



**June 1, 2007**

**Brenda's back. Bobby's back. Brenda's back is a lot nicer. I occasionally like to be politically incorrect. This time I don't mean the space from the shoulders to the knees, I'm talking about their physical relocation to New Iberia, Louisiana.**

**For those of you who aren't serious readers (regular might be a better term – most regular readers aren't serious either) of this Observational – Brenda and Bobby were the focus of a two days of this Journal – their romance and subsequent marriage made the headlines. They are our Prince Charming and Cinderella.**

**This was their first outing socially since they've returned from Saudi Arabia via Italy. They flew in Thursday night, tried to sleep although I suspect they were too exhausted, and too much in anticipation of climbing back on the "excitement train" that is New Iberia. They showed up early so we could catch them up on all the gossip that is also New Iberia. Sheila and I are real good at keeping secrets – the problem is the people we tell can't keep them.**

**In anticipation of this celebrity couple's return (Bobby and Brenda are like the Cajun Angelina and Brad) we prepared for a big crowd. We weren't disappointed. Tommy and Mary Carol made their inaugural appearance to learn more about and live the experience of the Porch. Tommy is Brenda's brother-in-law from her marriage to Tim. We provided the obligatory tour and then fixed them some wine.**

**Soon after Tommy and Mary Carol walked in the crowds started to appear. This wasn't a record but we did have excellent attendance. Charlie and Marlene and duck breast for barbequing, Jan and Bobby with a great tasting dip + guests in tow – Simone and Aileen, Richard and Mary with eggplant casserole, etc. Wine arrived under the arms of other good friends - their names escape me but I remember the food and drink. Seriously most other were regulars. This was our best eating ever.**

**Charlie Jefferson (a regular) and his friend Carmen (newbee) and their wine arrived – it looked like quality stuff – a cork in the bottle. Jim and Coleen also made a first time stop even though Coleen grew up right behind the Warehouse.**

**Brenda's oldest son Timmy and his wife made a brief visit more to see his Momma than to "hobnob with the oldies. It's unnerving and rewarding to see children of my contemporaries nearing forty, successful and with children of their own. Timmy reminds me of his dad – "Timmy those are big shoes to fill but it looks like they fit."**

**We've had larger crowds but never a louder group. The average age was up on Friday and the hearing of those in attendance was down because everyone was screaming – enthusiastic screams but screams none the less. Adding to the confusion and noise was the great debate that occurred when I circulated our first grade class picture. Arguing commenced about who is who. Most of my classmates claimed to be me – since I'm was so cute. Welcome home Brenda and Bobby!  
June 2, 2007**

**Today is Sunday but I'm stilling filling in my life on Saturday. The Sunday Advocate included comments from my favorite columnist – Dale Dauten (The Corporate Curmudgeon). He discussed differing feeling between the Baby Boomers and the Gen-Xers. Suffice it to say we see life differently. If you're a Boomer (a.k.a – aging hippie) you understand when I explain how wrong our parents were. We protested and / or challenged everything they thought, said, or felt.**

**You might even remember our mantra – "Never trust anyone over 30!" Now that I approach 30 X 2 I realize that our kids probably harbor the same resentment, frustration, and suspicion regarding all we said and did. The only difference with us as the Boomers in our youth and our kids in their current youth is that we were right and they were wrong. How could our parents have been so stupid and raised an entire generation that is so smart. Life is a mystery.**

**As I pondered these mysteries I realized it was our humble beginnings that probably tempered us for strength. When our first grade picture circulated around the room on Friday night most commented about our clothing. There was not an alligator, polo player, French name or anything else on our shirts. Maybe if you looked closely you could see grass, gravy, or blood stains but I promise you know manufacturer added any logos or symbols.**

**I must admit for the sophisticated aristocrats that we became we were a rag tag lot as 5 year olds. Everyone in the class that was in attendance on Friday commented that the clothes they were wearing were hand me downs. For young people today – this means that your momma bought your brother a shirt and he wore it and then the next closest in age or size relative wore it next, and it continued to be worn until we came around or got big enough to fill it out.**

**The only children in those days to ever wear new clothes was the oldest in the family**

– if they were lucky enough to be without cousins, neighbors, or friends of similar size. As the stories of hand me downs circulated a game of topper began – Bobby was the 3<sup>rd</sup> son in his family. Ray and David always broke in his clothes for him.

Brenda was one of 10 and the girls shared dresses, sweaters, jackets, and skirts. I had it toughest of all. The bad news is that we were poor and my oldest sibling was a girl – Claire. I got her hand me down dresses. The good news is that I was much bigger than Claire and so her dresses fit me pretty well as shirts. I did get teased about the lace but it made me better not bitter.

Such memories of our Spartan early existence triggered my memories about how tough times actually were. We all learned to swim when our daddies loaded us in the boat, threw us in the bayou and paddled off. “Sink or swim” was his simple command. Then too there was the 4 mile walk to school each winter day – uphill both ways – in the snow! Times were harder than Chinese Arithmetic.

June 3, 2007

“Rain, rain go away come again another day.” For the past week or two we’ve had more rain than we need and certainly more than we want – right now. The reality is that at some point in time we’ll be begging for more rain and at another point we’ll be complaining again. Since Friday June 1 brought us into Hurricane season, we’re only at the complaining stage – we’re going to save our praying for a Hurricane season like last year – no major storms and only one or two storms that even created any anxiety.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita changed our world forever and probably damaged our psyche more than any of us realize. Hurricane seasons would come and go and when the first named storm appeared in the Gulf of Mexico we’d think about it – a little. On the first – HURRICANE SEASON was above the fold headlines in each of our three major dailies – The Advocate, the Advertiser and of course the IBERIAN. My friend David said there is a fourth paper called the New York Times – I don’t know if he’s serious but I can’t really believe that many people care what Time it is in New York. I do realize that every one is different.

The more I think of it the more I realize that David must be pulling my leg again – even if they listed all the Times in the world it couldn’t fill a whole newspaper. Besides why would anyone need any more knowledge or news than is in the triumvirate of wisdom that are the Advocate, Advertiser, and IBERIAN.

Speaking of above the fold – the one bit of news “that’s fit to print” that I overlooked recently is the death of Mike V – the LSU Tiger Mascot. This like Hurricane Season was front page stuff in all the aforementioned major news rags. My one concern is that I didn’t hear a thing about this on NBC, CBS, ABC, or CNN. It shows how out of touch these liberal venues are. I’m assuming Fox News covered this story in their usual “fair and balanced” format. The people need to know.

The tragedy of this event is that Mike had recently moved into a new home on the campus. If memory serves me correctly the cost on this Taj Mahal of the Animal Kingdom was in excess of \$3,000,000.00. This sounds extravagant but compared to a head coaches salary it is modest. Come to think of it compared to the Taj Mahal that Nick Saban owned – it's even more modest. I haven't seen Les Miles house...

I'm wondering if the problem might be that we built a Taj Mahal and maybe Mike was not an Indian Tiger or maybe at Mike's age it's tough to change to an entirely new environment. I wonder if it would have been better to find an assisted living center for Tigers to let Mike live out his years and then save the house for Mike VI.

Now the debate rages – when and where will we get a new Tiger? Should we consider a female (feminist – ugh!) or what about a black or brown tiger? Then we have the issue of PETA – should the Tiger be merely a man (or woman) in a suit. As nice as the Taj Mahal is – I suspect many folks would apply for that job!

June 4, 2007

If you haven't already figured it out - I'll confess. I did it – I had nothing to write about on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and I was able to fill an entire page. I just let “my fingers do the walking” across my keyboard and look what genius appeared. Life is good. Now I'll try to get back to my substantive ramblings.

Here goes ... The problem is that my well of creativity still appears to be dry. I can't think of any real excitement to provide the standards demanded by the audience for this journal in terms of excitement, insight, and wisdom. Yesterday Sheila and I denied ourselves a day of physical pleasures and instead decided to live like the rest of y'all and merely – get up, read the paper, have lunch, and work.

