



May 1, 2007

Last Saturday, Sheila and I joined Johnny and Cathy for a night on the town. Johnny had tickets for a PBS sponsored event in Bator Rouge. This was the Celtic Woman Concert at the River Center. For you ole time folks the River Center is the Centroplex near the downtown municipal complex – redesigned and renamed now that Baton Rouge is the largest city in the state - thank you Hurricane Katrina.

We arrived about 6:30 and spent a few minutes searching for a parking place. Finally we realized the futile nature of our efforts and joined the masses by parking in the enclosed garage.

I was reminded of Boudreaux late for a very important meeting and desperately searching for a place to park. As it became obvious that a spot was not going to be found – he began praying or maybe bargaining with God by pleading, “God if you’ll help me find a place right now – I won’t miss mass on Sunday for the rest of the year and I’ll say my rosary every night.” About that time a car backs out to make room for Boudreaux’s truck – he closes the negotiations by saying – “Mais God dat’s all right – I found a space on my own.”

Since Johnny and Cathy fly first class they also had tickets for a pre-concert reception at the old State Capitol. We journeyed by foot around the building testing every closed entrance until in a last attempt we found the one open gate. The old State Capitol looks more like a Castle from King Arthur’s day than the butcher shop of state government where more “pork” was delivered than possible any other place of equivalent size in America.

We grazed, enjoyed a drink or two, and listed to the kilt dressed bag pipe crew and then headed back to the concert hall. As I ate appetizers including carrots, potatoes, and stuffed cabbaged I couldn’t help buy wonder if these had been gathered off of Magazine Street following the St. Patrick’s Day parade.

The River Center was near capacity. A crowd like this would have been expected for a basketball game but for a cultural event – this was shocking. The show was fabulous – it included a multi-sensory experience beyond the “sit and listen” events that Sheila sometimes makes me attend. There were colorful costumes, a light show, a haze settling over the stage and to my surprise no popcorn boxes being thrown.

The background singers and drummers were good – the singers were great. Four attractive young ladies sang individually and as a group throughout the evening – each capturing their moment. The show however was stolen by the fiddle playing phenom – more like an energizer bunny than a concert “violinist.” She combined the best of two great classics – she was like a “fiddler on a hot tin roof.” She exhausted you just watching. When Danny Boy was sung I flashed back to Will’s graveside during his funeral when his friend Rob sang the same song to a teary eyed crowd of friends. This night the tears were of joy! Thanks Johnny and Cathy.
May 2, 2006

Sheila and her Momma ventured back to Monroe this week. They went to pick up some sentimental pieces of furniture for her Momma to furnish her room here in our home. The decision has been made – her Momma, Lela (Mimi) is here to stay. Monroe will be “where’s she from” no longer “where she lives.”

Mimi sold her car a few weeks ago and the house will go on the market soon. This was a last trip to home as she knew it. I was a bachelor for two nights. This meant that I needed to find my own food, drink, and entertainment before I fell asleep on the couch about 7:30 p.m. About the only risk I run during these bachelor fests is that I might starve to death by failing to eat before I go to sleep.

On Monday night I had my first beer at Mulligans a new Irish Pub in New Iberia. I don’t know if there are that many Irish lads and lasses in New Iberia but we don’t count noses when it’s about creating a new bar. It was nice. Leon, Bobby, and David were there – as was Andy the local drug pusher (I mean pharmacist). Andy’s drug of choice was whiskey – everyone else had beer.

After a drink we convoyed down Iberia Street to the Oyster and Sushi Bar at Bojangles. Leon, Bobby, and I made the trip. Andy went home for no good reason except maybe to get away from us. David didn’t join us since ex-wife is the hostess.

We ordered salads had a drink and exaggerated to each other. Leon and I are lifelong friends, classmates from elementary and high school and college roommates. Bobby is younger and has known Leon forever. Bobby and his wife Jan are Katritians (evacuees from New Orleans). Jan’s a doctor and was trapped in one of the New Orleans hospitals immediately following the storm. Her stories are intriguing, scary, and really sad. Life is good but not everybody in life is.

On Tuesday I returned to Main Street for a Po-Boy at Clementines. The salad was good on Monday night and the Po Boy was great. I should eat salad every night – if

I ate Po Boys every night – I have to live faster because there wouldn't be as many tomorrows as I might otherwise enjoy. But what a way to go – fat and happy.

Sheila and her Momma made it home Thursday – tired but with their Mission Accomplished. The furniture arrived Friday and will be full arranged by Monday. Sheila and her mother are not the emotional folks in our family but this was a trip that evoked some tears, joy, and heartache. It was an acknowledgement of a life lived and a commitment to the tomorrow in a new town, a new house, and with new hope. Sheila and her Momma have “made nice” better these last few months than in all the previous years. Mommas and daughters are more complex than Daddies and sons – at least where I come from.

**Sheila said that Lela cried her heart out as they left the house for the last time. This is as it should be – home is where the heart is and stays. Monroe was home.
May 3, 2007**

Today I drove to Monroe on a one day turn around. This about a 440 mile drive (round trip) in the country briefly interrupted for a meeting and lunch. The bad news is that it makes for a long day. The good news is that it also makes for a paycheck. This was a client funded drive.

Joe and I met in Lafayette and drove from there. Joe is the heir apparent to a job I don't want and wouldn't be very good at even if I had it. I've been rehabilitating an insurance agency for much of the past year and now it's time to complete the transition from “picking out a casket,” to ICU, to rehabilitation, and hopefully soon – reentering the competitive marketplace.

I ran this agency in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was the best graduate course in life, business, and organizational culture that I ever took. I was naïve. I believed that good ideas or more correctly ideas that I thought were good would be celebrated and embraced by everyone. I didn't know that people were different – different values, different personalities, different motivations and different agenda.

I also didn't realize that organizations – the groupings of these aforementioned different people – also were different. Organizations have personalities – now most folks call this their “culture.” What I was trying to do then was to get bankers and insurance agents to think alike and act alike. Did I say I was naïve?

Bankers are not risk takers. They are money merchants. They buy and sell or at least lend cash. To them risk is bad. In the then world of banking – regulation was the dominant force – not competition. Sameness prevailed. Add to this reality was the fact that bankers were working their way through the worst period in their worlds' since the Great Depression.

Insurance agents thrive on risk. I was an agent. I was brash – too smart for my own good and choosing to run down the hill versus walking more cautiously like the

wise “old bull” mentioned weeks ago. To be fair to myself – very few people had experience in this new world of BancAssurance. It was and is an inevitable change – unfortunately I ultimately found myself on the “bleeding edge versus the leading edge.” I didn’t know what I didn’t know. I failed. I burned out in the effort.

Fast forward nearly 20 years to today – insurance and banking have changed as have the agents and bankers that populate these industries. Now it is starting to happen - not exactly like I proposed but close enough that you can see what we tried yesterday in the experiments of today. Joe was with me to learn about the opportunity. He now knows what I didn’t know. I think he’ll be successful.

Joe is close in age to me but he’s not been burned out and burned up. He has the enthusiasm of a novice but the scar tissue of a veteran. If he can stay focused – he’ll help write a chapter in the New World of tomorrow. Good luck Joe.

May 4, 2007

Friday night was quiet on the Porch. We had a few folks show up. Leon was there - Anne is out of town. Johnny and Cathy brought fried shrimp for the masses. Lloyd and Carmen were there as were _____ (previously banned for life from mention in this observational) and Vicki. George came briefly with his daughter-in-law in waiting, Nano. Charlie and David also meander in during the evening.

About half way through the evening my cousin Patrick and his wife Lucy showed up. They were in for Aunt Mazie’s birthday. The weather was comfortable and the mosquitoes were missing in action. This was one of the few times when the Porch party happened exclusively on the Porch.

We had wine, beer, whiskey, chips, sausage, fried shrimp and oysters and ice cream sandwiches. When you gather a group of dynamic young women with their collective “old fart” husbands you must expect an eclectic menu. We didn’t have any beef on the menu but the “bull” on the Porch was overwhelming.

The topic du jour was the “Electric Mist” movie being shot in New Iberia. This is a James Lee Burke story about his local hero David Robichaux. It so happens that Tommy Lee Jones the star of the show is renting the home of _____ and Vicki. Renting their home was the second best decision _____ ever made – marrying Vicki was his first.

Each of us embellished our personal experiences with the movie, the stars, and / or the experience. Carmen is a local celebrity. We consider her the Barbara Streisand of Iberia Parish. She is a frequent player in presentations by the local theater groups. She is good. She does have a speaking role in the movie. I think she tells David to bring her some food. Look it may not be academy award stuff but think of the hundreds of millions of folks in this country who never will be in a movie.

_____ and Vicki are under a non-disclosure agreement regarding their

house and their temporary tenants. Fortunately for them the word is already on the street about everything everyone from Hollywood says and does. The fact that _____ can't keep a secret is moot. Vicki is sensitive to the spirit and the letter of the agreement. She wouldn't share what she knew.

This is small town America – there are no secrets. Even if people could or would keep quiet – the local would create rumors more salacious than the facts. _____ is very conservative and the fact that Tommy Lee Jones once roomed with Al Gore is disturbing to all of us. If Al were to visit his old classmate at _____'s house he'd call a priest to exorcise the liberal spirits from his home.

