appearance – always impeccably dressed, his humor and his stories.

He's been dead for a long time now. My last memory was Mr. Lea entertaining Johnny Carson on the Tonight Show. He was one of the moments that made that show legendary – it wasn't quite as memorable as Ed Ames' tomahawk toss but it

still was funny. It was rumored that in his final days Mr. Lea and his business were busted by the IRS for tax evasion. He was such a good guy and his pies so tasty that this was one time that I didn't mind paying more taxes so he could pay less.

About 30 years ago I stopped on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving to buy pecan pies on my way to Monroe for a "redneck turkey festival." They were out – I was devastated and the folks there were embarrassed. They had never run out before. As I left in depression – deep depression, I said "I guess I'll have to kill myself because I have nothing else to look forward to." I went on – crying as I drove.

Nearly a year later I'm as I enter a store the manager smiles and says "obviously you didn't do it." I look in wonder as he explains that he was behind me in line at Leas and he too had considered ending it all. These truly are Pies to die for.

April 7, 2007

This road trip was only about 36 hours in length. A 3 hour drive - an overnight stay at the Church Street Inn – 10 hours with my client - some note taking and a return home. Natchitoches was the cul de sac on this quick turnaround in the North.

Natchitoches is like a trip Back to the Future. It is a balance of yesterday and today on a fulcrum of hope for tomorrow. Many of you have been there already. Some in person and others while seated in your local theater enjoying popcorn and a coke and watching Natchitoches (a.k.a. – Chinquapin) on the screen in Steel Magnolias.

Natchitoches is the home of Northwestern State University and the "gifted and talented" school for the best and brightest in Arts and Science. It is one of the best destinations for retirement nationally. It balances young and old.

The Church Street is in "old town" – along the Cane River Lake. It is a Main Street type community that was or our Grandparents worlds. Today it more like a festival marketplace than a Main Street. Tourist I'm sure spend more dollars on weekends that do the locals during the other 5 days. The rest of the community is unfortunately like any other small town or suburb – McDonald's arches, strip malls, and Walgreens our compromise of convenience over culture, calm, and serenity.

Late in the evening I walked up and down the riverfront – captivated by the beauty, calm and conflict. There were a disproportionate share of restaurants and bars along this two block walkway for the town this size. Mixed in between were book stores and gift shops.

While window shopping it's obvious that Natchitoches is anchored in the Bible Belt – crucifixes, bibles, and hand bags with biblical quotes are proudly displayed. You also sense links to Cajun Catholics - you can see beer signs celebrating Bud Light, Coors, and Michelob. The restaurants promote Cajun food – these folks ain't Cajun but they'd sure like to be and they get close on the food – Gumbo, oysters, shrimp and corn soup were more prevalent than cornbread, greens, and ribs.

I was reminded of the three absolutes of Religion today – Jewish people don't recognize Jesus as the son of God, Protestants don't recognize the Pope as the head of Christianity, and two Baptists don't recognize each other in a liquor store.

At about 4:30 in the morning I walked the streets again this time for exercise. There are Oak and Magnolia trees peacefully co-existing, dogs barking at the ducks whispering on the shore as they awake for another day of entertain the tourists. Skulls (boats – not body parts) are on the shore – Cane River is the lake of choice for college skulling teams on Spring break.

**The balance metaphor about yesterday and today – ole and new is reinforced by an old man in a suit rallying against new park benches on the street – made to look old.
April 8, 2007**

Happy Easter – Today is Easter Sunday and yesterday was Easter Eve. What made yesterday special was it sleeted. This is April in Louisiana. A week ago the temperature was approaching 90degrees. On Saturday sleet is bouncing off of the windshield like rice being thrown at newly weds.

If you're from here you don't need to read any farther – if you're away from here you're not going to believe what I'm going to say anyway. Weather here is unpredictable at best and unbearable at worst. In terms of the four seasons we have crawfish, hurricane, hunting, and football.

To be a weather man or woman in Louisiana it helps to have been ADHD as a child – lack of focus is good. Being able to “ping” around uncontrollably is necessary since you'll be following weather that does the same.

I won't waste a whole update on the weather since most understand that you can't understand it anyway – I'll merely share with you the two most extreme circumstances that I've ever witnessed.

I remember one year it was so hot that the cows froze to death. An investigation after this disaster indicated that the cows were grazing in the corn fields when the corn started popping on the cob – the cows thought it was snowing and they froze to death.

In terms of the coldest I can remember – Boudreaux has had a problem with exhibitionism and he often is seen on Main Street exposing himself – one year it was so cold that he merely handed out Polaroid pictures of himself – that's cold.

Today was the Masters – the greatest tournament in Golf and one of sports' real events. It was won by a young man from Iowa named Zach Johnson. Visibly shaken after his great finish – he hugged his wife, kissed his baby, and when interviewed he thanked God and cried.

I was taken back by this display of emotion to some of the greatest golfer's I know - Buster, George, Johnny, and John. Much like Zach – they are also very spiritual about their game. I've heard Jesus Christ hollered more times by Buster on the back nine than you hear on Easter Sunday at Jimmy Swaggart's Church in B. R.

Harmonizing in the background are George, Johnny, and John as they provide a chorus chanting to "God Almighty" as Buster knocks another one into the lake. Buster may never walk on water but he's certainly is getting the exposure and the opportunity as he searches for balls – part of his tithing to the Golf gods.

**Ben Hogan said "Golf is a game played on a 5" course between your ears." If this is true – George, Buster, Johnny, and John – need to reseed their greens. Fore!
April 9, 2007**

The Momma tomato and the baby tomatoes were walking along one spring day when the Momma tomato slipped and accidentally stepped on one of her babies. She looked down and screamed in horror – "ketchup." I realize that this is a terrible pun but it is also a reality of my current condition. My computer has been down for several days and now I must "ketchup."

I hope I can maintain the quality of ideas and writing that has been the self declared "gold standard" for this Observational. You and time will be the final determinant of the process.

On the way home from Victor's this morning I saw a van driving down the road with no one behind the steering wheel. I did a double take and confirmed that my first observation and the resulting fear were correct and justified. I was however relieved on the second "look see" to discover that this was a postal van and it was equipped with dual steering columns. I was safe – life is good and I could return to my status quo – life as usual.

This made me reflect on other "visual experiences" that may have had equivalent shock value and ultimate resulted in life changes to the first observers of the event.

In 1973 a truck hauling cattle to the auction overturned on the Interstate in Baton Rouge. Part of the "load" was injured or killed on the highway, others fell over the railing and were killed, some actually survived the crash and sought freedom on the Interstate and its exit ramp.

Picture with me for a second some poor Cajun who hasn't drawn a sober breath in many years driving home on the Interstate – stuck in traffic behind a "wreck" – sneaking another "nip" from the Old Crow bottle to relax while he waits. Suddenly he looks to his left and is face to face with a steer. The natural reaction or maybe the only reaction is to do as was mentioned early in this process – "Heavenly Father if you'll get me out of this mess I promise to never drink again."

Fast forward about 12 years and our friendly Cajun has lost his battle with alcohol and so as a compromise with God he has quit driving. He's learned as many have the driving on the Interstate in Baton Rouge can be horrible – drinking Old Crow can be euphoric. Now and for the past 12 years our friend has spent every morning on the bank of the Delcambre canal – fishing, drinking, drinking and fishing.