We went to Sacred Heart for Mass. It will be one of the last times Father Steve the Pastor will be there. He's being transferred to Pius X Parish in Lafayette. His replacement will be Father Richard Greene – a priest who was in New Iberia when I was a “youth.” If memory serves me correctly – he was good. Father Steve will be missed – he was great and really built the Parish. Some parishioners are even starting a movement to change the name of the church on a temporary basis from Sacred Heart to Heavy Heart. Time will tell...

Lily was at Mass and so she joined us for lunch at Le Petite Paris in St. Martinville. We had a great lunch (Sheila – hamburger, Lily – etouffee and shrimp salad for me [the sacrifices I must make to maintain this physique are substantial]). Dessert was a disappointment – the usual Turtle Pie was out and the desserts we tried were no better than gum drops or jelly beans.

Lily was a bundle of mixed feelings – she was proud that Bud (her son) had gone to Officer Candidate School on Thursday but anxious and sad that he would be gone for 10 weeks. Earlier in the week she had visited with her daughter Leah and her husband in their new house in Baton Rouge.

Saved as June Welcome to my Words  
© Michael G. Manes (June 2007)

Again – mixed emotions – the house is a great investment and Leah and Chad are justifiably excited. Momma Lily however was anxious since this is an older home in a Bohemian area of Baton Rouge that is slowly but surely being revitalized. More slowly than surely – that is the source of the angst. I didn't think of it over lunch but Slade and I had passed by his first college apartment on Wednesday and I could have assured Lily that compared to that place Leah and Chad's home is nicer than Mike's aforementioned cage.

Lily was “wired up” – on Friday she quit a part time job which she truly enjoyed. That's the bad news – the good news is that she did it for all the right reasons. She was working under a boss named “Debbie” – I won't honor her with then title “Miss” since I'm sure Lily won't “miss” her. Debbie was harassing Lily because she wanted to drive Bud to his Army base for departure to OCS. Lily – be proud - your priorities are in order and you stood your ground. You're doing great.

June 5, 2007

Sheila and I ventured to Mandeville today. I made a presentation to a student group called Pride. The best I can understand it is a national non-profit organization that works with high school students. I believe the overarching concern is drug abuse – I believe there work also provides these young people structure, leadership and communications skills, and other sort of training.

On our way into Mandeville we met a good friend John for lunch. He lives in Mandeville and was on his way out to the airport for a flight to Kansas City. Years ago Sheila and I drove through Kansas on our way back from a vacation in Colorado. After what seemed liked – no was - endless miles of travel with stops in generic towns in their black and white wrappers – I had a new understanding of the “plains” of Kansas. Nice people – but a world a little more sterile than Cajun Country or “way down yonder in New Orleans.”

We met John at a place called Bears – I have no idea if it was named for the animal, a sports team, or a guy. It did have a sports theme. One entire wall was consumed by a mural of the Saints in the Super Dome. At one time the Saints or even their picture was a source for humor – now it is a badge of respect. Today's Advocate included an article on the Saints as a favorite for the Super Bowl next year.

I was in Tulane Stadium in 1967 for the first regular season game. The Saints ran the opening kickoff back for a touchdown. The old stadium was rocking and the people were intoxicated with visions of a Championship Game. Forty years later – that fantasy may prove true. It's been a long hard ride – hopefully worth the wait.

In 1967 I visited the Mandeville / Covington area – it was “Mayberry RFD” in those days. Today it is suburbia, urban sprawl, and construction. It took John about 30 minutes to drive the 6 miles from his house (and he knows what he's doing). He

agreed to lead us to the site of my presentation (St. Timothy's Methodist Church). I'm grateful – I would have never found my way or made it there on time.

John took us through the back roads and lakefront in Mandeville – beautiful homes, piney woods, and quiet - all of this within a few miles of the Causeway – interstate, and chaos that is the North Shore. I'm sure the old timers miss the peace and quiet of the “good old days.”

After the program we drove across the lake to New Orleans and toured the continuing recovery that is Katrina. We only stayed briefly because of my distaste for traffic. We did not have time to go to the 9<sup>th</sup> ward or St. Bernard Parish – we did drive West End Boulevard, to the Lakeshore and in some of the upper end developments that were destroyed by Katrina's waters. It was a story of contrasts – million dollar homes newly restored, other similar homes abandoned and regular home on the similar extremes – signs in front declared victory, defeat, and defiance. You can't understand this without touring the city. Visit New Orleans.

June 6, 2007

Tom and Wendell stopped in Lafayette on their way to New Orleans. The son of one of their contemporaries and closest friends was being ordained into the Society of Jesus on Saturday and they were making the journey to honor this new Jesuit priest and to celebrate with his family. Ordinations can be like wedding receptions.

Sheila and I met Tom and Wendell for supper (north of Shreveport – this is the evening meal that you guys call dinner). We matched up at Poor Boy's Riverside Inn right outside of Lafayette. During my college days the Riverside Inn sat on the Vermillion River. It was a regular haunt for Johnny, Johnny, and me on Sunday's when we had a need for good raw oysters.

In those days they were a nickel a piece and you could eat them as they were opened. Life was good. Add a few beers to wash these down and life is great. To some of the locals - raw oysters are called “slides.” This is more a description of how you consume them. You dip them in cocktail sauce (some combination of ketchup, horseradish, mayonnaise, Tabasco, etc.) that you tailored to your tastes, lay them on your tongue, tip your head back and let them “slide” down your throat. At the wedding reception for Kevin and Nano mentioned a couple of weeks ago – raw oysters were served in a shot glass filled with Bloody Marys. These you didn't eat – you drank but I digress... This is what we mean by “laissez bons temps rouler.”

Tom and Wendell were delightful. They are lawyers and delightful is rarely a term I utilize to describe attorneys. I liked them in spite of that shortcoming. We got to know each other, learn a little of Tom's business and Wendell's practice, understand the unbridled enthusiasm that is grandparents, and celebrate all that is good about Cajunhood.

Tom's family had a history in New Orleans and they claim some Cajun heritage.

We told Boudreaux jokes, had a few drinks and some fabulous food. The desserts were to die for and I guess someday we'll all discover that to a certain extent we have. If you ever want to visit Riverside Inn get good directions – it's hard to find but worth the hunt.

To memorialize the ordination we told two Jesuit stories. The first was Father Harry's favorite line. He was a Jesuit who often said that he was thankful for two things – "that I'm a Jesuit and Jesus was not." Father Harry was a wise man.

Finally we told of the young girl who was promised by her grandparents a new car at graduation. She sought help from her local pastor – she asked that he make a Novena that this car would be a Lexus. The priest asked "What's a Lexus?"

A similar request was made by the honoree of her cousin the Christian Brother. He too needed to know – "What's a Lexus?" Finally when she asked her uncle, the Jesuit – he quickly agreed but had to know – What's a Novena? Pray for vocations. June 7, 2007

Carol is out of town. She's parent sitting with Shannon and Tommy – Tommy is Carol and George's son and Shannon is his wife. They are the new parents of Isabelle Grace. Isabelle Grace is a "preemie" about 2 weeks old and the first child and first grandchild in the respective families. In continuing a tradition here and I suspect country wide – the "experienced" parents (specifically the mother and mother-in-law) visit the "inexperienced" parents (the mother and father of the new baby) to help them transition into the new life they've just had delivered.

Since Sunday night George has been a bachelor here in New Iberia. Brenda and Bobby and Sheila and I were worried about George – since sometimes married men who are left "home alone" get into trouble. We might find ourselves in a messy environment because we don't pick up after ourselves, or we might become malnourished because no one feeds us, or we might become too comfortable or relaxed because no one is around to remind us what we should be doing or lecturing us on what we didn't do or do right. Bachelor life is risky – thank God for wives.