One day I watched the locals watch Tommy Lee Jones shoot a scene where he jumped from his truck and ran into Theriot's Grocery store. They were upset because Tommy Lee didn't wave back to them when he jumped out. Duh?
May 5, 2007

Most of us in business have heard of the K.I.S.S. principle. This stands for Keep It Simple Stupid or Keep It Simple Sir or Sister (if you're politically correct and appropriately sensitive). Today was a simple day. This is good

I took my morning walk for my exercise and returned by way of Meche's for a couple of hot glazed donuts for Lela. Lela has lost her appetite and is struggling to maintain her "fighting weight." She's so thin right now that she has to stand twice to make a shadow. From the side and sticking her tongue out she looks like a zipper. She also proves that even to people who can't taste Meche's donuts and Blue Bell ice cream are still good. These are the only things she eats consistently.

I then ventured to Mary's for Coffee and the intellectual stimulation, sophisticated exchanges, and personal growth that always accompanies such a venture. It was quiet (relatively speaking) there as well. Buster, George, and Johnny were playing golf. Attendance was limited to Mary, Sylvia, Marla, Butsy, T-Model, Rob, Robert, Charlie, and me.

Conversations ranged from nuclear physics to global warming, social justice to the core differences in the great religions in the world, Tommy Lee Jones and the Electric Mist, the who and what we liked to who and what we didn't like and why we didn't like them. Seriously you can't appreciate one of these events unless you are drunk, crazy, bored, or just like the folks there. Boudin and Banana Bread were served in generous portions.

Sheila had made homemade soup during the morning (she must be seeing her boyfriend again and feeling guilty because she never cooks on Saturday) so I stopped and picked up Miss Peggy and Momma on the way home. We fed them on the Porch and left them to wait in anxious anticipation of the 4:00 alcohol call. About 2:30 a horde of Landry's by birth or marriage descended upon the porch.

Mazie, my Aunt, our next door neighbor, the widow of Booz or Boozoo (one person – not some sort of bigamist), and the matriarch of our branch of the Landry Family is celebrating her 80th birthday on Sunday. All of her children were in for the event – they are devoted to their Momma and concerned if they didn't show up they might get stuck with a disproportionate share of the bill from Clementine's for the party. I suspect they also wanted multiple scouts at Clementine's to be to count meat pies, asparagus wraps, meat balls, and wine bottles to make sure that Wayne didn't overcharge or someone else didn't take the leftovers.

**Martin and his wife Paula and daughter Dana (all from Atlanta) arrived followed by Patrick and Lucy (no children) from Hartford by way of Toronto, Halifax, Denver, and Los Angeles and Joseph from Houston - the single son with good sense – no wife or children. The locals Paul and his wife Mary and Jimmy and Kathy and their kids missed out so we talked bad about them. Life is simple and good.
May 6, 2007**

Happy Birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday Aunt Mazie – happy birthday to you! How old are you? How old are you? The question maybe awkward but the answer is eighty. Again in my efforts to assure truth in journalism (a new concept) I must clarify that Aunt Mazie's birthday is May 12 but the party – the most important part of any birthday is on the 6th. Clementine's was the place – the place for the party and the place to be in New Iberia on today.

Aunt Mazie was the wife of Boozoo, the mother of my aforementioned cousins, my Aunt and a very significant part of my life. Her greatest contribution to date however was in her sons and this celebration. It gives me all the ideas I need to catch up with my Observational. She and they filled space yesterday and will be the whole story today and probably I'll be able to wring or exaggerate another 2 or 3 updates out of her progeny. Thanks Aunt Mazie.

It's not often that I go to a large party and am below the average age – but Sunday was such a delightful day. Aunt Mazie's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren were there as were many of her sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, other family, and friends. I personally believe the spirit of Uncle Booz was also there. I know I talked to him. Uncle Booz wasn't a social butterfly but I believe he was happy for Mazie and enjoyed watching his bride, family, and friends.

The good news is that the individuals in the crowd – with the exception of a few grandchildren and great grandchildren – moved very slowly. This gave folks like me time to focus on faces, bald heads, and shrinking or expanding bodies. With our collective memories dulled by time this was a needed help as we searched our memories for names and or context of relationships to help us “fake” recognition until names returned to us.

The block framed by Harriet, Hacker, Weeks, and Center Street was best represented. This is the first time this many of these neighbors ever gathered to

celebrate a life versus mourning a death. Manners and respect dominated – everyone older than us was “Miss” or Mr. Men stood up to greet women – even though they weren’t as quick out of the chairs as they once were.

Former citizens of planet earth were also hot topics of conversation. J.L., “Miss” Bib, Mamam, Nanmam, and others were fondly remembered not primarily in the context of everyday folks who had touched each of our lives. J.L. was the doctor and a certified “character.” “Miss” Bib was the cake maker and Momma and grandma to some folks there. Mamam was Booz’s mother and our beloved grandmother. Namam was her Mamma and the proto-type body style for my Momma. Both fit neatly into packages less than 5 feet tall. We laughed as we learned the “Miss” Bib used to call Namam – “Low Down.”

The food was great – the drinks good. This was Joie de vivre personified.
May 7, 2007

On Monday morning I volunteered to take Patrick and Lucy to the Airport in Lafayette for their return to normalcy. Patrick was the second son of Mazie and Booz. He’s about 4 years my junior. Lucy is his wife of 25+ years. Patrick’s lucky.

We left early in anticipation of traffic. The road to Lafayette can back up quickly on work days. Our decision to get out at 6:00 was a wise one not because of traffic but because a fog blanketed Acadiana. In combination of my poor eyesight, limited visibility, drunks on the road after a hard night, and other variables – both Patrick and Lucy are lucky. We made it safely. I think their flights even got out on time.

Patrick was headed to a presentation to a group of physicians. He’s an actuary (Actuaries are rich CPAs without all the personality.) who works for Prudential. Lucy is a consultant currently working in Seattle. Patrick works in Hartford and they meet on most weekends on alternate coasts.

He and Lucy live the good life. They do well and enjoy their success. They’ve lived in Halifax, Denver, Los Angeles, and now Hartford. I think the decision has been made when they finally retire – a cabin in Nova Scotia will become home. In the small world department their cabin is a few miles from the original home site of our family (Landry) before they were exiled from Canada.

Physically Patrick might be the next best looking in our family. Obviously this writer is the best. He did retain the Gragnon gene of Namam in that he would probably have been the shortest in our family anyway but Patrick through a combination of good luck and bad is artificially short.

I think it was 1967. I had just returned to the dorm following a USL and McNeese football game. There was a note on the door – “call home immediately.” When I reached Momma she told me that Patrick had been shot. I later learned he was almost killed. He was hunting on the farm and his gun discharged as he was taking

it out of the car. One of his thighs was nearly destroyed. Through the years and many surgeries Patrick had one leg rebuilt and the other shortened to nearly match his bionic leg.

His smile and easy attitude disguise the challenges he has faced. Except for a limp when he walks and a slight lift in his shoes you might never know the “troubles he’s seen.” Patrick has had great success in school and business. I wonder had he not been injured would he have enjoyed the success he has today or would the “good times” of college distracted him – much like the hard times helped him focus.

I think I mentioned earlier that Patrick is lucky. In addition to being alive – marrying Lucy is further evidence of his success. She’s a Polish gal from Toronto and she love life as much a Patrick does. I learned from Lucy that Polish weddings are as much fun as Cajun ones and may include more liquor. They are both lucky.
May 8, 2007

Patrick, Lucy, and Martin are now memorialized in the pages of this Observational. Patrick and Lucy were honored yesterday and Martin was celebrated during his earlier visit to the “Beri.” Martin’s wife is Paula – a tall, attractive, and patient soul willing to visit New Iberia occasionally and not be publicly critical of our collective idiosyncrasies. Paula, like Martin, is more reserved than crazy, weird, or obnoxious like some of Martin’s brothers and his cousins Claire and Johnny.

I remember when Martin and Paula got married 30+ years ago. Her people appeared to be sophisticated and respected. Their ceremony was proper and the reception well planned. A sense of decorum existed. Then a horde of drunk, crazed, and hungry Cajuns descended on the ceremony like a swarm of locust and the rest was history. Unfortunately for Paula this occurred about 30 minutes after she had said I do to the “for better or worse part of the deal.”

Paula has babysat Martin their entire married life in Atlanta – Smyrna actually – Georgia. They have two children – Dana and Drew. Their kids like their parents appear very bright. I suspect both of them may have and may continue to push the envelop more than Martin and / or Paula ever did. As mentioned earlier Martin is retired and Paula is a “short timer” on the battlefields of the education system.

Like all too many of us – Martin got more than he gave in this game that we call marriage and Paula has learned a hard lesson – kissing frogs ain’t all bad after you’ve lived with the Prince a while. Seriously they’re good folks – real good folks.

In Psychology class you learn about the issues of the middle child. In the Landry family – Jimmy fills that role. I agree that he fits the worst stereotypes of his middle positioning but since I’m an absolutely stable person and a middle child – I’ll blame Jimmy’s issues on DNA or maybe Patrick hit him on the head as a child. Jimmy and I share another trait. We’re both dreamers – poor and dreamers. If we ever

have a dream come true, folks will celebrate us as innovators, entrepreneurs, and maybe even geniuses. They'll probably qualify their praise with the word eccentric.