**One morning a Texaco drilling rig at Lake Pigneur penetrates the dome of a salt mine and causes the Lake (toilet flush style) to drain into the mine. This results in the waters in the Delcambre canal to reverse direction. Here we are again with our Cajun friend feeling mellow – seeing the waters reverse, remembering his earlier experience with a cow on the Interstate and his now violated agreement with God. I'd bet he poured out the whiskey and never drank again except wine at Church.
April 10, 2007**

I saw _____ this morning - he's been mentioned previously in this journal but will not be mentioned again. He was the first and I'm suspecting will not be the last person mentioned in this process to try to intimidate, manipulate, or blackmail me into more coverage or in his view better coverage.

I must enjoy freedom of speech and expression and I will not be held captive by a person not willing to accept the reality of this world as I perceive it. To paraphrase Leo Decaprio in Titanic – “I'm King of MY world!”

I've found it's wise to not negotiate with terrorists or too leave buried the information that a sleaze bucket blackmailer tries to utilize against you. Information is power but in everyone's hands the power is spread and diminished. It certainly has no value to the blackmailer after the world knows what he has threatened to tell them.

As I venture into this world of confession I must preface my revelations. I've never claimed to be perfect. I will admit that my behavior compared to that of some of my nearest and dearest friends (including the blackmailer) may appear perfect but this is more a function of the egregious nature of their offenses rather than this one limited indiscretion that was forced upon me through the influence of Jack Daniels.

Today I'm confident in myself and comfortable enough in my skin to reveal this one misstep from my past. I'm humbled by this admission yet greatly relieved because now no one can threaten me with this. The truth will set you free.

Speaking of confession – Boudreaux while a little inebriated walks into church and enters the confessional. The priest hears the noise coming from Boudreaux in the confessional and spreads the curtain to see what is happening. Startled, Boudreaux asks, “What's wrong Father – there's no paper on your side either?”

In 1969 on Easter Sunday Michael and Ceci were married. The weekend had been fun. Others had partied hearty and maybe vicariously I had been influenced wrongly. One or two drinks were forced upon me at the reception and I'm assuming that I picked up a bad sandwich while grazing at the reception.

Suffice it to say – I got sick and maybe in my condition I was laying on a bench outside of the reception and asking God to relieve the intense pain by “letting me die.” Once on the road home, I had to quickly exit the vehicle to handle a nausea problem. When I leaned forward I accidentally fell to the ground. A man and his very small son were stopped at the light. The boy asked, “Daddy – what’s that?” The Daddy looked at my crumpled body lying helplessly on the sidewalk and said – “Son that’s a failure in life.”

**Remember “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”
April 11, 2007**

“Don’t buy green bananas.” “Don’t invest in round trip tickets.” One of the worse aspects of health care in America today is that it focuses on what’s wrong and not what’s right. It’s a disease based science in lieu of celebrating the art of wellness.

The two aforementioned bits of advice were provided by doctors concerned about my medical conditions. One doctor even told me that “if I ever clean out all the plaque in my arteries and veins I’ll slouch.” It appears that this plaque has provided a rigid internal support system that greatly improves my posture.

Dave or “Kub” (this may have been mentioned before – loss of memory is another condition that inflicts me at this stage of my life) and I were talking a few weeks ago. He was complaining about multiple medical conditions. Suffice it to say the average observer would take one look at Dave and believe that he’s not in the best of health.

Here’s the bottom line – Dave had about 4 or 5 medical conditions of some note – I had 6 or 7. I do believe Dave will outlive me and most of my contemporaries. Life ain’t fair!

As mentioned before Sheila on occasion can be aggressive in her encouragement. My health is one topic that kicks her into high gear and really releases the supervisory side of her personality. So when she learned of a diabetes education program (obviously this is one of my 7 conditions) at the local library she insisted that I attend. (Insist is such a strong word – she told me that I could attend if I wanted – I could also be celibate if I didn’t.)

The condition is bad – the information provided was good. Three instructors were engaged in the process over the 3 day program. One was exceptional, one good for her age and limited experience, and the other “made me crazier than Hogan’s goat” and than I might otherwise be. I welcome people providing me information and even offering suggestions and encouraging me in my life.

**Saved as April Welcome to my Words
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It makes me furious when someone tells me what I can and can't do or what I am allowed to eat or not allowed to eat. I believe our freedoms in this country include the right to make our own decisions even if we make bad choices.

Boudreaux went to his local priest to seek help with his troubled marriage. He explained that his wife was mean – real mean. He told Father that she had fooled everyone in the parish into thinking she was nice but deep inside she was a hateful soul. Boudreaux expressed real concern that Marie was trying to poison him.

Although the priest did not believe Boudreaux he agreed to meet with Marie in an effort to “discover” her dark side. After a few visits with Marie the priest was more sympathetic to Boudreaux’s plight. When Boudreaux asked, “Father, what should I do?” The priest humbly answered – “Drink the poison.” Enjoy your health.

April 12, 2007

Spring is in the air. The flowers are blooming, the grass is growing, the pecan trees have started to bud, and winter is nearly gone. We have had a few cold days but this is just Mother Nature’s way of keeping life interesting.

The way Father Time makes our lives an adventure is by his recycling of another time period – the Election season. In Louisiana politics is in the air and its making more people sick than the pollen. Some folks cry because of allergic reactions and a congested head. Most of us cry when we look at the state of affairs in our homeland, community, and nation and realize – is this all we have to choose from?

If you were alive in 2005 you know about Hurricane Katrina and the disaster that was the storm, its immediate aftermath, and the bungled recovery. You’ve seen and probably hurt with us as our Governor worked through a process of leadership she didn’t plan for and few if any would volunteer to endure.

We’ll elect a new Governor in November of 2008. The Republican candidate of note is Bobby Jindal – a Congressman and the losing candidate in the 2004 election. In 2004 he led the field throughout the campaign but was defeated by some interesting political tricks in the last days of the race – race being the operative word.

When Kathleen decided not to run – John Breaux (former U. S. Senator) announced his interest. The democrats were excited since no one thought Kathleen could beat Bobby but most felt John Breaux could / would. Breaux is the fair haired boy of the Democratic Party. In the top ten list of all time Louisiana Democrats – he’s number 4 or 5 – Huey Long, Russell Long, Edwin Edwards, and then John Breaux.

Friday night John Breaux announced he’s not going to run (polls showed he couldn’t win) and now the folks are speculating on the next contender – this is more exciting that guessing at the BCS contenders in College Football. For local posts

most already know the candidates – that’s the bad news. To protect myself from possible winners I won’t be too specific.

We have a parish wide official who most believe will or should go to jail – but if he runs he can win another term. One yet declared candidate for some to be named race has been paid hundreds of thousands of dollars annually by 6 or 8 companies in industries where he has influence. He needs a new position to continue the influence to keep his private sector jobs. Confused – you should be?