Recognizing that "helping the needy" qualifies as a Corporal Work on Mercy – very important to us Catholics and since helping George was about the most fun any of us could stand on a Thursday night – we gathered at George's house at about 6:30. We were committed to helping him through his loneliness and to help his transition back to the ecstasy that is "husbandhood and married life." He's going to get Carol on Friday. She should have him manageable again by Saturday morning.

George – in spite of having been in the house without adult supervision for several days – was able to fix us each a drink. Sheila had a wine cooler, I drank Merlot, Brenda and Bobby had bourbon, and George had a martini. We spent a moment memorializing the spot in Carol's kitchen where Bobby and Brenda became reacquainted and where the seed of this romance was planted, then we discussed the

problems with toilet tissue in Saudi Arabia, and the delight of touring Italy. We are oh so sophisticated. As the drinks ran dry we decided to relocate to Le Rosier.

We grabbed the first clean table on the porch and positioned ourselves in the shadow of the Shadows, ordered drinks and got serious about something to eat. Since Bobby and Brenda held a post wedding breakfast at Le Rosier they exercise significant influence and we took advantage of that “stroke.” We ordered a sampler of appetizers that could feed 4 starving folks and one emaciated bachelor that hadn’t eaten right since he got home without his wife. We were all too polite to comment but it appeared that George was a little swollen from malnutrition.

The snacks were great. We had olive, cheese, and broiled tomato trays, fried shrimp and fried crawfish tails and another plate with catfish. There was a garlic shrimp treat – and French bread and butter. It was all delicious. We partied hard and well past our average bed time of 8:30. It is great to have Bobby and Brenda back, Isabelle Grace getting bigger, and George doing well. Life is good in the “Beri.”  
June 8, 2007

Last night was great. Today was perfect – almost unbelievable.

I slept more soundly than usual. About 11:30 I smelled the bacon cooking and could hear the orange squeezer going full speed. My senses were on full alert. I actually woke up the first time about my regular 4:30. I turned over and decided to enjoy a day off. About 5:00 I heard Sheila get up and start her chores. I dozed.

A little later I could hear Lela join her in the housework. The washing machine was going full speed as was the dryer. The vacuum made sounds that were almost hypnotic and Sheila and her Momma were harmonizing as they sang the trilogy of “Whistle while you work,” “Happiest girl in the whole USA,” and “Stand by your man.” I didn’t know what had them so positive and I didn’t care. It might be that life is good, Valium cheap, or living with me is delightful. When they are happy – I’m ecstatic. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the euphoria.

Sometime after the housework was complete I heard Sheila shout Eureka. I couldn’t imagine the discovery that deserved such a celebration so I listened intently as she shared gleefully with her Mother the fact that she had found a mistake in her check book. Her balance was \$10,580.54 not \$1,580.54 as recorded. I thought “Happy days are here again...” and dozed off once more.

At about 11:40 Sheila walked in with a smile and a tray. She fluffed my pillows so that I could sit up comfortably and fit the tray over my lap. There was hot coffee, fresh squeezed orange juice, bacon, homemade cheese grits, eggs and cat head biscuits. I dug in. It was delicious. I remember Breakfast at Brennan’s once many years ago – this would have rivaled that. It was great.

While I was finishing up – Sheila brought in the paper and quietly left me in the room to catch up on the day’s news. A little after noon, I heard Lela go back to her room and Sheila moved into our bedroom, quickly locked the door, and shed her housecoat. She joined me in the bed. Since this Observational is read by families I’ll limit the details from this point forward. About 3 hours later we decided to get cleaned up for the day.

Walking into the den for the first time this day I saw an immaculate house, my reading material stacked neatly to the left of the easy chair, a glass of wine and my reading glasses ready for my use. The CD changer was stacked with relaxing music and the phone had been unplugged.

Sheila whispered that she was going to “darn” my socks in our room, while Lela would iron my shirts in the back. I should merely enjoy the quiet and have a little well deserved time to myself. She left a bell near the chair in case I needed to call her. It was great – I dozed some more. Suddenly I awoke – as I focused on the TV – I saw Tatoo saying “de plane boss de plane.” It was a Fantasy Island rerun.

June 9, 2007

Headlines on today’s Daily Advertiser screams “Is it the year of the Cajun Triple Crown?” The article cites Calvin Borel’s win in the Kentucky Derby and Robby Albarado’s victory in the Preakness. Today Albarado will be atop Curlin and Mark Guidry will be riding imawildandcrazyguy. We here in Louisiana have produced our share of great jockeys.

If you follow other sports you’ll see some of the all time greats are from Louisiana – some born here others merely bred in this place. Without going to the Internet or other source documents I can name many – Maravich, Taylor, Guidry, Tittle, Malone, Parrish, O’Neal, Manning, Manning, Bradshaw, Robinson, etc.

In the world of entertainment we provided Jo Anne Woodward, Donna Douglas (Ellie Mae), Rex Reed, Johnny Rivers, Bunk Johnson (New Iberia’s own and the mentor to Louie Armstrong. Take all the great musicians in this world – trace their roots and you’ll find a New Orleans connection. The trio of cousins from North Louisiana includes - Jimmy Lee Swaggart, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Mickey Lee Gilly.

Our cuisine is known and celebrated world wide. We have Paul Prudhomme, Emeril, John Folse, and other great chefs more known by their signature dishes than by their given names.

Study your military history and you’ll discover great generals with Louisiana roots – I don’t know if there is such information available but I’d also guess that we have more Congressional Medal of Honor winners per capita than most other states.

Then there is the world of politics. Russell Long may have been the most powerful Louisiana native who ever kept residence in Washington D. C. As a U. S. Senator

he didn't just serve – he held court. Once a commentator mentioned that then President Jimmy Carter “had been on a world tour to visit the leaders of the most powerful countries in the world and now was returning home to have an audience with Senator Long.”

Huey Pierce Long – the Governor, Senator, and father of Russell was perceived to be by many a real threat to FDR. Many folks in this part of the world believe that President Roosevelt had Huey killed because his plan for “Every man a king!” was a real threat to the “New Deal.”

Here's the bottom line – we are a unique people, in a different place, living in a culture we love and most others are amazed by. Now in spite of this specialness – we'll all be marked for the next year by the fact that our U. S. Congressman – Bill Jefferson is under indictment for a little corruption. This will keep the folks in the rest of the country amazed and amused until he's convicted and then they'll forget about him as soon as Mayor Ray Nagin (Chocolate City) runs to fill the unexpired term of Mr. Jefferson – and wins. Louisiana – This is Louisiana - the state we're in.  
June 10, 2007

As I walked this morning I enjoyed the diversity that is New Iberia. The more I pondered the process however, I began to wonder if New Iberia is diverse or is it more extreme. Is our community best represented by a wide bell curve or a tall narrow one where the majority of the population lives on one side or the other?

I'll let you decide – here are some of the signs I saw.

Walking down Duperier Street I saw two older home – vintage 1940s. They were similar structures next door to one another. Both had porches with flags celebrating their values. House # 1 included an American Flag positioned one post away from the Marine Corp Flag. House # 2 included a Heineken Flag and one post over was a flag – type banner announcing “It's 5:00 somewhere!” The banner included colorful depictions of a Pina Colada, a Cosmopolitan, and a Margarita.

I'm sure the resident of the first house probably endured survival training. I suspect he's found water in a cactus and eaten lizards, locust, or other bugs to survive. I know the resident of the second house and he's made his survival tools of choice – the Pina Colada, the Cosmopolitan, and the Margarita. He's probably recovered from a hard night surrounded on the floor by bugs but he never needed to eat them.

As I turned on Main Street I walked past the Snake Bayou Tattoo Parlor. I don't know the owner but I have seen his work and I suspect him – when I stare at the guy with the key and all of his Tattoos. His Element Van was parked in front. It proudly displayed two decals – one for business (Snake Bayou Tattoos) and one I'm assuming in support of his children – ESA (Episcopal School of Acadiana). I can imagine greater extremes or is it diversity?