Jimmy is a devoted father, husband, horseman and craftsman. He grew up in the construction world and is now permit officer for the City of New Iberia. Locals know him as "Winston Lite." His greatest accomplishment is having his wife Kathy stick with him this many years and his children Glenn and Bridget. Glen is an entrepreneur who has lived through some tough times and now has settled down. Bridget possesses the collective musical talent of the Landry and Manes Families. Someday you may watch her on American Idol.

I better say something nice about Jimmy since he helps me with my honey do list on a regular basis. When Sheila exhausts herself with aggressive encouragement (nagging) of me, Sheila watch for Jimmy's truck at Aunt Mazie's and then she puts on her "saddest face" and says "Jimmy could you please help me with..."

May 9, 2007

Paul is the next in the line of Landrys. He in my mind is Boozoo. I see Uncle Booz in him – his pace, his manner, and his attitude. I know from my perspective that is a heck of a compliment. Booz was one of my all time favorite people. He was unassuming but always there. He worked – it's what he did. He was a poster boy for his generation. Paul is solid like that – maybe not as cute, conscientious, or courageous as his Dad but compared to his brothers he's not too bad.

Paul and his Dad ran Gragnon's in its final years. The business lasted much longer than I thought it would and classically trained economist projected it could. Paul must get part of the credit. He modernized it – when modernization was not in the vocabulary of Uncle Claude or Uncle Booz.

Paul remains in the food business – working for a wholesaler and owning a retailer. He has his daddy's work ethic. Paul married Mary – like Sheila a red neck girl who appears to be assimilating into the Cajun culture. Paul's children are Tonia, Scott, Tyler, and now Mai. I think Mai will be the caboose in our generation of children. She is a little oriental girl who looks much like Slade did at the same age.

Mary has run the business with Paul, is raising Mai and now teaches special education students. She could have just spent more time at family gatherings if she wanted to deal with special need folks but I guess the school system pays better.

Joseph is the Caboose of our generation. He and I are probably 15 years apart so when I was a "kid" he didn't exist and when he was a "kid" – I didn't exist much in his world. I was either in College or fighting the Vietnam War in Heidelberg, Germany.

Joe and I bonded when he was a freshman at LSU. He and his buddies would visit our house on most Sundays for a hot meal, use of the washing machine and dryer,

and a couple of scoops of Baskin Robbins ice cream. Joe has moved on to Houston, survived a stint with Enron and appears to now have more money than Uncle Claude. Other folks in our family have money – but Joseph is not married and does not have children so his money goes a whole lot farther than anyone else.

Joe is as skinny as Lela. His diminished figure is the result of jogging – he runs marathons not anorexia. I reminded of Boudreaux in Baton Rouge when the doctor told him to jog two miles every day and call the office in a week. Boudreaux called from Port Allen.

**I know at times Aunt Mazie and Uncle Booz probably looked at Claire, Johnny, and I and couldn't help but be disappointed in their own children but in retrospect they've done OK. As the folks back home say – these “kids clean up pretty well.” Besides it was Aunt Mazie's birthday – they gave her a great party and a trip to New York City. Honestly they were more my brothers than cousins – I love them.
May 10, 2007**

On KATC's Good Morning Acadiana my friend and Acadiana's celebrity - Tommy Voinche was visiting the Lafayette Police Equestrian Unit. I could hear Tommy's distinctive voice but couldn't differentiate him in the scene. Then I realized that there were three horses' asses prominently displayed – Tommy was the one holding the microphone. The PD horses didn't look bad – Tommy did.

Horse mounted patrols are fairly common in this area. These man / mount teams are effective, particularly in crowd control. If you've been in New Orleans for Mardi Gras you've probably observed the process. If you were a bad boy or girl you may still have a hoof print on your chest. Crowd control at Mardi Gras is not for sissies, civil rights advocates, or PETA members. It's about results.

The horse made me panic. I remembered that I had failed to report in this Journal on the biggest sports news in Acadiana since LSU won the National Championship in 2004, since the Saints won two consecutive games, or since Ron Guidry (Louisiana Lightning) won the Cy Young Award. That's right – last Saturday at the Kentucky Derby – Street Sense came from behind – way behind – to win.

The news for locals was not that the horse came from second to last to first in the short race or that the horse was a “junior” (only 2 years old versus the senior and typical 3 year old). The news for locals was that proudly mounted in the driver's seat was a local boy – Calvin Borel from St. Martinville. It turns out that it was near inevitable that a Cajun would be in the winners circle since four of them were in the race – all as jockeys. To the best of my knowledge there were no Cajun horses – I didn't however take time to read about the DNA on the horses.

In the Winner's Circle the horse was bridled but our home boy – Calvin wasn't. I saw a quote in Sunday's paper - it personified Mr. Borel's innocence and unbridled enthusiasm – “this is my most bestest rode ever.” I suspect his English teacher was

torn by ambivalence – pride for a former student’s success and humility because of the failure of her efforts to impart the King’s English on the lad.

I didn’t see the race but I was told on the way to the presentation of the Roses – Calvin, from his horse top, was hugging everyone, sponging down his horse, and finally sponging down himself – all with the same sponge. I would have loved to view this entire process again. What I believe, however, would be the ultimate treat would be to watch Calvin on Monday night. You see Calvin was invited to the White Tie Dinner at the White House with the Queen of England.

The paper mentioned Calvin being fitted for white tails and receiving a protocol lesson. In St. Martinville the only white tails are on possums. His lesson in style probably included not looking in the White House refrigerator for beer, asking for Boudin, or calling the queen – “mais babe”. I bet he had more fun than she did. Congratulations Calvin – we love you and the White House will never be the same.

May 11, 2007

I’m finally caught up. It’s 4:06 p.m. on the 11th of May and I’m writing today’s update. I feel like Boudreaux when he backed into the meat grinder – I got a little behind in my work.

When New Orleans folks first started to move to the suburbs in Jefferson Parish, a neighborhood in Metairie adopted the name of “Fat City.” This was the place where the young “movers and shakers” hung out for their night life. It was a few blocks of bars, restaurants and restaurants and bars. About 5 – 10 years later as Baton Rouge awoke to the arrival of the 18 year old baby boomers – it developed a neighborhood of joints and honky tonks called Baton Rouge’s Fat City.

Today I realized that New Iberia has a Fat City as well. I just went to Legnon’s to buy some sausage and marinated pork for tonight’s Porch party. As I walked from the bright sunshine of Jefferson Terrace to the shadow’s cast by big butts I realized - this is the real Fat City.

There were 11 people waiting to order. I’m not going to say they were big but if they had been wearing halter tops (and thank God they weren’t) I’m sure you couldn’t find belly buttons on half of them. The counter area is about 25 feet wide and we had to stand back to make room for the first wave or maybe more correctly the first tsunami to reach the counter. If they had stood side by side the left wall would have been knocked out. I’m not exaggerating when I say that it would take the hide from one adult steer to make the belts needed for the group there today.

I placed a heart healthy order – I didn’t ask for cracklin (fried fat), boudin (fat stuffed in a casing) or pork sausage (fat in a casing without rice). They were out of tofu / vegetarian sausage so I ordered the next safest thing – chicken sausage. The marinated pork is not healthy but there are some foods in this world “to die for.”

As I left Legnon's I couldn't help but notice directly across the street New Iberia's newest funeral home – Pellerin's. If Legnon's is a good place for food – Pellerin's is a great place to die. They're new in town and are killing the other Homes. Eventually they'll bury them. It's a morbid thought. I could go on with this but I suspect you're dying with laughter.

As a consultant I work with businesses on marketing strategies, joint ventures, issues of change, etc. I believe in a break from traditional thoughts, models, and delivery mechanisms. I believe in knowing your customers and then doing whatever it takes to meet their needs. I also know that convenience is so important in the hectic, fast pace world we all live in today. Profitable delivery is the key.

I see a strategic alliance developing here that will make everyone forget the Taco Bell / KFC marriage of convenience. Legnon's and Pellerin's share a parking lot and clients. Legnon's is guaranteeing the future success of Pellerin's. Rest in peace.
May 12, 2007

A trip to the recycling bin under the carport allowed me to evaluate the Porch party. There was one empty bottle of Crown Royal, several wine bottles ready for recycling and enough beer bottles and cans to require a garbage bag to supplement the bin. This debris was created with only about a dozen of us utilizing the ingredients of these containers. In the refrigerator there was left over sausage, chicken, and marinated pork. The good news is we ended up with a net gain of alcohol – there was one more bottle of wine and a six pack of leftovers – life is good.

The height of the evening was the arrival of Ruel – a high school classmate who I've seen 3 times in the last 40 years. My contact with Ruel had been frequent as compared to some others. Ruel was one of “the smartest guys in the room” – not as in the Enron book but as in our classroom for the 12 years in school. Ruel was the Valedictorian of our Senior Class. He went to LSU as a Tiger and matriculated to Stanford to become a Cardinal. (Let me rethink this smart thing.)

After graduation he stayed in California in the San Francisco area near Berkley. He retired as the Manager of the Bay Area Rapid Transit System and now is refurbishing his answer to Gragnon's for his home. He had grayed well but had sacrificed his Cajun accent and now talks funny like those folks on the left coast. He by his own admission is a progressive (a.k.a. – liberal) but appeared to be respectful of his roots and those of us that share them. He even confessed to considering someday moving home.