We have several candidates seeking to replace a representative criticized by many for spending time away from the session to feed the duck in Capitol Lake. The ducks are worried because of who might replace him. The debates for this race would make the Gong Show appear to be mature adult entertainment. One absolute - if Edwin Edwards were to be released from jail tomorrow he could win any race he entered (and in all likelihood would do better than most after he won).
April 13, 2007

Boudreaux had a physical and was diagnosed with a terminal condition. He told his son, T-boy to join him for a drink at the local bar. He explained that Cajuns have a drink when times are good and do the same when times are bad. After a few drinks Boudreaux talked openly about the terminal nature of his AIDS condition. Once T-boy and Boudreaux got home, T-boys asked about his comments – “Mais daddy, the doctor didn’t say you had AIDS.” Boudreaux says “I know dat but I don’t want nobody in town messin’ wit’ your momma once I’m gonna.”

Tonight we met at George and Carol’s for a “good time” drink. They returned yesterday from Houston following George’s quarterly check up. He got a clean bill of health and “yard leave” for another 90 days. Johnny was there, as was Lloyd, and yours truly. We sat under the stars and enjoyed a cool spring evening.

We ate and we drank but tonight our stomachs weren’t the focus – the future was. George’s looked bright again and that was all that mattered. George is a private guy and I’ve already said too much so I’ll just focus on the other folks there.

From a political perspective this gathering could have just as easily been a meeting of the John Birch Society. I’ve been accused of being to the right of Barry Goldwater and I was the socialist in this group. George has been on the Parish Council for many years and Lloyd served with him during much of this time.

The initial conversation centered on a breaking political scandal with the President of the Parish Council and evolved to a game of “topper” with reminders of preceding scandals that really make the current target of the investigation appear to be a rank amateur. As the night evolved we shifted from theory to practical solutions to the problems of higher education, race relations, and the decline of civilization. You had to be there or maybe it’s better that you weren’t.

Johnny is a character, a daddy and grandpa, a husband, a nurse, a nut, a successful businessman and one of the most offensive people you've never met. If you hear him talk you'd consider him as one of the most hateful guys you could ever know. If you scrape off the veneer of absurdity and know him as we do – you'd see a gentle, spiritual soul that would do anything he could for you. Johnny is married to Cathy – a patient soul who by marrying Johnny volunteered for her hell on earth. If she don't make it to heaven – none of us will either.

**Lloyd may be older than us but tonight he was the healthiest one there. He sells in the oil field, is a former politician, and is the keeper of Carmen. Carmen is Barbara Streisand of New Iberia – a late entrant to the community theater scene who is good and has stayed with Lloyd in spite of her recent celebrity and I'm sure better offers. Lloyd and Carmen have lots of kids and what amazes Sheila and me is that they really appear to still be in love after many years of marriage and surviving a large family. Lloyd must be good in bed or have money or Carmen needs to get out more.
April 14, 2007**

Friday night was good – a quiet evening on the Porch. Sheila, Carol, and Lily were there. Inside the house was not as quiet. George, Lloyd, Richard (Fang), Johnny, David, and me were holding court.

The night started simply – I had purchased “shrimp boudin,” marinated pork, and chicken sausage. Boudin and sausage are a part of our cuisine and culture and in their natural state they are made with pork. Tradition is big in this part of the world so a deviation from nature such as swapping chicken or shrimp for pork is not to be taken lightly.

I've never looked but I would not be surprised if the Bible in some chapter of the old Testament didn't mention the importance of pork in Boudin and the perversion created if you change this ingredient.

I doubt if Legnon's or other purveyors of Boudin and Sausage took it upon themselves to introduce this alternate lifestyle – it was probably necessitated by the fact that most lifetime pork eaters now have had bypasses or stents and their doctors or their wives no longer let them eat the bad stuff. The good news is that these are almost as tasty as the real thing.

A similar change in our eating patterns occurred in my youth when we transitioned from a selection of Boudin by color (red or white) to a white only society. PLEASE NOTE – in the same week when Don Imus was fired for a racial remark – White Only has nothing to do with race – its about the color of food. Red Boudin was also called blood sausage – I'm guessing this is all you care to or need to know.

This transition was dictated not by the demands of the people but more by the mandates of the Boards of Health. Another compromise we've had to endure is

hoghead cheese is no longer made from the head of the hog. Again probably more information than you need.

After beer and wine started flowing the conversation heated up more than the seasoning in our food. Unless we were quoting Imus the words “nappy headed” were not mentioned but every other offensive word and term were used – politically correctness does not exist on Weeks Street on Friday nights (not at my Porch or probably anyone else’s). We are like Imus however equal opportunity offenders – we insult family, friends, blacks, whites, browns, yellows, and reds.

Our opening (and closing act) was Fang (Richard). His topic du jour included his personal experiences with folks that shall we say may have offended him in some form or fashion in the past. Richard is funny – intense but funny. He can embellish a story like few others. His wife Mary is a Saint – she probably always was – she certainly has earned the title after living with Richard. Richard is much funnier on the nights Mary does not attend the party. Did I tell you Mary is a Saint!

April 15, 2007

Sheila and I drove to Opelousas on Saturday. I was scheduled to entertain, inform, and inspire (my words) a client company at their Annual Crawfish Boil. I’m struggling right now trying to decide if I should mention their Corporate Name. It would give them positioning and additional Brand Awareness in this Journal which once published will give them exposure in about 17 homes (if sales go as planned).

It could also cause me to lose a client since exposure in the 17 homes that this journal may occupy is probably not something this company (or any other company would want). I’ve made my decision – I won’t mention them but if Marc (the CEO is hurt by this I’ll do a second edition and edit them in!)

As we drove up I-49 to Opelousas I saw a giant red BP sign advertising gas at \$1.40. Since this was much less than I paid earlier in the week I got in line – a very long line. As I finally pulled to the pump to commence my purchase I asked “Is this a British Petroleum station – I thought their logo was green and yellow?” The owner answered – “Mais no – dis is BP – Boudreaux’s Place.”

I inquired why his prices were so low since most other stations were charging twice his rate. He explained – “dat his friends couldn’t afford dem high prices so he was selling gas by the half gallon.” I filled up and drove off with a smile.

We arrived at the event with plenty of time for me to prepare for my presentation. Talking for me comes easy – it’s the other issues that take time. I had to create a few drawings on a flip chart. I did my best – it took about 7 minutes. Sheila then spent the next half hour cleaning these up and making them legible and pretty. She’s continuing to help me become legible – she’s given up on me and pretty.

The program went well – if you can get them laughing in the first two minutes the next 20 won't be too painful. Entertain first – inform second. My topic was teamwork and relationships – my message was that People are Different. Celebrate and tolerate the difference and you'll do fine – try to change folks and you'd be better off trying “to shove a wet noodle up a wildcat's tail.”

To elicit laughter I used a tried and true story about Boudreaux walking into a Bar and approach a very attractive young lady – “Mais what's your name?” he asked. She responded my first name is Mary but I go by my middle name Carmen since it includes two things most important to me – Car and Men. ”What's your name?” completed her sentence. Boudreaux responded “Beer Sex.” Smile.

**The remainder of the afternoon included the best of the Cajun Culture – family, friends, food, fun, and hyperbole. Their were Crawfish, fried catfish, beer, hamburgers, beer, hot dogs, beer, and other things to eat and drink. Volleyball, fun jumps, Frisbees, and other activities were available to the kids and the adults still sober enough to try or too drunk to know better. It was fun – enjoy life it's short.
April 16, 2007**

Sunday morning as I walked down Indest Street near it's corner with Henry I saw a snake right near the sidewalk. Startled I started to jump over it but realized it was dead – I completed my jump because I don't like snakes even dead ones. My heart was beating fast. I was reminded how real the “fight or flight” response is in us.