**I would have guessed that there are more Episcopalians with Tattoos in all of Louisiana than there are Tattoos in ESA. Maybe I'm wrong.**

**As I moved through the Bank parking lot I saw a truck that appeared to me to say – LOOK AT ME. I would have believed the owner of the truck loved two things – his truck and himself. When I got to the front of the truck – there was a license plate proudly announcing that Michael Loves Mary Ann. I was wrong again. As a Michael – I was embarrassed that a Michael would own such a site and I certainly would have expected something other than a love note on the front bumper.**

**I flashed back to Coffee at Mary's yesterday morning. There had been a series of car break-ins earlier in the week. In one night someone or someones had used entered 9 cars in their neighborhood and stolen everything that was stealable. Most of the folks their would not live in my mixed neighborhood – Mary's street is supposed to be safe. My neighborhood is not - the problem is bad people in good neighborhoods not good people in bad ones. We're not one world!**

**June 11, 2007**

**During the height of the Vietnam War and its protests you'd often hear cries of "Kill a commie for Christ." Today you often sometimes hear commentators discuss terror and killings in the name of Allah.**

**The American Heart Association or AHA is a fine group that promotes a motto of "Learn to Live." Yesterday Sheila and I blocked a few arteries in the name of heart health. The event was the "Taste of the Teche – On Main." This was an annual fund and awareness raiser for the local chapter of the AHA.**

**The Mayor and First Husband provided us tickets (Thanks – Hilda / Floyd). We met at their home for a little inside tailgating in advance of the event. We had drinks, conversations, relaxing chairs and for those so inclined a tour of their home that had recently been remodeled. Joining us at this pre-event celebration were Carroll and Charlotte, Bill and Marilyn, and Genee and Wayne.**

**About 4:30 we left for the drive to downtown. Since it was Sunday the traffic was limited and we were able to make the 1 mile trip in about 2 minutes. There were stop signs that slowed us down. New Iberia needs a loop!**

**The first stop was the Gougenheim for registration and to view the offerings for the silent auction. If memory serves me correctly the Gougenheim was the old Morgan and Lindsey store and other retail outlets that has been converted to a reception hall and Bed & Breadfast. Current guests at the Gougenheim include – John Goodman, Ted Danson, and some of the other folks involved in the Movie – Electric Mist. In retrospect they could have sold Pepto Bismol or Gas X in anticipation of the event.**

**Once our wrist band registration was connected we ventured first to La Rosier. There was a good gathering “porking out” on a few appetizers – the winner there was the Crawfish Enchiladas from the Blue Dog Café.**

**The second food stop in this eating marathon was Lagniappe Too. Of the three or four offerings their I’d vote for the Stuffed Mushrooms from Prejean’s. This was a slightly different presentation in that a casserole was stuffed with mushrooms more than mushrooms were stuffed themselves. This made distribution easier.**

**Next we headed to Clementine’s for additional calories, cholesterol, and sodium – my favorite here was a shrimp dish – provided as the Surprise Presentation from Cypress Bayou Casino. If I had to vote today – this might be Best of Show.**

**The finish line for us was Bojangles. There we enjoyed a variety of Sushi and a bread pudding dessert. As I loosened my belt, rocked back in my chair, burped and licked my dessert spoon – I said, I’m finished. In addition to food there were drinks available, good conversation, and very warm weather. Unfortunately the time was limited so we had to focus – the food won! Next time we’ll talk more.**

**June 12, 2007**

**Today on my book case I’ve proudly taped up a little ball of yarn – “a little thingy.” It was given to me yesterday by a “kid” named Brandon.**

**Several weeks ago I wrote in this update of my presentation to the HOBY group in Baton Rouge. As a direct result of that presentation I was asked to address a youth group in Mandeville. Last Tuesday I made my presentation to the first week camp. Today I returned for a near identical presentation to the second week group.**

**I don’t believe in motivational or inspirational speakers as defined by most folks. I am absolutely certain that a speaker or no one else can motivate another person. I believe that motivation and inspiration must come from within the individual. I do believe that some speakers, coaches, teachers, and others have the gift of creating an environment where folks may choose to motivate themselves.**

**I think in general and the program I did yesterday in particular does create an environment for self-reflection and ideally personal change. I’ve presented this program many times to a variety of audiences. It is always well received. When I’m on stride I can bring a few folks to tears – it’s an easy benchmark for my success.**

**I’m a believer that crying is good therapy – it often helps us wash away the face paint that masks our souls. I remember about the second time I presented to a HOBY group a young girl / lady came up to me and asked if she could give me a hug after my comments since the ideas presented really touched her. She said a good friend had been killed weeks earlier and my comments had helped.**

**I've presented this program to adults and it is also well received. In the stereotype adult audiences aren't as wide-eyed as these kids but you can see them reflect more deeply. The kids tend to listen on a look forward basis – adults appear to me to be looking backward. I guess this is a function of which end of the hour glass most of your sand is on.**

**Today – I hit it out of the park. I don't know if I delivered better than usual or if this group was merely more focused or thoughtful but it played well – very well. Brandon brought me the “thingy” after I had spoken. He thanked me for the words and the confidence it instilled in him. I had spoken briefly with him in advance of the program. He's 13 and in him I saw all of my own insecurities and possibilities at the same age. Hopefully life will be a good to him as it's been to me.**

**As I wrapped up the program probably 30+ of the “kids” came up to thank me. One young man with bright, shiny braces, smiled and looked me dead in the eye and said, “You changed my life today.” I don't know about you but for me it don't get no better than that. I've never been driven by money and what I did today doesn't pay a thing but I can't think of a better reward or in the language of business – compensation than I got. Thanks Brandon for the “thingy.”**

**June 13, 2007**

**At Johnny's request I called on Barry. Barry is the new CFO for LHC Group. Johnny is an Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. Johnny asked me to visit with Barry on some insurance / managed care issues. As I walked into their home office in Lafayette I was greeted by a smiling receptionist, and other smiling employees. This is a happy and successful place. I'm not sure if the success is because of the happy or if the happy is because of the success. I would however bet on the former. Visit some day and you can decide.**

**Johnny is a friend and a very interesting character. Johnny has been mentioned previously in this Journal. Many consider him to be the “operational brains” behind the success story that is LHC Group. Some have used the term “genius” but I know Johnny too well to accept that term.**

**Keith is the President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chairman and also the “Visionary” of the group. The LHC Group story began at Keith's kitchen table in Palmetto Louisiana. His wife Ginger was the founder and first employee. She is an LPN. To provide context for this humble beginning – picture in your mind – Podunk America, then slow the traffic down, reduce the population and eliminate some of the glamour and that is Palmetto.**

**Today LHC Group is publicly traded – it includes over 130 locations and thousands of employees in many states in the southeastern U. S. As you walk into their office on Pinhook Street in Lafayette you are greeted by a sign announcing that “It's all about helping people.” As you walk through the lobby this message is reinforced by awards, plaques, pictures, etc. all celebrating – “the people.”**

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**There is a servant leader award honoring members of the staff that are representative of the team and the Mission – “helping people.” There are pictures of patients – the purpose of their efforts. There’s even a framed document announcing that the entire staff was named – employee of the year for 2005.**

**The core function of this group is “home care” – the core result is best of people making some of our toughest times in life more human, more bearable, and more comfortable. The reality is – in my opinion – LHC Group is merely a reflection of the best in Cajun Country. Ours is a simple life – with a simple purpose - we know who we are, where we are, and are happy to be here. We care first our each other – our family and friends and even strangers who will allow us to embrace them.**

**To the rest of the world we are “different” and yet we know that those willing to “jump into our culture headfirst” and become immersed in our lifestyle will soon be “one of us” and wonder why they waited so long to test the waters of Acadiana. To our critics and cynics who see our state through the political scandals, worst of lists, and our problems and our shortcomings – I encourage you to learn as well our success stories – we are really all about the people. Thanks – Keith and Johnny.  
June 14, 2007**