Many of us in the CHS class of 1965 went to school together for 12 years – some joined up in the 7th or 9th grade and a few recognize the distinguished group that we were chose to “stay back” a year to join us. We had our cliques and our differences but for the most part we as a group and as individuals were very close – time and distance has not changed that. If anything –we've matured in addition to growing old and now are respectful of our differences and have outgrown our pettiness.

Other members of our class present for Friday's roll call were Byron, Leon and George. Carol was with George and Diana was with Byron. Anne was out of town on personal business. To this distinguished group you can add Bobby and Jan, Simone, and the Mayor and First Husband. The first husband was Ruel's fraternity brother in ATO – when they shook hands it appeared to be part of a ritual.

Conversations were diverse. We covered news – good and bad of “old” friends – I was going to use the politically correct term of “long-time” but I guess we now must start to embrace “old” as a fact of life. Dickie – Ruel cousin, a fellow classmate, and Vietnam fighter pilot was memorialized. He was killed in training about 20 years ago after successfully surviving many combat missions. Life's not fair. We solved social, political, economic, and future health care issues both locally and on a national and international scale. We celebrated and bemoaned the politics here, in California and D.C. We're still a very smart group. Welcome home Ruel.

May 13, 2007

Happy Mothers' Day!

A new neighbor moved in next to Boudreaux's house in Breaux Bridge. Her name was Mrs. Dunn. Boudreaux distressed to learn that Mrs. Dunn's son John who lived in New York never visited or wrote his Momma and rarely even called her. Boudreaux vowed to Mrs. Dunn that “if I ever meet that boy of yours I'm going to straighten him out – teach him to treat his Momma right.”

As fate would have it Boudreaux went to New York on business. When he got to town he looked in the phone book for a John Dunn. The first name he saw was Dunn and Bradstreet so he assumed this was the place. He went to their office on Wall Street and asked the receptionist, “Mais you got a John here?”

She said, “Yes – go down the hall second door on the left.” Following directions Boudreaux walked in and saw a man washing his hand at the lavatory and said, “Are you done?” The man replied “Yes.” Boudreaux said simply – “Call your Momma.” At Mothers' Day and most other days - we should all call our Mommas.

Today this update is dedicated to Mommas – all of them – not just mine. My Momma has been introduced in the past and will I'm sure receive additional coverage in the future. Other women who were like second Mommas to me were my Mamam (grandmother), Naman (great grandmother), Aunt Mazie, Miss Mickey, Zenobia and Sadie. I salute them as well.

Sheila is the mother of my sons. She did all she could to “raise them right.” She certainly carried a disproportionate share of the load and still reserved sufficient time to “keep me straight.” As a teacher Sheila touch thousands of students in her 30+ years in classrooms and was a “second momma” to some of the kids and

possibly the only “safe momma” others had.

In my personal Mother’s Hall of Fame – I must remember Lela – Sheila’s Momma who raised her right in a hardscrabble world, to Miss Eleanor and Miss Mac who kept their sons alive in spite of their sons’ best efforts to self destruct. Add to this Zenobia who “raised” a disabled husband, her children, a grandchild, and great grandchildren on a few dollars a day. I must celebrate and thank Weezie who birthed our son and made the ultimate sacrifice because it was best for him. I salute single Moms in general and those like Lynda specifically - who get up each day and face hardship and struggle yet smile as they labor for their “kids.”

**Today – as I leave to pick up Momma for lunch – I know that phone calls are being made in record numbers, flower shop coolers have been picked clean, and card stores racks are near empty as Mr. Hallmark must provide those special words to us to express feelings that our own words can’t describe. Mommas are special not just today but everyday – so remember Boudreaux’s sage advice, “Call your Momma.”
May 14, 2007**

Saturday was Mary’s for Coffee – nothing special but as always very special. Every Saturday we meet has meaning to the folks there and a few of the folks not there. For everyone else – they don’t know this experience exists or they don’t care. Saturday included a large group – I originally wrote “nice” but I can assure you some of the folks there aren’t nice.

Buster – once described in this journal as a recovering personality was there. The truth is that as a young man Buster was a “wilder than a Marsh hare.” As he grew older and sobered up Buster made Lawrence Welk seem exciting. I’m not sure what triggered this transformation but some suggest that Mary as a young mother finally “put her foot down.” Maybe it was on Buster’s throat or other body parts but it worked. Buster is good – just boring.

Today Buster is Mary’s houseboy, lover, husband, and father of Beau, Charlie, and Paul was there. When Beau, Charlie, and Paul were and are at their best – Mary deserves much of the credit (I think Buster helped in their management – Mary merely trained the trainer). When they were and are at their worst – Buster – the original Buster will get the blame.

Sylvia was there with a portion of her family, as were Robert and Rob, Charlie, T-model, Butsy and Marla, George, Johnny, and Alycee. There may have been others – it’s hard to count such a dynamic group. The decibel level was unusually high – multiple conversation being interrupted by multiple contributors each trying to make themselves heard over the din of the crowd. Consider the noise that would occur if all the Playoff Games in the NFL were played on the same day, on the same field and at the same time.

Saturday’s topics included politics and corruption (I guess I repeat myself), my

alma mater, Golf, the weather, fishing, neighbors and other folks not in attendance, New Orleans, summer vacation, and each other. Probably the longest and most heartfelt words were about Phil – a regular on Saturday's who has been in the hospital since Labor Day. Hopefully he'll return one day – one day soon.

On the way home I made a stop that is part of the economic system that is New Iberia but more importantly it is a major contributor to the uniqueness of our community and culture. Bi-Lo is a locally owned grocery store. It's the kind of store that Aunt Bea visited back in Mayberry. It's a lot like Cheers – the folks there know your name. You don't go there just for food – you go there for social life.

My treat du jour today was running into Miss Mac – Johnny's Momma. Miss Mac is a Miss Mickey type character that just bubbles when she sees you. She told me I was getting too skinny. Mac was shopping for soup bones but also for conversation. We visited briefly at 89, she moves fast on foot and in her car. Our visit was brief but good. I walk my "skinny" self back to the car and look for Andy and Opie.
May 15, 2007

The invitation was for a Cajun Fiesta – it could have been a six pack of beer and a pound of boudin or a 6 course meal that would rival a White House white tail dinner. We had not driven to Baton Rouge for the food – since anything they serve up there can be improved on down here. We went for the memories – for the friendship. The crawfish were good, the beer cold, and the desserts delightful.

The party was for Jamie the daughter of Jim and Dee. She and her intended, Kevin will be married after Thanksgiving. Jamie is a contemporary of Slade, was taught by Sheila at Country Day School many years ago and has grown into a responsible adult and beautiful young lady. That is however enough about the guest of honor – for us this party was about catching up with long time friends.

When our children were small our circle of friends were the parents of their circle of friends. Jim and Dee, John and Lany, and Charlie and Karen were in this most intimate club. We invested much time in each other but as our children grew older and their demands on our time changed we didn't grow apart – we just didn't have time to get together. Tonight was to be a couple our verbal critique of our lives.

Jim and Dee moved to Orlando 15 years ago so Dee could take advantage of a great career move. Jim who had enjoyed the good life here on Dee's pay stub now has delivered on the talent he always possessed. He's running an agency and employing most of his family. He's also successfully fighting cancer – his greatest work. In fairness raising Jamie, Patrick, and Chris was also quite an accomplishment.

Karen works as a teacher and Charlie as a Financial Planner. Sheila helped Karen start her career and I got Charlie his first job in "the business." They are proud grandparents helping their daughters Amy and Brooke raise 3 grandchildren while the girls pursue their education. Their son Chris is in school – studying pre-med.

John and Lany are happier than they've ever been before. They are the parents of Meredith and David. John is an Investment Advisor and Lany is retired from State Government. John was early in our group a source of much laughter – sometimes intentionally and other times just because John is an easy guy to laugh with or at.

Of the two, Lany is the more serious or at least has a better sense of decorum and manners. John has no sense and fewer manners. Last night they revealed the secret to their happiness – DIVORCE. For them it works. They looked happy.

**Ty and Amy were the hosts of the event. Amy is Dee's sister. Ty is her houseboy. Their children were younger than ours so they missed out on some of the history. We had a great visit – we laughed, caught up on nearly 20 years of living, dreamed, and reminisced. A reunion about 14 years ago had been our last meaningful contact. We had taken our “Big Chill” picture that night – we restaged it Saturday – we looked even better this time. Maybe it's our perspective that goes first.
May 16, 2007**

Today I saw my brother Johnny on Main Street. He was praying the Rosary. Johnny is very spiritual. He's faced many challenges in his life and I suspect his unusually strong faith has helped him through the process and his circumstances.

It appeared that he was using plastic beads like we were often given during our school years. Good Catholic boys and girls were also given sterling silver or crystal rosaries for special occasions such as our first Communion, Confirmation, or graduation. Johnny's prayed enough to perhaps have worn the “cover” off his best beads or he may have just been using his “work” beads for today. I often joke that Momma has three children – a smart one, Claire – the good looking one, me and the nice one, Johnny. Johnny's also the Saint. I think Claire would agree.

On Tuesday I was in Natchitoches on business. Sheila made the trip with me. I was to spend the day consulting with a client. Sheila was committed to spending the money I made consulting by reinvesting my earnings in the community. This is how economies grow. She did more for Natchitoches than I did.