Once Boudreaux was on a flight to Atlanta when the pilot let out a blood curdling scream. A minute or two later he came on the intercom to apologize and explain – “please excuse me – I accidentally spilled a cup of very hot coffee in my lap as we were taking off. You should see the front of my pants.” Boudreaux shouted back – “mais you should see the back of my pants.”

As I landed safely and recovered from my jump the snake experience I checked both the front and the back of my pants. All was OK. The good news is that I now had a topic for the day – Critters. One thing that most people from here, most visitors here, and most critics of here know about is our critters.

I just took a second to look up critter in the computer thesaurus – much to my surprise it means a living thing – often a child or an animal. My use of the word critter will be limited to animals (not children that act that way) with four or more legs or legless like the snake.

The perception of Louisiana as a Critter Haven is exaggerated a little. We do have our share but we don't have quite as many as most believe or fear. I've been asked on many occasions “How many alligators do you see on an average day while driving to work?” I'll answer with a number – sometimes the number is too low and sometimes it's too high. I can assure you that anyone who asks the question already believes that alligators are an every day peril.

Yesterday's update discussed boiled crawfish. Boiled crawfish are a delicacy – an epicurean delight. Live crawfish are critters. The problem is you've got to deal with the critters to get to the delight. Add to this edible critter list – crabs, shrimp (not threatening since they can come after you like a crab or crawfish), catfish, etc.

Oysters are not threatening since they just lay there but if a friend challenges you to eat one and you're not the adventurous type you might spontaneously declare "I won't eat that critter." Escargot and Calamari are snails and octopi but my sophisticated friends eat this so these are delights not critters.

Roaches, ants, mosquitoes, flies, caterpillars, etc. are critters. We yet celebrate the delicate beauty of the butterfly. Like the crawfish – it ain't good until it transitions from caterpillar to butterfly. Add all rodents - mice, rats, possums, tree rats (squirrels) etc. and you get the picture. I keep a ceramic armadillo at the house as a reminder that we would catch these in the yard growing up. An armadillo is merely a possum on the half shell. Watch out – what's that near your foot.

April 17, 2007

Yesterday was the day at Virginia Tech that will be forever remembered as the worst mass murder in American History (until someone breaks that record). I believe in God but if I was an atheist I think I would hope for God since I don't know what else can change the heart of this "generic being" we call man. I say often that life is good. I believe this. On days like yesterday – I question myself – then I remember Momma's sage advice – "everything happens for a reason..."

I remember the nursery rhyme. There was a little girl – who had a little curl – right in the middle of her forehead. When she was good – she was very, very good – and when she was bad – she was horrid. Life is good – very, very good – but when it's bad – it can be horrid. Yesterday was rough.

We were the direct descendants – the sons of the "greatest generation." We were blessed. Our parents anchored us with structure, example, and direction that have – I believe – served us well. I hope we have provided a similar legacy to our kids.

Ours was a "when you fall down, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and start all over again" world. Men / daddies of that era were the providers and the protectors – women / mommas in the context of men / daddies were protected and providers of love, balance, patience, encouragement and sometimes safe havens from daddies.

As a son – I heard "big boys don't cry" and "keep your eye on the ball and a stiff upper lip." I and my contemporaries I believe moved forward in the direction we were pointed. I think we are stoic – not to the extent of our daddies but stoic none the less. In the politically correct, sensitive, emotional, and I'm a victim world of today such rigid and rational responses are often criticized but this is who we are.

A few months ago and older friend who has enjoyed success by any conventional measure explained that in his twilight years he's struggling with depression. Our conversation was brief and "our generation" tends to avoid nosing in other people's business but I suspect part of our strength has turned on us as we get weaker and creates this self doubt that we did not acknowledge as "young bulls."

Another friend and personal hero of mine has expressed a profound curiosity about the nature of his father and his "ways." Their relationship is one of reticence – both probably have much to say but weren't socialized to say it. This same friend once expressed a passing concern to me that he might have been too strict with his sons. He doesn't doubt himself ever – except in the silence of his own soul.

Sunday a College roommate and I visited – he's in the middle of a family tragedy and doesn't have a clue how to handle it. He wasn't complaining and neither am I. The fact is that you don't learn to cry with a "stiff upper lip." Life is good – very, very good but when it is bad it's horrid. Be thankful for each day. I hope our kids learned the best from us and we can learn from them – the best there is. Peace!
April 18, 2007

It's Wednesday morning (not really – it's Sunday) but I'm alert enough today to remember Wednesday morning. On Wednesday I was headed to Portland Oregon for the quarterly Board of Trustees meeting for the National College of Natural Medicine (www.ncnm.edu). I've been a member of the Board for 9 years. This has been one of the most delightful experiences of my life. Most would consider this statement clear and convincing evidence of exactly how boring I am.

Normally I fly out on Thursday and return on Saturday. On this Friday we have a fund raising auction, dinner, and dance and so all activities have been pushed back a day. I'll arrive in Portland at about 11:30 and to the hotel by 1:00 p.m. Because of the event on Friday night we're staying at the Hilton in Downtown Portland.

Wednesday when I arrive the weather is clear and comfortable – there are blue skies, minimal clouds and 70degree temperatures. The Limo driver comments how "I've time this perfectly since it's been raining all week." Portland and rain in the same sentence are redundant but he's an immigrant and you have to give him latitude in the language.

Once I check in and grab a quick bite to eat I decide to walk to the NCNM campus on Ross Island. As I think I've mentioned before I'm directionally challenged – severely directionally challenged. I can get lost anywhere – anytime. The main building at NCNM is actually H shaped with crossover halls on the first and third floors (I think). I didn't realize this for the first 4 or 5 years and thus I couldn't figure out why I could never find the restrooms.

I started walking from the hotel it was 70 degrees and the sun was shining. I went two blocks and it had dropped 15 degrees and was raining. I hung out under the

awning at a Kinkos and then walked about 7 blocks to find my way back to the hotel 2 blocks away.

Portland itself is beautiful – very lush. The weather is comfortable – except on rare occasions. I’ve seen heavy snow one time and 95 degree temperatures another. Most buildings have heaters; not all have air conditioning. The community is as diverse as you may find anywhere. The streets are a gumbo of red, black, white, yellow, and brown faces. There are more hippies than Republicans – more Muslims than Catholics.

You’ll see more tattoos and bright red or dark blue hair than you might see at a Mardi Gras Parade. If someone mentions their “partner” don’t ask – they might be heterosexual, homosexual, or maybe even homo sapiens. Body piercings are very much in vogue – some folks have more stuff stuck in them than porcupines have sticking out of them. One night a friend introduced her date as “Bill, S. E.” – I innocently inquired as to the meaning of the S. E. certification. She responded – “Spouse Equivalent.” You’d like these folks – they’re different.

April 19, 2007

Boudreaux is as popular in Oregon as he is prevalent in Louisiana. Since I first joined the Board Boudreaux jokes have become part of the ritual. In the good old days we would stop the meeting periodically to insert a Boudreaux story onto the record. Now that we’ve reached a more sophisticated plateau in our governance, Boudreaux usually only joins us at the Board Dinner or on special occasions where the “world and wisdom” of Boudreaux is needed to make a point at the meeting.