**When I first moved back to New Iberia I was asked by our new Mayor to Chair the Economic Development Committee portion of a Blue Ribbon Commission that she had established. I believed that New Iberia had become (or maybe was always) a divided town. A recent campaign had added tension. Frustrations were running high and the people needed a positive way to give voice to these feelings.**

**Mayor Hilda is a people person. She grew up in privilege but never lost or perhaps better said always had a respect and caring for those that were not so privileged. Politics is Hilda’s blood. Her father and grandfather were also Mayors of New Iberia. Hilda’s slogan in her campaign was “Progress through Unity.” She lives this – believes it – honors it. She’ll succeed because of it.**

**In my role as Chair of the Economic Development Committee I invited input – the voice of all of New Iberia. First on the scene were the traditional power players – the Chamber, the Industrial Development Foundation, and the Tourist Commission. In addition to these folks we did hear from a few traditional “government watchers” or Civic Leaders – representing their segments of the community. As a practical matter however – I felt very few of the “new” voices in and to New Iberia were heard. The speakers at the meeting were the status quo.**

**With the blessing and encouragement of the Mayor I invited 6 young professionals from and in New Iberia to join us for a meeting. Mike, Kelly, Burt, Nick, David, and Mark attended the first session. Their thoughts were different, their Vision new, and their passion obvious. It was stimulating. It was refreshing. It was the**

**future. These folks were here today but their role – their responsibility was tomorrow. They are to be the “New” in New Iberia.**

**New Iberia is a sleepy little town to most – to those who have left and come back it is or can be a sleeping giant. This community – like this region – has been blessed with natural resources, charm, people, and opportunity. One day the “Queen City” will wake up and claim her crown. Hilda is doing all she can to rouse her.**

**Following that meeting – the folks involved decided to continue their dialogue, clarify their Vision, and take their rightful place of ownership in the future of New Iberia. Their efforts quickly evolved into a group called Bourgeois 2030. They’ve had impact in the two short years of their existence and they’re still young.**

**Fast forward to tonight – at the Cyr Gates Center in City Park. The event was the Commencement Gala for the Iberia Parish Enhancement Fund. It was the Bourgeois 2030 group planting their flag in the soil of the city and claiming the future for New Iberia. One endowment was initiated to honor the Shea Family for their contribution to the region. This is also establishment of a system that the past can use to fund the future. It is more - a statement that at long last – the next generation will capitalize on the NEW in New Iberia – lead on, lead on, lead on!  
June 15, 2007**

**On Friday we cancelled the porch party since I had to be in Lake Charles on business. Lake Charles is too Louisiana what Newark is to New Jersey. Their state may be the garden state but Newark is not a garden spot.**

**Now before the locals in Lake Charles start writing hate mail let me apologize profusely and assure you I was just joking. Now for the rest of the residents of the state or previous visitors to Lake Charles – “Wipe that smug smile off your face.” I must admit however it is a pretty good comparison.**

**Lake Charles is on the west end of Louisiana. It is the last border town before you cross the Sabine River – in more politically incorrect times, this was defined as the river that separated the “coonasses from the jackasses.”**

**Daddy would tell the joke about Boudreaux walking into a bar in Lake Charles to hear a Texan crying about the terrible droughts in Texas. Boudreaux offered to have a one inch pipeline run from Louisiana to Texas. The indignant cowboy questioned how a “one inch pipeline from a little state like Louisiana could do any good in solving the drought problems in a great state like Texas...” Boudreaux responded – “Mais if y’all would suck have as hard as you blow there will be plenty of water...” Simple solutions to complex problems – this is Cajun genius!**

**I digress. Lake Charles is an industrial town that was once the site of an Air Force base and is home to McNeese State University – the Cowboys. In the good old days of the Gulf South Conference McNeese was the biggest rival of my alma mater the**

**University of Southwestern Louisiana Bulldogs – now the Ragin Cajuns.**

**The rivalry was bitter and the fans maybe acted more like European Soccer fans or World Wrestling fanatics than the civil and proper fans of most college athletics. In fact on some nights where whiskey was snuck into an event and it took its toll you could hear the Bulldog / Cajun Fans yelling “BUCK the cowboys.” If you don’t capture the symbolism there you may be a McNeese Alum – just joking!**

**After my meeting I joined Sheila at the Casino in Lake Charles. I must confess I gamble. Sheila does too. We have been known to play the slots – not too well and maybe too often. Our contribution to the stupid tax in Louisiana is not enough to help the state out of its economic doldrums and not sufficient to impair our financial future – I guess it’s as near as we get to a walk on the wild side.**

**Our trips to Lake Charles are through Vermillion Parish. We travel from New Iberia, to Delcambre and Erath, and then through Kaplan and match up with the Interstate in Crowley. As you meander through the beautiful old homes in towns like Crowley you realize the vitality that once was small town Louisiana and the fact that New Iberian isn’t the only Mayberry USA. We enjoy the life we have – it’s not right for everyone but just perfect for us “two wild and crazy” folks.**

**June 16, 2007**

**Saturday at Mary’s for Coffee was the extent our excitement this weekend. Even this traditional event was limited since Buster, George, and Johnny were playing golf and Sylvia was out of town. The folks who were there did what we as a group do best – talk and yell, laugh, eat, exaggerate, and enjoy ourselves.**

**I’ve often wanted to bring a sound meter to test the decibel level around the table when all of us are “wound up.” It’s not that any of us talk too loud – it’s merely the people that we have to talk over are so loud. With such a well read, well educated and thoughtful group it is also a natural venue for stimulating debate, reflection, pondering, and bull.**

**Often the members of the group will address the issues of the day and debrief what has occurred with the same enthusiasm, insight, and emotion that is John Madden doing color commentary at a championship game.**

**The topics du jour included our traditional areas of specialty - politics, race relations, sports, the world economy, nuclear physics, religion, and sex. In addition to this near complete menu we added the issues of Catholic High School.**

**On the political scene - speculation remains on the outcome of the investigation of our Parish Council President. Some believe he’s going down, others think he’ll walk, one or two believe he’ll receive a slap on the wrist and others think his future is secure and another successful run for reelection will follow. I suspect that the Judge, George, and Buster know a lot more than they let on – that’s to their credit.**

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**The rest of us – who don't know what we don't know - would make great reporters and news commentators. We can talk for hours about what happened, what should happen, and what might happen and we really don't have a clue. None the less we are very confident in our pronouncements and authoritarian in our delivery. I hope this drags on for a while – we'll be bored when the results are finally known.**

**The jury is also out on the future of CHS and their new principal – Tim. There have long been complaints about the need for CHS to change and now that has happened. It's too early to tell the real impact of the changes that have been made and the ultimate outcome in terms of the impact on the “changees” – those that were changed and those that haven't been changed – YET.**

**One thing is certain – CHS next year will be much different from what it was last year. It was a great school when I graduated. My contemporaries and I received an excellent education, discipline, and direction. It was simpler times and parents accepted what was delivered. Today the world is different. Kids are right and teachers and administrators are wrong. It will be interesting to see what happens. Change was demanded – change was delivered – change is real – change is painful. Watch what you pray for!**

**June 17, 2007**

**Happy Father's Day – Today is Father's Day – the day we acknowledge and sometimes celebrate our Fathers and their contribution to our lives. In the old days almost without exception our father was also our Dad. The term father was meant to define the sperm donor that gave us life – the term Dad in all of its variations (Pops, Daddy, Papa, etc.) better defines the man that gave meaning and direction to the life created by the physical act of fathering.**

**Today our world is more complex. There are more fathers than there are Dads. There are far more folks that provide the “makings” of a kid than there are folks willing to provide the “makings” of a life. Today is for Dads that live with, for, and through us more than the father's that made us. Enjoy your day.**

**My own Daddy was a very intelligent man – ill fit in his work – uncomfortable with his life – yet well meaning in his soul. Daddy marked my life in many ways – some by direct modeling and some by my remodeling myself based upon what I saw in him. Daddy was unhappy in his job – I vowed to never allow that to happen to me and it hasn't. Daddy obsessed about money and providing – he wanted to have more. Money has never driven me and I doubt if it ever will.**

**Daddy was smart and applied it in his studies and then took work where “smarts” weren't an asset and actually were often a liability. I'm probably reasonably intelligent but never applied it to my studies. I now attempt to create the illusion of smarts in my work and it has carried me farther than I had hoped or even dreamed.**

Daddy and I are both emotional – he cried for himself and his perceived plight. I’m much more likely to cry for the plight of others. Daddy was very impatient in his work and yet became a student of mosaics where patience is a necessity. I’m impatient with / in my work and yet am overly patient with myself. I allow myself to procrastinate way too much. Daddy and I were of the same flesh and occupied the same house but never bonded as souls – to me he was distant – to him I’m sure I was distant as well. I’m not complaining – only observing. I owe him a lot.