Early in the morning I walked along the Cane River lakeshore and into an older neighborhood I crossed the path of a Monk in full “habit” walking his dog. This soul was in sandals, his robes and with full beard. He wasn't carrying a sign of protest or admonition that “The End is near.” I'm assuming that he was legitimately a man of the cloth and not a “wacko” portraying such.

I never met St. Francis of Assisi but I suspect this might be how he looked. His dog trotting at his feet only added to the allure of his spirituality and oneness with nature. The fact that he had a leash and a “pooper scooper” did distract me from the ideal of Sainthood but he did look the part. I was waiting for a bird to land on his shoulder or for squirrels to approach him for his blessing.

I was distracted about the goodness of ordinary folks – folks just living their life as it unfolds. Johnny in prayer and the monk in meditation - both at peace and as one with Nature. Then I remembered Sheila – a saint in her own right. Sheila’s sainthood some would attribute to tolerating me all these years – others might see it as her kind and gentle side. She cares for people and animals. She takes in strays – her 32 years of marriage being an excellent case in point.

Sheila’s latest missionary project is a black cat with a white chest that creates the illusion of a tux. She hasn’t yet filed the papers but it appears that this will end up in adoption. Unfortunately Sheila tends to develop fantasy images around the targets of her affection. With “Cat” she sees a sweet lovable kitten that will merely stay on the porch and purr. In reality – Cat spent all day Sunday “entertaining” a couple of Toms in the neighborhood. Sheila was furious that these Toms had abused her “innocent kitten.” I saw Cat smoking a cigarette after the experience. I’m afraid she may have been more a willing participant than an innocent victim.
May 17, 2007

While Sheila and I were in Natchitoches we discovered that New Iberia had been an exciting place. My momma had agreed to spend the night with Lela (Sheila’s mother). Carol had offered to check in on them while we were gone. Carol called Sheila to update Sheila about the excitement only to discover that we were in the dark about the morning’s happenings.

As Sergeant Joe Friday used to say on Dragnet – “Here are the facts M’am – just the facts.” Evidently when Momma got up on Tuesday morning, she slipped and ended up on the floor. Lela was asleep, Momma is unflappable and most patient, and thank God was not hurt. Pepper our dog was with her to comfort her. Momma decided to merely stay on the ground until Lela awoke.

Lela is a little more excitable than is Momma. She walked in and saw Momma on the floor and tried to get her up. When they couldn’t achieve this goal they called Lynda who lives with Momma. She too lacked the strength to lift Momma up. Finally the pressed the “Life Line” that both Momma and Lela wear and like magic help appeared in the form of an ambulance and a couple of medics. Momma was returned to her feet, Lela was returned to her normal state of angst, and Lynda was able to return home.

The good news and the bad news about New Iberia is that everyone knows everyone. An ambulance at a house is always news. When the house is occupied by a senior citizen like Lela and a half dead veteran like me – an ambulance in the driveway also stimulates a guessing game, rumors, and mystery.

Burt saw the ambulance on the way to work. He mentioned this to Warren and Warren called to check on me. Listening to his voice mail later in the morning I realized that maybe I don’t look as good as I thought or hoped. Warren – a nurse

who has seen injury and death sounded really concerned. He asked if I was OK and to let him know if he could help.

To me it appeared that he was inviting Sheila to call him and let him know what had happened since obvious to him maybe I had gone to the big consulting project in the sky. I was honored by his caring and concerned but also alarmed that such a dynamic and vital free spirit as myself could be seen as a mere mortal by a health care professional such as Warren.

When Sheila and I returned that evening from Natchitoches, we debriefed Momma and Lela about the event and were reassured that everything was OK. Momma fell but didn't want to wake Lela or call the medics until after the bad weather had ended. Carol innocently had called during the height of the excitement and before Lela could report the incident to Sheila. We now know all is well.

The people that needed to worry did so. Those that don't didn't. God is good.
May 18, 2007

In anticipation of the Gros Wedding tomorrow and the need for rest for such an exciting event we didn't open the Porch tonight. Also I had committed to do a presentation on Friday for a local law firm – Haik, Minvielle, and Grubbs at their Crawfish Boil and planning retreat. My charge was to talk about “teamwork” and “client relationships.”

Leon is one of the partners. He and I were classmates for 12 years in elementary and high school and roommates for a year or two in college. I've known him all my life. He's my attorney. Ted is Claire's age, a recovering legislator, the Mayor's attorney, and I'm assuming the Senior Partner in the firm. Will is the partner I know the least. He seems like a decent, honest guy but he did choose to become partners with Leon and Ted so I think some suspicion is appropriate.

The event was held at Lake Fausse Pointe past Loreauville. This is a State Park and includes cabins for rent and a convention center. It is on the edge of the basin – quiet and peaceful. The grounds are green and the land filled with critters. Normally snakes, raccoons, possum, armadillos, bears, deer, and alligators roam the area. This day it was unusually quiet. I'm guessing even snakes and alligators are uncomfortable around lawyers (just kidding guys).

Eric one of the lawyers and the Crocodile Hunter du jour was called upon to capture the one garden snake that had the audacity to cross the volleyball court while the group was setting up their net. Eric made a quick kill and order was restored.

My presentation was well received and focused these good folks on what they already know – be nice, respect people, smile, etc. Its funny how the obvious can become blurred during the course of a work day. I spoke of nothing new but when

you're away from the phone, the fax machine, customers, and the clock its much easier to ignore the urgent and deal with the important.

Following me, Judge John gave a presentation on ethics. I left during his program to pick up Sheila to join us for crawfish. I'm told his comments were "on point." I know they were effective. I left the \$5.00 in dimes used in presentation on a table in the conference room and when I returned an hour later all the dimes were still there. That's ethics.

Now for the most important part of the event – the boiled crawfish. These were prepared by a team of professional cooks. They all appeared to be older than me – probably had drank more than I have or will for the balance of my life and have cooked more Cajun food than I have consumed. Their shirts included their Corporate Mission – You call – We boil. And they did!

**There was plenty of beer, corn, potatoes, and select Crawfish. Lawyers are OK.
May 19, 2007**

Today and tomorrow the Observational will focus on the marriage of Kevin and Nano. The invitation stated – "Doctor and Mrs. Guy Paul Zeringue, Jr. request the honor of your presence at the Nuptial Mass uniting their daughter – Nano Karen and Mr. Kevin Michael Gros..." I was lucky enough to be connected on the Kevin side. Carol and George are Kevin's parents and our dear friends. After this event their status as Kevin's parents hasn't changed but they are even "dearer" friends.

Wow, what an event! I really don't know the "Doctor and Mrs." but on behalf of the assembled masses and particularly the hordes of SW Louisiana Cajuns that descended upon the SE Louisiana Cajuns called Thibodaux I must say – THANKS.

It's inappropriate after such a lovely wedding to make marriage jokes like Henny Youngman saying "Marriage is a great institution but who wants to live in an institution." I won't even quote Brother Carret's saying "Marriage is like a hot bath – once you've been in it a while it ain't so hot anymore." So I'll restrain myself and only discuss the family, beauty, passion, sincerity, and PARTY that were yesterday.

I've been to many great weddings – one in Biloxi that nearly killed me, another in Natchez where some of the wedding party should have been killed and some at Jefferson Island where only liquor was killed. Today was one to rival all of these.

The setting was beautiful. There were more flowers over the entrance way to the Cathedral than Sheila has in our yard and there were more people than flowers once you got inside. It looked like Easter Sunday - plenty of folks that don't go to church too often were there in their spring finery. Most even paid attention.

I've heard much about the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel as created by Michelangelo. It couldn't be any nicer than the intricate detail overhead at St. Joseph's. This is

the first time many of the folks (on the groom's side) ever looked to the heavens in Mass and one of the few times some of them ever exclaimed "God Almighty."

We didn't arrive in time to watch the wedding party process to the altar but I was told by the groom it was great. Kevin must have inherited his Momma's emotions because he started crying as he looked into the filled church – overwhelmed by the friends, family, faith, and the anticipated event – Nano's appearance.

**This was one of the few times in my life where the only available seats in church were in the back. It was packed. The priest sang the mass and really personalized the service. Laughter, tears, joy, and memories overwhelmed the attendees. About 38 years ago I saw tears in Kevin's Daddy's eyes as he walked down the aisle but it was from overflowing his soul - not with Church wine - but rather with the Devil's brew. His Momma those many years ago looked just as lovely as did Nano today. My hope for Kevin and Nano is that their marriage is as good as George and Carol's – and that their children turn out as well as they have. Best Wishes and Peace!
May 20, 20007**

Getting lost on the way to the reception was impossible. The event was held at the Zeringue residence and everybody in town was going. I just got in line and followed for a few miles and then a Sheriff's deputy pointed to my parking place.

This event must have been many months in preparation. Behind the house it appeared that Cane fields had been leveled and converted to a parking lot for the hundreds of cars that streamed into the place. I saw two poorly camouflaged golf carts shuttling people to the reception a good distance away. I was told there were several other carts working but their camouflage was better.

To the left as you entered the manicured grounds was a tent that would have pleased the richest Arab Sheik. I was told it was 200 feet long – I didn't measure but it did cover two Zip Code areas and best of all it was well air conditioned. The house was to the right of and behind the tent. A. Hays Town had designed the home – it's a masterpiece. You could pick out the New Iberia folks and first time visitors because they were pointing and saying something like Gomer Pyle's "gaw -lee."