Wally was our Board Chair for two years. He loved Boudreaux stories – after the meetings and a few drinks a selected few would sit and laugh the night away. About the last time I saw Wally he had broken a few ribs in a fall in his yard. He was “ace bandaged up” and in severe pain. He ask for a joke and I’d deliver. He’d grab his side as he laughed and with tears rolling down his face he said – “quit it Mike, you’re killing me.” When his laughter and the accompanying pain stopped – he would beg again “tell me another one.” Wally died a few years ago – I miss him.

I enjoy the diversity of NCNM even though occasionally it makes me crazier than I might otherwise be. Through the years most of the Board members have grown to embrace me and my redneck, unsophisticated, and backward ways. They know I’m harmless. The Board has been dynamic – fluid in it’s collective politics from the far left to me on the right.

The students and faculty are a different group that includes probably two or three people in the center, a few on the left, a very large bunch on the far left and the remainder of the group are Wackos that run the risk of stepping so far to the left that they complete the circle and end up on the right.

Once when I spoke to a group of students during a formal presentation I mentioned that as a young man I worked for my Uncle Claude at Gragnon's Wholesale. I described myself as a delivery BOY. Months later at a social function a fellow Board member pointed to a young black lady in the room. He explained, "Mike she hates you." Innocently, I asked "Why?" He explained she was offended by your use of the word "boy." I protested that I was talking about myself – I was not forgiven.

Later the Chair of the Board explained to me that it took her months to calm the student body down after my presentation because I had told "ethnic jokes." Digging a little deeper I realized that they were upset about my Boudreaux stories. I had prefaced my comments with the fact that the beauty of the Cajun people is that we are the last minority / ethnic group that still laughs at our selves. Again my sin was unforgivable. We're not one world. Sometimes we just can't communicate.

Boudreaux was approached one night by a lady of the evening who approached him about possible services. He asked how much and requested that she be specific. The lady said "for \$200.00 I'll do anything you can describe in three words." Boudreaux thought for a while, counted out ten \$20 bills and said – "Paint my house." Smile!
April 20, 2007

Over 30 years ago Johnny and Betsy got married. At the rehearsal supper Uncle Smitty offered a toast to the bride and groom. It was a cute rhyme – I can't remember all of it but I do remember the closing line said something about Betsy giving more than she got. I occasionally think about this when I'm at the College.

I've made great friends, added to my resume, been exposed to a world I didn't know existed, and have learned a lot. I've made probably 35 trips to the Great NW, eaten at some of the finest restaurants in Portland, and toured places that can't be accessed from New Iberia. I, like Johnny, have gotten a lot more than I've given.

In the meeting on Thursday and Friday we had two very interesting sessions. The first included discussions about the students of tomorrow and the generation gap that exists in our world today. The second program was about a positive means to enhance communications. This process is called Appreciative Inquiry.

These discussions parallel the "kinder / gentler world" discussed by President George H. W. Bush many years ago. When Buddy Roemer was Governor he had some New Age folks on his staff. These young guys and gals were seen wearing rubber bands around their wrists and popping these bands to relieve stress. In our discussions at meeting we often refer to the "woo-woo" side of the culture of NCNM.

Years ago when I was on a tirade about "why the students and faculty of NCNM didn't get it?" David one of our more successful Board members and an N.D. – free spirit conservative quickly wrote some notes on a 3 X 5" green card and passed it to me. (Please note the green was the color of the card – it was not tied to immigration or saving the environment.) It included the words: Volvo, Birkenstock, tree-

hugger, tie-dyed, etc. He smiled and said – “Mike these folks ain’t gonna change – relax. Let’s accomplish what we can within the culture that exists.”

David was right. Changing culture in an organization is very difficult if not impossible. It is certainly the most difficult thing a leader can do. I believe it can only occur if you change the people or change the people. If you don’t believe me consider the war in Iraq. We won the war in less than 100 days and at a cost of less than 100 lives. Now four years and 3,000+ lives later we have not impacted the culture – I’m not sure we ever will.

This leads to the one “cultural agreement” among our Board. I didn’t count ballots. I merely read body language. David was reporting on the difficulty adapting to the new “culture” of the millennial students – those after the Gen Xers. He mentioned their “helicopter parents” (hovering overhead) and parents as “stealth fighters” who come to the defense of the kids at the first text message. John a grandfather, retired College President, conservative, shook his head in disbelief. Ellen a 30 something, liberal, acupuncturists sat wide eyed and in awe of something so different from the independence all of us so desperately pursued out of high school.
April 21, 2007

“Don’t eat with your fingers.” “Keep your elbows off the table.” “Sit up straight.” “Wash your hands before you eat.” “Clean up after yourself.” As we say back home – my momma raised me right. These quotes were ringing in my ears on Thursday night when as a Board we ventured to a Moroccan Restaurant for our evening meal (I say supper, the other folks on the Board [except maybe John] say Dinner).

Although we’ve had many great meals at the finest restaurants in Portland during these 9 years – this night proved to be the most different and memorable. Understand this is not a cavalier statement – it was well thought out. This evening’s experience had to compete with such memorable occasions as the night we played “drink very much wine and kick around the conservative” or the night there were professional belly dancers or the night I was the highlight belly dancer (I made \$14 in tips – 4 ones and two fives) or the night I tested boiled Crayfish (note the spelling – these were out daddy’s crawfish) at Jake’s Famous Crawfish restaurant.

It was different because I had never eaten Moroccan before and memorable not because of the food or the setting but because of the memories that came flashing back to me during and after the meal. As we arrived Pauline warned me that we would have to eat with our hands. I got all excited because to a Cajun boy eating with your hands can only mean a few things – boiled crawfish, fried chicken, corn on the cob, hot dogs, or being drunk and not caring what your epicurean experience is like. It was different because it was none of these.

We arrived in an old part of Portland after suffering through the traffic on the streets so crowded I thought I was in New Delhi India not an American City. A camel would have been a welcome relief as alternate, more fuel efficient transportation.

We were then directed into the back and up the stairs of this old building that looked like something out of an old movie. The only thing missing was a water pipe and some old guy in a turban. It was decorated in what I would consider a “double wide at Christmas motif.” What appeared to be Christmas lights adorned the walls, There were cushions on the floor, tables sitting low that resembled the empty wire cable rolls we use for tables at camps back home. Bread was hidden in a basket that could pass for a sombrero in any Mexican restaurant.

After brief training, a few drinks to mute my sensibilities and proper manners and two “pourings” – one of a hot tea and honey flavored drink and one of water (clean I hope) to wash our hands the food arrived. We had chicken and apricots, kabobs of something, several rice dishes with meats and vegetables (we travel with vegans and vegetarians). Since my remaining words are limited just imaging a meal of red beans and rice, jambalaya, and dirty rice with no utensils. To add to the festivities these were shared servings. As I looked around I remembered Slade as a child throwing food from his high chair and John Belushi hollering “FOOD FIGHT.”
April 22, 2007

Saturday was travel day. One of the only challenges I face in Portland is the time difference. Portland is Pacific time and Louisiana enjoys Central time. I’ve always been an early riser. I get up about 4:30 every morning – without an assistance. I only set an alarm clock if I need to wake up before 4:30 to catch a plane. At my age and boredom stage nothing else happens before 4:30 a.m. If you are flying out of Lafayette Louisiana you schedule your life around a few flights not a few flights scheduled around your life.