I believe the reality of my generation – the sons and their fathers – is one of peaceful (more often than not) coexistence at least during our formative years. We observed our Daddies but didn’t know them. We held them in awe – tried to be different as we raised our own children and then look back and wonder if we did right or not with our own progeny. Our mothers were our teachers – our daddies were the “principal’s office.” All too often our interaction was because we had done something wrong or should have done something we didn’t.

Our Daddies grew up tough – a depression, a World War, a relentless work schedule – eye on the ball, nose to the grindstone, and shoulder to the wheel – they had to bring home the bacon regardless of their hopes, dreams, talents, or personal ambitions. They paid a price – we were the beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Thanks!  
June 18, 2007

Sometimes the wheels come off.

Before I left for Portland I wrote myself the above reminder so I’d know what to say for my update. Today was a day when the “wheels came off.” Sheila and I planned our trip to Portland a year ago when Sheila had to cancel her trip to help Slade through his rehabilitation process. We agreed then that she would DEFINITELY join me for the June 2007 retreat.

2007 provided even more need for Sheila to have an escape from her routine. Her school experience, watching her mother lose some of her independence and seeing my momma tail spin in decline created a potential for burn out. This trip for me is a business meeting that I enjoy; for Sheila it’s a retreat she deserves and desperately needs.

Both of us have been anxiously watching the calendar - Sheila with more accuracy and intensity than me. I – not being a detail “guy” thought we were leaving on Wednesday. Unfortunately the real trip wasn’t scheduled until Thursday. Because we were to fly out at 5:00 a.m. we planned a night at the Airport Hilton in New Orleans. Sheila was sooo looking forward to leaving.

Our plans (if you want to make God laugh – show Him your plans) were set – Momma and Lela would stay here and Lynda Momma’s “adopted daughter” / sitter was going to stay with them at night. Life is good – we’re soon outa here.

**Johnny called first. His message is simple, “Lynda is in the hospital. She’ll be there for a while.” Sheila fears the worst – I hope for the best. The wheels have come off – two days before we leave. That’s the bad news – this is New Iberia. Crises in other places are merely contingencies that must be addressed here.**

**I get on the phone – Claire can take a day off and will gladly stay with Momma and Lela. Johnny is on the road some with his job but he can stop in early and be available late. Carol, Lily, and Brenda are available and will check in as needed and are only a cell phone away in a crisis. George assures me that Carol can always reach him and my cousin Jimmy is near as well.**

**Even the Mayor assures me that in a crisis she’ll send someone from City Hall or her houseboy Floyd to help. I remind myself that the real fear is Momma falling and the real reason for the community concern is not just my want to go to meeting or Sheila’s need for a break from her hectic world – the real or more correctly - primary reason is the fact that Momma has touched so many folks in so many ways and they want to pay her back. The wheels are back on!**

**Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. Plans don’t always work as hoped. Good people will help us through bad luck / happenings.  
June 19, 2007**

**Today I spent an hour with a group of prominent folks in New Iberia “brainstorming” the possibilities for a new multi-use center for the City. The Governor is not running for re-election. She has monies to spend and I believe she’d like to leave a legacy in New Iberia. She is considering funds for a multi-use or Civic Center here in town. It’s a gift. I think we should take it; others say no.**

**The Mayor has been very supportive of the idea and has something not found historically in elected leaders in New Iberia – Vision, Passion, and Persistence. Hilda (the Mayor) doesn’t see New Iberia as it is – she projects it as it can be. If there was ever a “diamond in the rough” it is this little town.**

**I left here 40 years ago – it was a sleepy place – comfortable for those with money and not too uncomfortable for those without. I returned in October of 2004 and it still fits the definition above. There is nothing wrong with “sleepy.” Mayberry is still Mayberry and I am sure the Mayberrians are pleased.**

**The dilemma in New Iberia is that most parents, grandparents, and to some extent soon to be parents worry that when their children grow up they’ll leave because there is nothing for them to do here or there aren’t good jobs here or there isn’t the social life needed to attract young folks or housing options or limited or ...**

**If New Iberia remains Mayberry lite then we don’t need a multi-purpose center but if we want to create a “new” New Iberia we should at least consider the possibility. The question is not do we need a new Center today – the question should be – What**

**will New Iberia look like in the future and what will we need then? If we're serious about wanting our "kids" home – what type of community must we build to attract them? This is the one time the "Field of Dreams" model may work – "build it and they will come."**

**I watched recently a CNN special on a 40,000 seat mosque being considered in a community in England. The resistance was fierce. I'm not ready to say that NI is that resistant to change – I am stating that the "Visioning" the mayor had hoped to trigger with these brainstorming sessions was driven more by fear, failure, history, and scarcity that is our past – more than the hope, possibilities, and passion that must be (in my opinion) our future.**

**Margaret Thatcher once stated that "consensus is the absence of leadership." I've heard it said that the "camel is a horse designed by committee." Winston Churchill mentioned the gathering of brave warriors in a meeting will result in "the sum total of their fears." These folks are quoted for a reason – their wisdom.**

**Does New Iberia need a Center? I DON'T KNOW and I DON'T CARE. New Iberia needs a Vision – a sense of daring – a passion – an entrepreneurial spirit or followers for the Mayor since she gets it. If not – Coteau may soon annex us!  
June 20, 2007**

**At about 8:00 Sheila and I load our luggage into the trunk and head to Baton Rouge. I'll spend the morning with a client and she and Sherry will be able to visit for a few hours and lunch.**

**About 12:30 I meet them at McAllister's Deli. Sherry – the old friend with a new attitude is bubbling with enthusiasm, confidence, and fun. She is worrying and obsessing about Sheila much like Sheila did over her when Sherry was struggling with life's changes.**

**With the enthusiasm that accompanies – a break from the routine and escaping from daily challenges Sheila and I get in the car and head up Perkins Road to the Interstate. New Orleans is only an hour away. I take a few business calls and then at LaPlace the cell phones go off and we are free to be free.**

**We check into the Airport Hilton – a nice place that shuttles you to and from the airport – the savings in cost and time makes their room rate almost acceptable. Considering that Sheila and I spent our honeymoon at the Bel Aire Motel in Broussard – these are really nice digs!**

**I could now try to convince you that Sheila and I spend hours making wild and passionate love – but most readers that know us would never believe it and the anyone else wouldn't care so I won't go farther. We go to the lounge for a drink and await the man that promises to make us wealthy.**

**John's a guy who really believes that what I've done for years can be packaged and "sold" on the Internet in some sort of subscription / membership system. Being the dreamer / perpetual optimist, I'm easily convinced that people will gladly pay to have access to the tons of stuff I've created during my 14 years as Square One Consulting. Time will tell. John's willing to venture with me on a risk basis and I've studied all aspects of poverty and am willing to learn how the rich and famous live. Wish me well.**

**We escort John to his car and head out to eat. I'm going to take Sheila to a little place on Veteran's near our hotel. I had lunch here with George and Dan a few weeks ago. Shaun and Al were there as well. These are New Orleans devotees and international food critics so there is wisdom in following their lead.**