Inside the tent a very good band was playing. Dancing was being attempted with varying degrees of success. Some children were out their playing – a few daddies were being Prince Charmings for their young daughter Cinderellas. Many ladies seemed to know what they were doing with their feet and the music.

Unfortunately too many of my contemporaries seemed committed to proving that "White men can't dance any better than they can jump." Laura, Phyllis, Carmen, Peggy and others had drug their husbands on to center stage either for public humiliation or as Cardio-vascular exercise. Marlene has long since given up on Charlie and so she was dancing to the music, with the crowd and anyone interested.

I'm sure in all the weddings in this world – others have had better bands, some bigger tents, and maybe even a few lovelier settings, I must however state unequivocally none have ever had better food or drink. Champagne, beer, wine, liquor and even a Martini bar were provided. I was told you could pick the olives for your Martini from a live olive tank. I settled for Champagne.

The Tourist Commission, Seafood Advisory Board and Restaurant Association couldn't have created a better or more diverse menu of tastings. If you could eat it fresh, boil it, bake it, smother, wrap it in bacon and of course FRY it – it was there.

I first grabbed duck quesadillas – from there it got more exotic. I had raw oysters in a shot glass, strawberries the size of apples, fried - eggplant, artichokes, shrimp, oysters, etc. I kept looking for a banner acknowledging the Cardiovascular Institute because I'm sure they must have been behind this. I suspect yesterday's reception for those lucky enough to attend blocked more arteries than all of the boudin, cracklin, and hogs head cheese served by Legnon's in a month. What a way to go!
May 21, 2007

Coffee at Mary's was cancelled on Friday so Mary could make Buster presentable for the Gros Zeringue Wedding. I took my usual walk and stopped at Victor's for breakfast, coffee, and intellectual stimulation.

The crowd was somewhat smaller than usual. This typically increases the IQ of the group. The less of these folks you have around the more chance one of them will be smart. Life is a game of chance. At Victor's more often than not the "dice are loaded" and so are some of the patrons.

I sat at the end of the table and just listened. Chris and David two of New Iberia's self-proclaimed political strategists, business dynamos, and power brokers were comparing notes about the state of the state. Their conversation was more like a game of ping pong with ideas bouncing back and forth than an academic presentation on Politics 101. Nonetheless it was interesting and amusing.

Initially they were laughing about new candidates hoping to fill seats in the state legislature and local offices. These were the rookies to the game of politics. They understood its rewards but maybe not the legal or election process. Both Chris and David had been approached to help by providing with campaign contributions and temporary consulting or contract work.

The "beggars" had asked for these handouts from the "beggees" only on a temporary basis because once they were elected there would be plenty of work for the new legislator and parish council member. I'm sure the folks at the League of Women Voters or other good government would have been outraged by the blatant nature of these discussions but that is our political culture.

This was nothing more than stimulation for a “Back to the Future” review of our current system. Our current Parish President is under investigation for suspicious activities. The DA is investigating and publicly the officeholder is celebrating his innocence and off the record he talks of taking others down with him. Time will tell.

Our outgoing (both in terms of personality and being term limited out) state senator has already set a new entrepreneurial standard. He has been able to parlay the limited time he has away from the legislature into multiple jobs and / or consulting contracts that pay him more money than does the state. The “big” question around town is what future office must he hold in order to sustain these “second jobs.”

**We ended the morning handicapping the race for State Representative. The Chamber and “polite” society’s choice is well qualified and a decent man. As a practical matter he may not make it because he is the Chamber’s choice and a decent man. If you think the Kentucky Derby was colorful – watch this race! The last comment made as I walked away from the table was “If only Edwin Edwards was out of jail – he could fix this mess. He’s such a good man!” Unbelievable!
May 22, 2007**

The first e-mail awaiting me yesterday morning arrived at 6:15 a.m. The subject line said – Phil Warner. It was from Mary and was addressed to about a dozen “old” friends. I didn’t have to open it to know the news. Phil had died. He had finally found peace in a world that often was tumultuous. He was leaving a bed of pain and frustration that had housed him since Labor Day and was returning to the heavenly promise of hope and happiness that we pray for. Phil’s pain was over.

Phil was my age but was one year behind me at CHS. He had arrived on the scene I believe in his Junior year. I got to know him at basketball practice. He was a player and I was the manager. Phil was always nice to me and in my insecure world of that time being nice to me was sufficient to qualify you as a great guy or gal.

I remember Phil married young and he and Susan had their first son – Chris. A few years later they had twin boys – Jeff and John. I remember Phil used to say “I don’t know what it’s like to have two children. I had one and three but never two.”

In the brief forty years that I was gone from New Iberia, I’d see Phil at an occasional party or hear about him from others. I learned that he had traveled more miles of rough roads than many of us. Some probably created by the “luck of the draw” and others self imposed.

Occasionally Beau (Buster and Mary’s son) would comment about Phil visiting their house or having Sunday dinner with them. I was never told this directly but I believe Buster and Mary became something of a surrogate family during some of the “lean years” and most of the last ones. They were very good to and for Phil.

Once I moved back to New Iberia I’d see Phil regularly at Mary’s for coffee. He

was always entertaining – loud, quick witted, relentless and funny. He could make me laugh as he challenged Johnny with “Where’s the love?” inquiries or attack the Judge for his use of taxpayers funds in living the good life. If you could reduce “Mary’s for Coffee” to an episode of the Three Stooges – Phil would most easily fill the role of Moe. He was always in charge and would “slap us around” as needed. We loved him – bluster and all.

Among the other Stooges Phil never showed his soft side – he was always in the attack mode but one on one he’d get real. I can remember his concern for Will as cancer destroyed his brain, his hopes and ultimately his life. He and I had one or two private conversations and he was always concerned, careful, and caring.

He’s gone now – his memory will linger. We’ll remember Phil the bigger than life character, the good times, his courage and the last 9 months as he fought the twin demons of his health and his head. We’ll remember the concern and compassion that his family and friends had for him. I’ll also pray that when my “roads get rough” good friends like Buster and Mary are riding with me. Rest in peace, Phil!
May 23, 2007

Life and its living and death and its dying have distracted me for a few days and so now I’ll try to get back into a routine, quasi-daily updates. Since Calvin Borel won the Kentucky Derby and charmed the Queen with his sophistication, humor, and Saint Martinville (actually Catahoula – right outside of Saint Martinville) charm the locals have had fun celebrating the success of another great Cajun hero.

The Preakness was Calvin’s next opportunity to step into the small circle of jockeys that have won the Triple Crown. The bad news is that he missed history by a nose. The good news is that the nose that beat him was being ridden by another Cajun – Robby Albarado. The horse who did much of the work was Curlin. Robby’s from Lafayette. Eddie Delahoussaye another great jockey was a home boy as well.

There have been and are now many great Cajun jockeys. Smallness is a requirement, a work ethic is important, experience and expertise a must, and a boldness for danger a part of the job. Many, if not all of these guys, start on the bush tracks throughout Cajun Country and then move to Evangeline Downs and finally to the big leagues. Calvin started at age 4 or 5 riding horses and was in active competition at the bush tracks at age 8.

Each day when I start an Observational I have some sense of where I’m going but I never know where I will end up. Today I planned to focus more on Calvin or as he’s known locally – Boo Boo. Unfortunately or fortunately I’m quickly distracted and lose my way easily whether at this keyboard or behind my steering wheel. I was reading the cover story about Boo Boo in the Independent - a weekly paper from Lafayette when I noticed the number of stories about Cajuns and animals.

In addition to much coverage of horses, jockeys, racing, gambling and the love affair

Cajuns have with all of them – there was a story of Cockfighting and its inevitable ban by the state legislature, a story about the nutria problem, and other references to our cultural intimacy with animals.

My first task this morning was to feed Cat. This is about the 7 or 8th stray Sheila has taken in since she found me on the streets of Baton Rouge about 34 years ago. Sheila loves her animals and treats most of them well. I'm the exception sometimes.

I spoke with Floyd yesterday evening – he's the workaholic friend who'll start selling about 6:00 a.m. and doesn't stop until sundown. Yesterday he stopped because his old dog Hershey had gone down. The dog has had heartworms for a long time and needed to be put to sleep. Floyd couldn't do it. But yesterday as the end was near – Floyd sat with the dog and comforted him much as family and hospice does for us when the end arrives. Floyd was hurting yesterday - really bad.

Dewey – our retired backdoor neighbor stood by as Jewel died in the last few days. Part of life is death. Our animals are part of life. Their deaths are part of our lives. May 24, 2007

We buried Phil earlier today. I wrote about him on Tuesday. Midday on Tuesday I received a call from Susan - Phil's friend, ex-wife and the mother of his children. She asked if I would serve as a pallbearer and then requested that I deliver a Eulogy.

Delivering a Eulogy in my opinion is one of the greatest honors you can receive. You're being asked to write the Cliff Notes of another person's autobiography. They by their life provided the script. Your challenge is reducing the many years of living (in Phil's case – 59+ years) into a few minutes of entertainment, memories, and hope.