My challenge in the west is that I’m two ahead of everyone at night and worse than that two hours ahead of everyone in the morning. When we meet for an evening meal at 7:00 it’s really 9:00 to my stomach so I’ve had lunch – late lunch – an early evening snack – warm milk so I can sleep and then we go out for dinner. I get to bed around 10 or 11 p.m. which is really 1 or 2 a.m. my time. The dilemma is then that I still wake up at 4:30 a.m. Louisiana time which is 2:30 Portland time.

Friday night was the auction and banquet. I had an unusually early flight on Saturday so I had to get up at 4:00 a.m. Portland time. The Limo driver appeared at 4:30 – when I travel I only take 30 minutes to get ready because I don’t do my hair or fix my face. I don’t care what the world thinks – I just go comfortable.

I like traveling – I hate airports. First you must suffer through the humiliation of trying to get an e-ticket out of the machine. As mentioned earlier I’m still impressed by carbon paper so anything that can answer my questions and look me in the eye frustrates the “bejeezus” out of me. Then I get to watch someone or something

inspect my luggage – underwear and all. In Lafayette it's done manually and in Portland and most other places they have something called X-ray type machines that do this electronically.

The final stage of the pre-frustration process is the stand in line, walk through the buzzer, and finally the “pat down.” To most of you this is the security gate. We all share the stand in line part and some of you may sound the buzzer as you go through the metal detector – you then find your glasses in your pocket, a necklace you forgot to take off or change in your pocket – you remove this and walk through again. No buzz – you're merrily on your way. I ALWAYS sound the alarm.

I have a titanium hip – take that \$6,000,000.00 man. It sounds the alarm and I get patted down. I now look forward to it. There's this special man at the Portland airport with really soft hands (just kidding). Then in about an hour you get to become part of a “blippit” – a “blippit” is 2 pounds of boudin squeezed into a 1 pound skin. Airlines tries to squeeze 600 – 800 pounds of people into seats made for only 450 pounds. Hopefully your co-sardines bathed.

At airports I have two pleasures – the first is people watching and second and most important is being able to Thank our men and women in uniform. Please do this.
April 23, 2007

At USL many decades ago a favorite getaway was Ferdinand Stutes on Ridge Road. If memory serves me correctly this was a bar, grocery store, barber shop, gas station, Justice of the Peace, Notary and probably other departments that were not as well marketed as the aforementioned services.

The idea that Taco Bell and KFC can co-exist under one roof or that Subway, Popeyes, and a convenience store can operate around one set of restrooms is not marketing genius, it's not innovation (as Mr. Stutes proved) – it is not a novelty - it is merely an idea whose time has come and has finally been embraced - convenience.

Earlier this week I was driving down Lewis Street and noticed what appeared to be a grass skirt wrapped around the awning covered patio at Danna's Bakery. Danna's Bakery is a long established business here in town. Candidly the name bakery might be a misnomer – “fryery” might be more appropriate. I've been there many times and can't remember ever buying something baked.

I have enjoyed donuts, apple fritters, and cinnamon twists on occasion but I can assure you these weren't baked. These were morsels of delight wrapped in trans-fat. These were evidence as to why we are fat and of limited health but happy.

Some believe places like Danna's, Meches, Jud's, etc are fronts for non-violent terrorist who are trying to bring down our society 1,000 calories at a time. Others contend that these are offsite marketing arms of major and minor hospitals, cardiovascular groups and their allies in the war on fun – the cardiologists.

A few of us correctly acknowledge that this is merely a tradition – part of our culture that makes life in this part of the world so unique. I wonder if we actually die sooner than others in this world or do others just think their life is longer since they don't live life one mouthful at a time.

I watch my health nut – vegetarian and vegan friends and their enablers the “joggers” fight the war on fat, struggle with skinny, and exercise to obsession only to die healthy. I also laugh as Big David leaves the wake of a colleague who did everything right in this race we call life – everything that is except finish last. My full figure friends have buried more skinny ones than skinny ones have buried the epicureans of earthly existence.

**I digress or really I just needed to stretch a subject with limited substance sufficiently to create 543 words. I stared as I drove by realizing that the perceived grass skirt on the railing was more an attempt to thatch the exterior of the patio and frame a new sign indicating Bubba's Crab Shack. Forget Taco Bell and KFC or Popeyes and Food and Fun – the truly unique marketing joint venture of this country is Danna's now a donut shop and crab shack! I challenge any of you to find a place that can kill you with sugar or red pepper. God I love this place. Let's eat!
April 24, 2007**

Big families are a tradition in Louisiana. There is a large Catholic population in this part of the world and the firm stand on birth control has had its impact. Add to that the rural nature of this state and having extra help around the farm was never a bad thing. In a world of hired hands – having plenty of “free” hands is better than a few “hired” ones.

What got me thinking of this was a brief conversation with Laurie one of Warren's sisters. She mentioned her big family. When I asked for specifics she mentioned that her Momma had 17 pregnancies in 18 years and lost 7 to miscarriages. Wow! Don't let me hear one momma or one daddy express their frustration or exhaustion with their only child.

Sheila came from a big family – she was an only child but her Momma was one of 10. If memory serves me correctly Uncle Riley – her Momma's oldest brother was only 13 years younger than their mother. She outlived several husbands and “raised those kids right.” They grew up poor – real poor by today's standards but if you listen to their memories of childhood you might celebrate the wealth of their life and living. Today they might all be deaf from listening to I-pods instead of having their shared musical talent from singing together since singing don't cost nothing.

Charlie and I were in the Army together. He was the baby of the family. He was number 13. He broke the tie between the existing 6 boys and 6 girls. Charlie explained that his daddy died shortly after he was born and his momma went deaf a

little time later. Once Charlie went off to college her hearing returned. The doctor called it a miracle. I consider it good luck.

Nancy, a Mormon not a Cajun but included in this story because with this experience she could be was the mother of 6 children under the age of 7. She was in a grocery store with the 6 kids in “tow” and a shopping basket and another basket for the groceries. A man approached and asked if all of these were hers – she answered yes. He said – “good start.”

In terms of “birds of a feather flock together” the great big family story has already been told in earlier updates. When Bobby married Brenda it was a celebration of family – not just a family but REALLY BIG families.

Brenda was one of 10 children. Tim – Brenda’s first husband was one of 10. Bobby was one of 10. As a side note Bobby’s Momma (Miss Sister) died when Bobby was in the 8th grade and her oldest son Ray was a senior in high school and the youngest was an infant. Another advantage of big families is that they take good care of each other. Rene – Bobby’s first was the anomaly – I think she had only 4 or 5 siblings.

Mr. Smitty the Catholic father of 10 or 11 was asked if he practiced birth control. He explained he used the rhythm method. He said, “See all my little musical notes.”
April 25, 2007

My goal with this process parallels the twin faces of Mardi Gras – laughter and tears. Hopefully most of the time these tirades, translations, tidbits, etc. make you smile, bring joy, or evoke a belly laugh. Sometimes topics are sad – I can tell if I cry when I write them. Life is good but on occasion it can be tough or touching. I occasionally touch on politics not too take a position but more to acknowledge its intimacy with our culture. And as with the aforementioned observations Louisiana politics will make you laugh or cry.