**The place is hidden away behind a Tiffin Inn in a strip shopping center that might have been improved by flood waters. The name is Sandros Trattoria – my guess this is Italian for "really tacky restaurant with great food." You enter through an Astro Turf courtyard decorated in traditional "red neck motif." The interior does nothing to outshine the exterior EXCEPT for the food – it is fabulous! We had two pasta dishes that could feed the Board at tomorrow's meeting. We eat our fill – head to the room and dream about our Great NW adventure! Bon Voyage.  
June 21, 2007**

**3:00 a.m. arrives early – I get up to shower and Sheila wrings the last few moments of night out of the morning. We load our 17 pieces of luggage onto the shuttle and head to the Airport. Check in is fairly easy but the security gate is forever a hassle. I get patted down (titanium hip) – Sheila waltzes through the X-Ray machine.**

**Our first stop is Houston, breakfast, a USA Today and on to Portland. We arrive at Portland (PDX) airport and are greeted by the limo. Life is good. We check into the University Place Hotel – this was a Double Tree. It's a great, reasonably priced hotel without Chocolate Chip cookies. Double Tree had the best cookies in the land.**

**At the hotel we match up with John another Board Member – he, Art, and I are the old timers on the Board – 9 years each so far and limited chance of getting off for good behavior. John's the former President of Oklahoma State University and still very active in the world of Academia.**

**The three of us stroll to the campus at the site of the old Failing School (formerly an elementary school) – I've always marveled at naming a school Failing. John, Sheila, and I visit with the new President – David. Sheila bores quickly and decides downtown holds more excitement. John and I continue to plod through our responsibilities with the past, present and future of NCNM – the National College of Natural Medicine.**

**As evening approaches – the long day has us all hungry and yawning. We started at 3:00 a.m. Louisiana time and by 6:00 in Portland we've been up for 17 hours. Back**

at the hotel we match up with John's wife, Eunice. Eunice is a very proper and professional lady – mother and grandmother. She has many talents and vast experiences but one major problem – she's an addict. She is absolutely addicted to Marionberry cobbler.

For the uninformed this is a delicious dish that has many supporters and probably more than one innocent soul "hooked" like Eunice. We have our choice of many fabulous restaurants for the evening meal but choose to revisit the site of the "king" of Marionberry Cobbler – the The Marina Restaurant.

This is a nice restaurant that floats in the Columbia River. Tonight we choose to sit inside – there is a nice deck area overlooking the river. I've eaten there many times as both a Board Member and a tourist. It's always fun. The waitress remembers John and Eunice and spends time reminiscing about their "score" of cobbler last night. We order – desserts first and have a great meal.

We'll spend another hour meandering along the waterfront. There is a strip shopping center best described as a Festival Marketplace – restaurants, bars, gift shops, and tourist traps. We catch up with John and Eunice on their past year and they learn our last 12 months. This is a great start to our week.

June 22, 2007

Our meetings start on Friday morning at the Executive Offices of NCNM. We endure / enjoy committee meetings for Nominating, Master Planning, and Programs. I love the people at NCNM and I enjoy the process. The fact remains, however, that committee meetings are committee meetings and even exciting ones can be boring at best and frustrating at worst.

I really shouldn't complain because these sessions aren't as hard on me as they are on the other members of the Board. You see I use a disproportionate share of the words spoken at any an all meetings. Some might say (and probably do) that I talk too much – I prefer to consider this sharing enlightenment.

As noon approaches we pick up Sheila and Eunice load in cars and head to the Retreat Center – The Welches Resort on the Mountain about an hour outside of Portland. The setting is beautiful as is so much of the Great NW. Trees, mountains, greenery, and surrounded by cool, crisp air. A golf course, a world class croquet field (?), tennis courts and condominiums complete the grounds. Everybody's got to be somewhere and for a few days – I'm glad I'm here.

Lunch arrives – sandwiches and two pasta dishes (like I've never seen before), a cabbage salad that compares favorably to our cole slaw, and a dessert tray that would make anyone pastry chef proud. I'm guessing the dessert tray is there for population control. As healthy as most of these dishes are the population police must require something sinful to assure that we don't live too long and strain the

social security / Medicare systems any further. I eat good / well for the main course and then take two of the delightful pastries an attempt suicide. I'm unsuccessful.

Lunch is followed by meetings to assure an effective environment for napping. There is nothing like a full stomach, beautiful scenery, and a meeting to lull us all to sleep. As evening approaches we're released to prepare for our dinner – more good food – this is the unique bipolar balance of flavor and health. Our meals in Louisiana are flavorful but can't even be “spun” as healthy.

A review of our itinerary reveals that the evening's continuing education program / personal development opportunity will be a Martini class. Eric Tolstoy (I'm assuming this is the guy that wrote War and Peace) is the bartender. He and his assistant teach us the fine points of Martini making. Six or eight samples later we're ready for the lounge and the real leadership challenge – Karaoke!

All day long David (our President) has been hinting that Boudreaux (the Board's name for me when they need a “jester” to break the monotony) will provide entertainment for all. David and I try our luck with Pretty Woman. The speaker system is bad – we sound like fingernails on the black board. Some one fixes the system and the next guy up sounds like Lou Rawls. Technology is amazing. I sneak out without the groupies following me. Sleeping in the cool mountain air is great!  
June 23, 2007

On Saturday morning early I meet the group for a walk with our tour guide – the Golf Course Grounds Superintendent named Tony. Our group is small but we cover the gamut of humanity – aside from Tony the only other person in attendance is Nancy – our Board Chair. Nancy is too health what I am to physical decline.

Nancy is probably near my age (I'm guessing since she has six adult children – older than Slade and Seth) but no where near my physical condition. Nancy is very active for any age and is a Vegan. Vegans are vegetarians without an obsession for food. When Vegans order Pizza they throw away the pie and eat the box. Their simple motto is – “if it tastes good don't do it.”

When I think about how healthy Nancy is I'm reminded of the time Boudreaux was having liver problems and the doctor told him to take one of Carter's Little Liver Pills a day for 30 days. Boudreaux figured he'd expedite the process and take 30 pills in one day. Unfortunately Boudreaux died and a week later they had to shoot his liver. When Nancy's time comes – I'm sure she'll have to be shot since she doesn't eat anything that can hurt her.

In spite of Nancy's weird taste in food (or lack thereof might be more appropriate) – she is one of my favorite people not just on our Board but in general. She and I both are consultants – we work with organization on change, communications, and their people dynamics. Nancy does this based upon a world of experience, a spiritual zeal, a Zen like quality to her being, incredible insight, sensitivity and

patience. I'm more of a consultant with a jack-hammer. I make a lot of noise, bust up some things, create dust and sometimes get the desired results.

One day we may work together on a project. It would be fun. Our styles would provide a multi-cultural experience for the client. I joked with Nancy that we could be like Lester Maddox (former segregationist Governor of Georgia) and his sidekick – a black busboy (his term) that toured the country in the post integration world.

The walk was enlightening and as is everything in Oregon – GREEN. We learned about the restoration of the Wee Burn (stream) on the golf course and the fact that when possible the grounds are maintained naturally (without chemicals) as compared to home where we use Napalm. (Maybe it's not the food that's killing us.) The stream had also been reengineered to allow Salmon to make their way up the stream to spawn. These folks in the NW can "mess with Mother Nature" and Mother Nature seems to like it. I guess we can learn from them.

For supper we had drinks, barbeque, and entertainment. The band included an instructor from NCNM, another ND (Naturopathic Doctor), a talented young lady singer, and David – our new president. David performed better on the drums than he did while sharing the Microphone with me at Karaoke night. I was disappointed with his singing – he ruined my performance – David - stick to the drums.

June 24, 2007

We're not one world and all it takes is one trip to Portland to discover this. If you want a crash course you can just attend one function at NCNM. In New Iberia Louisiana I'm probably one of the more liberal members of my personal network of friends. In Portland – this lovable, cuddly, bundle of caring is seen as Attila the Hun. Graded on a circular scale of humanity from a starting point of Jesus or Ghandi on the left - I'd be scored somewhere beyond Saddam Hussein.