It is a great opportunity to say your last good byes, to speak to the soul of the departed and to the hearts of those left behind. For me it is always a challenge to deliver. Writing it is easy – delivering it is tough. The good news is that the audience is very forgiving, encouraging, and understanding – your words aren't as important at a time like this as are the efforts and your good intentions.

Phil would have been pleased I believe not so much with the Eulogy as with the outpouring of grief and love displayed. He probably would have been uncomfortable with the process – please but uncomfortable. He was an emotional guy in that he was very enthusiastic, animated, and aggressive. I didn't and I'm not certain others ever knew for sure what was inside of the veneer of emotion that was always on display. One of his contemporaries described Phil as a “Grumpy Bear.” I think it was an apt description. He was a cute, lovable, cuddly – Grumpy Bear.

On the ride from the Funeral Home to the Church, there were six of us in the back - Phil's 3 sons, Chris, John, and Jeff and Buster, Robert and me. Buster, Robert, and

I were his contemporaries. It was interesting to watch and listen – listen and watch. Phil's boys were Phil – 25 years ago. To a large extent they were us – Robert, Buster, and me as well. We all enjoyed telling the more interesting stories about Phil than could ever be used in the Eulogy. We talked of activities that could only be mentioned in the Confessional.

Following the funeral we all went to Susan and David's house for the "post-game show." It's often said that the only difference between a Cajun wedding and a Cajun funeral is that at the funeral there is one less drunk Cajun. In the name of truthful journalism – no one drank but we did tell stories, joked, and laughed as if we had.

The food was fabulous. I told Donald that the food was so good it might be worthwhile to push someone downstairs to force another funeral and thus another "post-game show." He thought I was joking and laughed. It was really good food.

I went home and slept. A Eulogy is emotionally exhausting to deliver. Bye, Phil.
May 25, 2007

Friday was a lazy day. Sheila and her mother were in Monroe preparing the house for sale. I played catch up at work and did some power relaxing. Jimmy (now called Jim) called about 3:00 to see if we were having a Porch Party tonight. I had to break his heart with the fact that the Porch was closed because Sheila was out of town and to allow all of us to rest in anticipation of Bobby and Brenda's return from Saudi Arabia. The party on the 1st will be an event with record attendance.

Jim is a lifelong friend, elementary and high school classmate, and one of the best of us by any measure except maybe physical appearance. He's married to Peggy – a patient soul (she married him) and a great wife and mother. They live in Jackson Tennessee where Jim has been the CEO of a major Health Care Organization in the region. Jim has enjoyed great success and is well respected in his state, his industry, and among his contemporaries. He's soon to retire.

Jim's physical presence is not pretty but it is pretty large. He stands about 6' 8" tall and is in relatively good shape except maybe for an abundance of forehead (he's not bald but he does have a lot of face to wash). From our earliest years we called Jim – Jolly Green a reference to the Giant of the same name. Peggy like all of my friends' wives is – beautiful, dynamic, and friendly. She's a character – a patient character.

As young men our lives and our academic dreams were driven more by the issue of the "DRAFT" than any other motivation. Today more of us have degrees from college because of our need for a deferment than for any altruistic or disciplined reason. Jim was supposed to be too tall to pass the physical so he went to work in retail. When his Draft notice arrived – he tested and passed the physical in spite of being too tall. They needed bodies that day. He joined the Air Force and served.

Upon discharge he went to college, got married, had children and became a hospital administrator. As he retires he leaves a legacy of a successful system and thousands of employees that are better for his leadership. Jim practiced / practices what is called Servant Leadership. Jim is a spiritual soul – who preaches what he’s practices. Upon retirement he’ll complete his studies to be a Deacon and he and Peggy will complete the next phase of their lives together doing God’s work.

George, Carol and I were invited to join Peggy and Jimmy and their posse at Duffy’s Diner for a Cajun Feast. Duffy’s has fabulous food. George could join us so Carol and I went. Sheila doesn’t believe I still have the magic – but I can get a date on short notice on Friday night. Jimmy, Peggy, and several generations of their family joined us for the best fried shrimp in America. We had fun.

About Peggy and patience – many years ago, Johnny, Betsy, Brian, Sue, and Sheila and I were heading back to Baton Rouge following a party. We were drunk and stopped to visit with Jimmy and Peggy. Peggy was about 12 months pregnant. We were obnoxious drunks. She smiled and was a delightful hostess. Peggy is patient.
May 26, 2007

I like many of my contemporaries get discouraged with the “youth” in our country, the way this world is, and the problems we face tomorrow. I worry about the some folks dress, their music – Rap and otherwise, video games and the world of technology that has “kids” looking at a small screen on their technology du jour instead looking into the eyes of the person they should be talking with, etc.

I then laugh and remember how our parents believed that Elvis was the devil incarnate, the Beatles and their long hair and Nehru jackets would lead us to hell, our tie dyed t-shirts and VW vans and realize change is...

Once a year to regain perspective I volunteer as a speaker at the Hugh O’Brian Youth (HOBY) Program for South Louisiana. If you’re within 10 years of my age (on either side) you should remember Hugh O’Brian as Wyatt Earp – one of the first made for TV westerns. I know Hugh has continued to act through the years but I haven’t followed his career. I just remembered that I discussed some of this months earlier after meeting with Hugh in New Orleans. I apologize for the repeat – just consider this the ramblings of an “old guy.”

Last night I spoke at 6:30. The program was held at Broussard Hall on the LSU campus. This is the dormitory that housed the LSU football team before the NCAA encouraged schools to “mainstream” their athletes. Oh – if the walls of this place could talk. It’s a dated facility but ideal for a bunch of high school sophomores to celebrate the end of their school year, prepare for their leap to “junior” status and to learn about leadership and live the experience if only for 3 days.

In advance of my presentation I served on a panel to select two students to attend the World Leadership Conference for HOBY. We divided the panel into two

groups. We interviewed five boys – I guess they'd prefer to be called young men. Another group interviewed five or six girls – again young ladies.

For these “kids” this is a once in a lifetime opportunity. For this old “fart” it's a once a year opportunity to regain faith in our children – the world and our collective futures. These conference participants (called HOBY Ambassadors) are mostly 15 – 17 years old, insecure in some ways and extremely mature in others. They are much more educated than we were at the same age and certainly a thousand times more “techno-savvy.” I don't believe they have gained the people skills that we possessed at the same age.

I've made the same presentation for 8 years now – it's titled, “Souls don't grow in the sunshine and First you dream.” It captures August 5, 1994 as the most significant learning experience of my life. This was the day that David was murdered. It's what I learned that day about life, David, myself and my world. Through the years the presentation has been expanded to include communications, planning and other topics. It's good. I learned a lot from David and his death.
May 27, 2007

Sunday was a quiet day. I started my morning walking only to be slowed by a traffic jam created at Meche's donut shop. Sunday morning is one of their biggest days. When I walked by all 20 or so parking places were filled, several slots were taken at the ICT agency lot next door and cars were lined up three or four deep on St. Peter's Street waiting for someone to back out so they could pull in.

When I was growing up New Iberia claimed to be the “sweetest” town in this country. The claim was based upon our unique position as the hub of the Sugar Cane Industry. Today we can make the same claim based upon Meche's and similar places in town. We could or should add “fattest” to the list of accolades.

Later in the morning as I drove to church I saw folks lined up waiting to get into Bon Creole for their “pick up” – I'm not talking about loose women or trucks – I mean their lunch. Bon Creole is a unique little café in New Iberia that has some of the biggest and best food you can find in this area. Six days a week they serve fabulous Po-boys, salads, gumbos and soups, etc.

Their large Po-boy can feed a family of four for several days. There appears to be more shrimp on one of their sandwiches than there is in a single net on a boat pulling into the docks at Delcambre. Sundays they serve take out barbeque. It's great and goes quickly. This explains the line at the door before they open.

Theriot's (pronounced Terry Os – not the riots) Grocery has a similar and equally delicious Barbeque lunches on Sunday. There for about \$6.00 a serving you can get a mini-buffet in a Styrofoam box. Aunt Mazie can eat for a week on one serving. Growing up we didn't New Iberia was the “sweetest, hottest (Tabasco), saltiest

(Avery Island / Weeks Island salt mines), and oiliest (offshore / onshore exploration)” city + the “Queen City on the Teche.”

Today truth in advertising might require we add – “fattest” and “fullest” to those lists of adjectives.

I had lunch with Momma – salads from Charlies. Charlie’s salads are almost healthy. They take about a head of shredded lettuce, a fist full of olives, some onions, a half pound of cheese, a few tomato slices, and some topping – shrimp, crawfish, steak, tuna, etc. and force fit it into the same size Styrofoam box used by Theriot’s or Bon Creole and call it a healthy salad. It too is good. If we could ever learn to fry lettuce it would be perfect.

On the way home I saw a dead possum on Julia Street. Possum are fairly common around here. In the old days some folks here would eat possum. I suspect some still do. Before you roll your eyes, I can promise you if you were served a plate of it by someone who knew what they were doing and you were told it was “chicken” – you’d eat it and ask for seconds. Welcome to the kitchen called Louisiana.

May 28, 2007

Cajun sells!

Today is Memorial Day. A holiday for most but for poor, starving consultants its merely another day to try to scrape a living out of Mother Earth. Before you start to raise money for me to help me escape this economic bondage, let me explain. I love what I do and I do OK.