Today may be the only time or hopefully one of the few times I’ll dig into controversy and maybe even make you mad. Understand – that is my intent.

Today was Cover the Uninsured Week sponsored by the Department of Insurance and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana. This is the 3rd time I’ve participated in the conference. It is a well intentioned effort to create awareness of and hope for a solution to a major problem that faces all of us as individuals and this country in the aggregate – Health Care and Health Care Financing.

As I’m assuming you’ve noticed we’ve got a major problem – a problem of cost, quality, and access. On a purely personal note – I know the cost we pay each month for health insurance. I have a brother in job lock because of his need for health insurance for his wife and Lily struggles to find coverage for herself in a post-COBRA world. Sheila needed a simple test and had to wait over a month for access. Quality is the hope of us all yet the reality is the care we receive often does not meet

our expectations – sometimes we know it – sometimes we don't. The good news is that often it also exceeds these expectations.

What follows are my closing comments after my prepared remarks. Our Health Care (HC) system is broken. I don't believe it can be repaired incrementally. I believe the system need to change at its core. I hope we don't allow the current system to collapse before we create the new. Here are the facts – today a family of four pays about \$11,400.00 for their health insurance through their group. If this trends at 8% inflation the premium will double in 9 years. This is also in advance of the aging boomers, the obesity crisis, and the accelerating cost of technology.

What is amazing is that none of the stakeholders - doctors, hospital administrators, your local pharmacist, patients, employers, premium payers, taxpayers, etc. - are happy with the current system. NO ONE LIKES THE STATUS QUO. Yet suggest change and each of these stakeholders will “bow up” and say “that won't work.”

Hurricane Katrina destroyed the status quo of HC in Louisiana. We had a once in a lifetime opportunity to rebuild a new system – a better system from scratch with a federal government ready, willing, and able to innovate. Unfortunately when the legislature adjourns in June they will have recreated the system everyone hates. Think about it – become involved. We've put a man on the moon. We can fix this.
April 26, 2007

Are you Robert Redford? I hear this often in my own mind. One time I was stopped and asked this question. In the name of truth in journalism I must confess that I set up this inquiry. I was scheduled to meet a person at a meeting. She asked what I looked like. I said, as I always do – “I like to think of myself as a tall Robert Redford. I'm about 6 feet 2 inches tall.”

I continued - “I have reddish complexion, and strawberry blond hair. What may appear to you as gray is actually mold on the strawberry. The spot in the back that is skin colored is actually a treatment I use to make myself appear more mature.” On occasion I will blame the skin color on scar tissue from a war injury. The truth may set you free but in the world of self promotion one needs to embellish a story.

In the name of truth in advertising, I am 6' 2” and I do weigh about 220 pounds. My hair once was strawberry blond – now it's sort of Ole Miss colors – gray and red. The hair is gray the skin surrounding it or overwhelming it is red. I suffer from furniture disease – my chest has fallen in my drawers. I can also promise you that no one has ever asked Robert Redford if he Manes. Such is life...

When survivors such as myself reach our 60 birthday (soon to be – November 17), we start reflecting on life. We search for meaning, balance, comfort, aspirins, and our daily medications. We start to think about what's real. In the last few days you've seen a few updates that realize I understand that “my life is good” is an

attitude I embrace and I believe. It is also seasoned and tempered by the fact that even a good life can be or often is “hard.”

The link between these paragraphs is the bridge between fantasy and reality. Today is a group is shooting a movie in New Iberia. The movie is based upon one of James Lee Burke’s David Robichaux’s novels. I think it’s called the Electric Mist. But don’t be “shocked” if I “misted” the name. (Sorry I couldn’t resist.)

Last night I walked for my daily exercise. I had a hair cut day before yesterday so I looked unusually good. About half way through my adventure it started to rain and so I sought cover in Clementines Restaurant and Bar. I had a glass of wine and waited for the weather to subside. I must also admit that I sat their hoping to be discovered by some movie director much like a teenage ingénue at a soda fountain in the local drug store. No such luck.

The rain stopped. My new “do” was a mess so I headed home. This morning when I walked they were actually shooting scenes. My first thought was the U. S. Congress – there were dozens of young laborers (I learned \$10 an hour) scrambling about getting all the work done) – the stars would arrive pampered for a 10 minute shoot and they and the money folks would retreat to a safe haven and the \$10 guys and gals continued to labor in the sun. Sounds like staff, Congressmen / women, and lobbyist to me. What about you?

April 27, 2007

Several tidbits on the Internet and in Today’s papers had convinced me to write about our animal friends. I will do so. As I reviewed the comics the Zits cartoon – I flashed back to my youth and the animal that may have had the most influence in my life. This was my horse Sham. I owned this beautiful stallion for about 48 hours. After that I owned Sham – a beautiful gelding for several years.

The Zits cartoon shows Hector (a teenager) obsessing that everyone thinks he’s a “good boy” and he knows that teenage girls like “bad boys.” Much to his chagrin he now realizes that he is every girl’s mom’s dream. Jeremy (the main character in Zits) attempts to offer direction with the words “a good reputation is hard to overcome.” I too was a good boy. I attributed it to fairly conservative parenting and my extremely shy personality.

Only now as I prepare to write about animals do I realize that Sham was the reason for my “goodness.” I remember vividly the day we brought Sham to the farm and secured him in the corral. Twenty minutes into his new life as my horse – he gets a sniff of an old blind mare in the pasture. Sham crashes through the 1” X 12” boards that made up the corral fence. I stared in horror screaming “bad boy.”

The next day Dr. Reaux appeared at the farm to “slow down” this bad boy by removing his – how can I say this delicately – his manhood. I didn’t realize it until

this morning but my “good boy” image was a practice act – a choice based upon the fact that being a stallion is a better alternative than being a “bad boy.” Such is life.

Back to the update – an item on the Internet explains that dogs communicate by wagging their tails and another item mentioned that anti-depressants have been approved for dogs. I can remember vividly that in Germany the dogs were much more calm – they rarely barked. I don’t know if their culture back then was more relaxed or if this had more to do with their reasonable marijuana laws.

Smiley’s column in the Advocate also talked about Saturday being National Veterinary’s Day and “Vets being more than animal doctors.” One page later is a picture of a deformed crawfish – his left claw has about 6 parts instead of two. As a “good boy” momma would have told me “don’t stare.”

One last thought – Sheila brought a cocker spaniel into our family when we first met. Babito had an attitude. He’d growl, snap, bark, and once he even “peed” on me while I slept (maybe he didn’t see my goodness). One day our Vet heard me say he’s snap at people. The vet told me this was “bad” and obviously our dog had emotional problems. Being the good person I am – I asked for help.

**The Vet suggested counseling. He wanted to come to the house and watch Sheila, Babito, and me interact and then he’d provide family counseling for \$60.00 an hour. I rolled up a newspaper instead and became more of a disciplinarian – “bad dog.”
April 28, 2007**

Grits is good. Grits are good. Grits is / are a cultural icon. In recent years grits have also become an acronym for Girls Raised In The South are GRITS. GRITS is Girls Raised In The South. This gets so confusing.