Having spent the last year traveling 3 or 4 days a week to Baton Rouge (I’ve probably put 50,000 miles on my car in the last 12 months) I am getting a little tired of the road trips. This and a friend named John have encouraged me to repackage myself. In a nutshell - find a way to have the clients come to me or to create a mechanism so that I can send my knowledge / experience / wisdom / BS to the client without having to hand deliver it. I’ll explain more as this makeover continues.

Today I tested part of this premise. A client from Kentucky flew into New Orleans and drove to New Iberia Sunday night so that we could visit on Monday. We spent the day on the porch discussing business, agencies, mergers and acquisitions, etc. To me it was fun – to David I hope it was beneficial – to most observers it would be the question of “he paid good money to listen to that?”

We’ll see what develops – but maybe or more correctly maybe hopefully someday you’ll buy a day on the “Porch” for consultation. Hey it’s cheaper than a day at the Mall or less risky than time at a Gentlemen’s Club.

Once David headed back to New Orleans to fly out, I scrambled to pick up my mess from 4 days as a bachelor. Sheila will be home shortly – this is great news if I get

my mess cleaned up and disastrous if I don't. Sheila – to most is an easy going soul who has patience beyond the norm. What y'all don't know – is that if I don't do my chores she turns into Rosie O'donnell and treats me like Donald Trump.

At 4:00 I drove to Lafayette to pick up our eldest son Slade who was coming in to visit us during his week off from Oriental Medicine School (Acupuncture). Slade is my free spirit. He loves life – is impulsive – lives for the moment. He's lives the way many people on their death bed wished they had lived. He'll have no regrets. He tried it all and probably some things I'm glad I don't know about.

Once Sheila and Lela got home and we all settled in I brought Momma over and then went to Seafood Connection for Crawfish and Crabs. Boiled seafood is a staple of the Cajun diet. Diet is used here to include what we eat – not diet in the terms of “what you can't eat.”

The crawfish were good, the crabs full, the beer and wine refreshing and the conversation spicy. To convert this to a Master Card ad – 6 crabs – \$10.90, 8 lbs. of crawfish – \$24.50, Slade home for a few days – Priceless. Happy Memorial Day!
May 29, 2007

Family week continues in the Manes household. While Dad ventured to Baton Rouge in pursuit of continued economic viability, Slade, Mimi (Lela), and Sheila created flashbacks of the good life – Ozzie and Harriet, Leave it to Beaver, and Father Knows Best. Today they lived like we did in the 50s – doing simple stuff with no real demands – limited pace and few hassles. I wasn't here but it seemed to have worked. All were happy when I returned (please note – I said when not because).

Sheila and Slade visited Cypremort Point outside of New Iberia. This is the Cajun Riviera. As a child folks had camps here – mobile homes, shacks, duplex refrigerator cartons and an occasional frame house. The rich folks lived on the water's edge – the less rich folks were across the road from the water. Miss Mickey and Mr. Louie had access to a camp on the right / rich side and we'd make occasional trips to the point as children / teenagers.

Sheila and Slade enjoyed a picnic lunch, an unguided tour and each other. I haven't been out to the Point in many years but I've heard that now Mansions exist where the trailer homes once stood. I'm assuming the real poor folks now occupy frame houses and shacks and refrigerator cartons are merely a distant memory. Recreational opportunities are numerous – people go to the Point for a day to fish, relax, and drink, or spend weekends, to fish, swim, drink, relax, and eat. I'm sure things are more appropriate now but on occasion in the old days boys would venture to any available camp for private time with a girl in their hopes to become a man. The Point then and now - was the “Joie” in our joie de vivre (joy of life).

When I got back to town, I picked up Momma to join us on the Porch for a Sunday drink on Wednesday evening. You should always stay a few drinks ahead in case

Sunday doesn't get here or you don't get here on Sunday. About 6:00 p.m. Seth arrived to join us. We ordered Pizza from the Pizza Place. One small - bacon and pepperoni and one medium – round the world. These were good.

I drove Gum (Momma) home and Lela turned it in for the night. As evening transitioned into dark we all meditated on the couches, sofas, and E-Z chairs in a state of semi-consciousness. Sheila being the only hyper one in our family could not (literally) let the sleeping dogs lie and started to drag out family albums.

**For the next few hours we - the boys, Sheila and I relived happier and sadder times – the good and the bad from our collective 171 years of living. Memories rushed back to surround each picture or to create confusion as we tried to figure out who that person was, why were we there, or what year was this? For me personally it was good that time has dulled my sensitivity and ego. If it had not – I might have had difficulty looking at the young man in those pictures parading around as me with my two young sons. That guy had all his hair – still strawberry blond, a flat belly, and a certain degree of flexibility in his body. All of this while still having the responsibility of fatherhood. Come to think of it – aging ain't so bad!
May 30, 2007**

Slade rode with me to Baton Rouge. I went to the agency for my day of consulting and Slade went to visit his friend Mitchell. Slade probably looks and acts more like a Baby Boomer of the 60s than the Gen Xer that is his chronological fraternity.

Slade is a big “hippie” – long hair, sandals, and a relaxed dress code. He is also more than his pretty face and his external packaging. Slade is a free spirit that would have relished the days of protest.

Mitchell is what's right about the Gen Xers. Mitchell is a fun guy – not stiff but relaxed. He works and goes to school both at his own pace. He'll get out of LSU someday – maybe sooner rather than later – maybe not. He's gone through his motorcycle phase and escaped unharmed.

He has been and is a “called for” waiter at some Baton Rouge's finest restaurants. He's also kept a dream of moving to Hawaii alive for all these years and I suspect once LSU releases him with diploma in hand – he'll act on that dream.

Mitchell is a good looking “kid” who always smiles. Years ago he got sucker punched (with a tire tool) in a barroom brawl and nearly died. We visited him that night and he still smiled. He's a great friend to Slade and when Slade was with him as a teenager he was a great comfort to us.

In a world of “kids” that causes me on occasion to shake my head in disbelief – their dress, their music, their language, and their attitude - Slade and Mitchell give me comfort. Although they look like Mutt and Jeff in their differences of appearance –

they are always smiling, polite, hopeful, and helpful. They are the future. Gray hair, scar tissue, and experience will make them even better – thank God.

What got me focused on the differences of the various generations was a brief stop Slade and I made at Food and Fun in Breaux Bridge. I opened the door for a teenage girl leaving the store. She dropped a quarter and bent over to pick it up. As she stood to leave I saw an additional 36 cents on the ground. I said – “look here’s some more of your money.” She rushed to her car saying – “Oh that’s OK.”

I’d almost bet her Momma would be appalled at the cavalier attitude about money and I’d guarantee that her great grandpa would have a “hissy-fit.” The depression generation will stop to retrieve a penny and this value marked me. I grabbed the 36 cents off the ground and thought “This is my lucky day.”

Listening to NPR as we drove on there was an expose on some breaking scandal. Slade commented (remember he’s a hippie) that it appears the more power a person has the more “crooked” his spine. I was proud. I recognize the “power corrupts” issue for “old farts” in control and too often accept it as a fact of life and yet I judge a young girl for leaving behind 36 cents. What do you value and accept?
May 31, 2007

On my way in from Baton Rouge, Leon called to extend an invitation to the Pit and Pot supper. It was late but I needed a break and I know Slade enjoys “power eating” and Pit and Pot is the A-Team of power eaters. I leveraged Leon for a second invite – called Slade to announce our good luck and headed home.

We arrived early – the food was being prepared a few of the regulars were already there. With draft beer in hands Slade and I made our way through the rooms and took up our position along the bench seating in the hallway that separates the Keg from the Kitchen.

I began to loosen up my lips, brain, and memory in anticipation of a long night of hyperbole, reminiscing, and “senior moments.” George, Vernon, and others were already in place and the banter had begun. George was asked about his health (he’s in remission from Cancer and doing well) he’d respond great and then redirect the conversation to the fact that he was healthy but now getting old. He and Carol were leaving in the morning to see their first grandchild for the first time.

Isabelle Grace was born a few days earlier and a whole month earlier than the doctor predicted. Tommy and Shannon were now at home and ready for company (from George) and help from Carol. If Carol had been born about 25 years earlier she could have been Betty Crocker or some other stereotype for the ideal – housewife and mother. Carol is a Home Ec graduate and great cook. She knows how to make a house a home – start in the stomach.

This discussion of grandbabies quickly turned the conversation to a game of “topper” as each of these old codgers that are my contemporaries tried to out say about the wonders of their grandchildren and out do each other in terms of what they say, give, or do for these same kids. I had to laugh because 35 years earlier most of these same guys had their own kids and were trying to find a way to sneak off for golf, hunting, fishing, or drinking. Now they were talking of taking a rain check on these passions so they could baby sit.

A few more beers and a few “grand childless” additions to the conversation resulted in a return to memories versus hopes. Tales of fast women, faster cars, athletic accomplishments, moments of partying, etc. replaced the more civil and respectful discussions that had just completed.

For guys bragging about all night drunks and partying for days – the clock striking 8:00 p.m. led to yawns, a look to the serving table in hopes of a meal delivered, and the beginning of the excused as to why I’ll have to leave early. The real reason is that these party animals were tired and most nights go to be early – real early.

The meal was delicious – shrimp stew / rice, shrimp kabobs, a shrimp and mirliton casserole, salad, French bread and a fruit dessert (health food) – bon appetite.