Grits create(s) a dual debate. The first issue is it single or plural. The second is more of a territorial issue (much like the Civil War) – what is grits or why don’t you know about grits? From the Civil War perspective Blue states ask what it is and Gray states question your ignorance – dumb Yankees!

To add fact so normally absent to these observationals I’ll quote Merriam Webster. “Grits pl.n. corn or other grain, soybeans, etc. ground more coarsely than for flour or meal; esp., in the South, hominy ground coarsely; grits are eaten as porridge, a a side dish, in casseroles.” Based upon my interpretation – the “Grits are” folks win.

Smiley Anders offers a column (he offers its tough - for him to even give it away is an accomplishment) each weekday morning in the Advocate. It is more of a compilation of stuff sent in by his readers and Smiley by his own admission assembles it and takes credit for their genius. One day last week one contributor was reminiscing about Grits, fried grits and voila an idea for an update.

As a son of the South I love grits. I always have and I'm assuming I always will. In my earlier – less sophisticated and untraveled life I was so naïve as to ask for grits when I went North or West of the Mason Dixon Line. I have been corrected enough now that I don't even ask.

Unfortunately with the popularity of the Sun Belt and the hordes of Yankees that have descended upon us (probably running from Oatmeal) some Southern Cities no longer offer grits in their restaurants. Thank God most small towns still do! Save your Dixie Dollars the South will rise again – a ban on Grits may be the provocation.

Enough politics – back to the topic at hand – Grits. Momma used to fry grits. As Smiley's reader / writer mentioned, leftover grits from supper were placed in a shallow dish and put in the refrigerator to cool and to solidify. The next day the grits were cut into small pieces and fried in oil or bacon fat. Hot fried Grits were then dipped in syrup (preferably Steen's from Abbeville) and consumed in vast quantities. Remember down here anything worth eating is worth eating in vast quantities. Anything not good is not worth wasting our time or stomach space on!

**I remember Coach Corky (from Kansas) discussing his first visit to a South Louisiana Café for breakfast and asking in dismay – “What's that white stuff on my plate?” The other extreme is John Wesley (his first name) explaining that when Ms. Bea died and he and Mary drove down from Nebraska for the funeral, he had on thought on his mind – “Miss Teenie's” Cheese Grits. Grits to die for – literally!
April 29, 2007**

I'm still playing catch up from my computer being down and my trip to Portland so the date on this page may not match the events described. In the name of truth in journalism I'm declaring this upfront. The world is not perfect and neither am I. The world is a continuum of chaos interrupted occasionally by calm and normalcy.

The stress that we read about, feel, and discuss ad infinitum is caused by the fact that most people want a world of calm and normalcy rarely – if ever – interrupted by chaos. We like our status quo – we don't like change. As Maxine once said in her comic strip – “change is good as long as I don't have to do anything different.”

The problem is many people are unwilling and unable to accept this reality of chaos and so they scratch out for their life a safety net or comfort zone in their economic world where they spend about 25% of their time. This is called in the immediate their job and in the long term their hope - their career.

A few of us and I'm proud to include myself in this number like the edge – we like chaos and would rather live free than live safe. We are the entrepreneurs and sales people of the world. I'm talking about the commissioned sales people that only eat what they kill – not the salaried folks that are subsidized on each daily hunt.

This may be the longest introduction to an update yet. I've carefully crafted this document to celebrate Floyd – New Iberia's first husband, a dear friend, and one of the best salespeople I've ever met. Floyd doesn't live on the edge – he lives past the edge and occasionally ventures to the edge to visit with his security driven friends and family who live safely in their jobs.

Floyd was fired two Mondays ago and re-employed or re-engaged on a Friday 12 days later. Floyd worked harder during those 12 days than many folks do in 2 months in safe jobs. You see Floyd knew that he still had to eat and to do so he had to kill so he needed to be out scouting the next prospect or deal. Life for the salesperson or entrepreneur is many things but secure isn't one of them. His friends ask "if he's crazy?" I know he's not – he just loves the rush of the game. Floyd will survive as will I. What follows – is the Entrepreneurs' Creed – it says it all.

**I do not choose to be a common person. It is my right to be uncommon- if I can. I seek opportunity - not security. I do not wish to be a kept citizen, humbled and dulled by having the state look at me. I want to take the calculated risk, to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I refuse to barter incentive for a dole; I prefer the challenges of life to the guaranteed existence: The thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of Utopia. I will not trade my freedom for beneficence nor my dignity for a handout. I will never cower before any earthly master nor bend to any threat. It is my heritage to stand erect, proud and un-afraid; to think and act for myself, to enjoy the benefit of my creations and to face the world boldly and say: This, with God's help done. All this is what it means to be an Entrepreneur. (Unknown)
April 30, 2007**

Today I took Momma to see Mr. Louie. She went to tell him bye. Mr. Louie was mentioned earlier in this process. He's the father of Pat and my long since deceased (1971) friend Paul. He is a second daddy to me. He and Miss Mickey were and are great influences in my life.

Mr. Louie is 94. He's near the end of this earthly voyage. His bags are packed and I'm sure he's ready to go. Time and pain have taken their toll on this once active and proud man. He's diminished in size but not in character. His handshake is still firm but his ability to stand and look you in the eye has been gone for some time now. Watching him float in and out of a comatose state convinced me that he feels the eternal cruise liner is late and he'll get on as soon as it arrives.

Miss Mickey was resting after spending last night in the hospital recovering from the effects of aging and watching her beloved Louie waste away before her very eyes. Miss Mickey is energy captured by skin - enthusiasm personified and sometimes controlled. Earlier I think I mentioned "Miss Mickey doesn't greet you when you enter her house – she celebrates your arrival by squealing your name – MMMiiiiikkkeee! I guess you have to be there to fully understand it. Remember Mimi Pearl yelling Howdee! That's Miss Mickey.

Momma has been friends with them all of her adult life and I think she's known Mr. Louie longer than that. Momma is to calm what Miss Mickey is to energy. Momma's pace parallels Mr. Louie and balances Miss Mickey. Momma stands only about 4 feet 5 inches tall (down from her towering early adult height of 4 feet 11 inches.) At a hospital bed she's about up to the side railing. The sitter lowered the railing so Momma could stand and hold Mr. Louie's hand.

He recognized her – she knew him. She held not just his hand but the collective hands of her contemporaries now mostly absent from the room. I believe Miss Fran and Mr. Emerson were there, as were Miss Arte and Mr. Donald, Miss Millie, etc. She was not in the moment but was vacillating between yesterday and tomorrow.

Mr. Jacob - Mr. Louie's contemporary and half of the "Southern Gentlemen" bookends that he and Mr. Louie personified once said when you get over 70 your life is a series of visits to the funeral home. You spend your time burying your friends – it's what you do. He was not bitter – he was merely defining his reality.

I asked Momma if she was ready to go. She said she was. She told Mr. Louie good bye with a lie that is something that rarely if ever crosses her lips – she said, "I'll see you again soon." I believe she knew that if her comments were meant for this world she was "fibbing" – if she meant it on a more eternal plane – she was being honest.

I left realizing that Ozzie and Harriet are dead. We shouldn't mourn their loss but rather celebrate their life. They had a great run. Good bye Mr. Louie. I love you.