It's not that I'm so conservative it's just that real conservative folks must not visit here and probably have never darkened the doorway of NCNM. I know a few closet conservatives here it's just that they are afraid to speak up for fear of being banished to the desert of prejudice, the swamp of racism, or the asylum of Republicans. Once in a heated discussion with a student at the school he cursed me with the term – YOU DAMN REPUBLICAN. Another time I referred to MYSELF as a "boy" and I was accused of being a racist! I can't even define myself!

One of the hot topics on the agenda of our meeting was Cultural Competency. This is the graduate school of study if Diversity is your major. Diversity is embraced on this campus subject to some carefully considered criteria. The criteria that makes you OK in the world of diversity is that you agree with what the majority of folks in this diverse world think, feel, or say. I'm reminded of the "hippies" in the 1960s. To prove their individuality and uniqueness they all dressed the same.

I speak my mind at the meetings and even at Board dinners where whiskey is

flowing. I sometimes feel like the soccer ball being kicked around – that’s the bad news. The good news is that occasionally I score one for our side (far right hicks).

A few meetings ago – I went on a tirade. I indicated that the NCNM campus specifically and Portland in general was a very INTOLERANT place – since the only opinions embraced were those shared by the left. The reaction was a lot like someone putting a turd in the punch bowl at a formal event. (Excuse my French.)

The good news is when Heather discussed cultural competency at the meeting she indicated that the students now realize that even Republicans have a right to their opinion. She also indicated smokers are now protesting because people don’t want to sit next to them even when they are not smoking. Where’s the love?

At the Gala on Sunday I saw the real world of diversity that is NCNM and the families of the students. The students look, act, and think the same but their families don’t. You saw everything from designer gowns / suits to jeans and seersucker. There were traditional families, singles, gay couples, every color of the rainbow, every faith - even non-believers, and every language on the planet. I suspect I wasn’t the only Republican at the show – there may have even been a few military folks and Bush supporters. ALL GOT ALONG for one night. You see this was to celebrate success not to debate politics – we are family! Real diversity!

June 25, 2007

Today is the commencement for the Class of 2007 at NCNM. Traditionally Board members participate. This year would be no exception.

The day however would be more than just walking in procession in a cap and gown. John, Nancy, David, Sussanna and I agreed to meet for breakfast and to visit the Body World 3 exhibit at the OMSI (an exhibit hall and I-Max in Portland).

We found a small breakfast joint named Jams. The food was great and the service better. As a consultant I was amazed to find a restaurant that had a Mission / Values Statement and even more surprised that these were predominantly displayed on the menu. If you do have such a standard it is prudent to display them.

From there David and Nancy took on an adventure – trying to find OMSI. I have zero sense of direction so I shouldn’t be critical but it does concern me that our President and Chairperson could both be lost simultaneously. At least it wasn’t at a board function – there these two folks perform exceptional well.

Body World 3 is a display on the human body – real human bodies. I had seen it advertised in the Airline Magazine on our flight in and thought – “how sick.” After completing the tour I thought – “How profound.” For me it was a tremendous spiritual and educational experience. I can’t do it justice and it’s not right for everybody but if you get the chance to go – seriously consider it.

**The artist / scientist that created the exhibit has developed a technique that allows him to “plasticize” bodies and he displays them – absent their skin. The poses are artistic, some humorous, and all interesting. You literally get a glance inside of the human animal and a few other animals. A horse and camel are similarly displayed – a couple of these are actually cut in thirds so you get a cross section view.**

**Throughout the exhibit are banners including quotes / thoughts from the bible, philosophers, and others that ponder the question of life and the meaning of humanity. The words next to this intricacy and intimacy that we call US really impacted me. Again it’s not for everyone.**

**We left the exhibit changed forever and journeyed to the Commencement Exercise where the graduates will begin the rest of their lives as NDs – Doctors of Naturopathy. The greatest change that I’ve seen in my 9 years “on board” and “on the board” has been in the make up of the student body. By my standards these folks have become more mainstream.**

**To the grads this may be an insult but I gues I can still have my own opinion. The medicine is built more on the principles of mind, body, and spirit and this year’s speakers touched more on spiritual issues than I can remember in the past. It was good. Congratulations to the graduates. Go out and change the world.**

**June 26, 2007**

**After the graduation ceremony Sheila and I went to explore downtown Portland for a few hours. Portland has a fabulous and free bus and light rail system and so the process of pioneering is easy and cheap. We were scheduled to meet several folks at Andina’s for dinner. We played tourist before then.**

**The restaurant was in the Pearl District of Portland. This is an older part of town that once was primarily warehouse and light industrial. Today it is a mix of condominiums, art galleries, retail, etc. To some it is the “rich” and the “young” taking over from the “old” and the “poor.” Hearing some of the prices paid on some of the properties it appears to me that some “old” and “poor” might be getting to the “young” and “rich.”**

**We walked down one street where homes sat right on the sidewalk with a very small porch and enough yard for two flowers, a shrub, and four ounces of ground cover. I have more dirt in my coat pocket than most of these landowners possessed in their entire lot. I didn’t any place for sale so that means the prices are even more exaggerated than they would otherwise be for property merely quaint and available. Suffice it to say you could probably buy whole subdivisions or neighborhoods in New Iberia for the price of a duplex here.**

**Probably the most significant barometer for the wealth and excesses in this neighborhood could be understood with a brief walk through at Lexi’s Dog**

**Boutique and Social Club. The best comparison I can offer is a Montessori School / Living Experience for dogs. Most readers of this journal can understand the concept of a boutique – overvalued and overpriced stuff that you don't need except to show off to people that can't afford such stuff or have too much common sense to buy it. Oops my conservative side is showing again.**

**There was a doggie sweater (T-shirt) that read – “Does this make me look fat?” There were doggie snacks – a \$1.50 peanut butter cup and a \$3.00 donut. There were antique pet carriers (faux antique) for only \$295.00 and other treats fit for the pets of a king and queen. We watched one man arrive to pick up his little darling. Before the “child” was brought to him he watched his greyhound puppy play with the other dogs on closed circuit TV and then was informed by the head mistress that his puppy had played so well with Molly all day...**

**Prominently displayed was a schedule of social club hours – dogs under 12 pounds would have group play on Sunday between 10:00 a.m. and noon. The bigger “children” played in separate groups in the p.m. As we walked out of the Boutique my eyes fixated on a Ben and Jerry's sign. We walked over for a pre-dinner snack only to discover the store closed for remodeling. I want to return to the boutique for a peanut butter cup but we were late for dinner. I commented to Sheila another major difference in our world and theirs – the folks on the street won't look at you much less talk to you. We're not one world! Bow wow!**

**June 27, 2007**

**When Sheila and I were driving home from the airport we received a call from Brenda. She wanted to know about our trip, our lives, and to share some news with me. Sheila provided the report on Portland and us and then handed the phone to me for the news. Brenda said simply and sadly, “Tim DeRouen has been diagnosed with Pancreatic and Liver cancer.”**

**This type of news is like a kick in the solar plexus. It takes your breath away or at least it did that to me. Tim is Brenda's brother-in-law from her first marriage. He's married to Yvonne – Tim LeBlanc's youngest sister. Tim DeRouen is just over 50 years old. He's a very nice guy. I know him as part of the LeBlanc family and also as a “computer guy” at ICT Insurance Agency. I'm still impressed by carbon paper so computers are a different world. Tim easily moves through this world.**

**With Brenda's words my mind flashed back to the phone call from Carol that told me of George's cancer, the conversation with Will announcing his brain tumor or as recent as the September call from Steve calmly telling me about his identical diagnosis as the one Brenda had just shared. I don't know how others react to such a diagnosis or news of someone else's diagnosis but to me this always shocks me into thought – “What would I do?” “What will they do?” “What must they be feeling?” “What happens next?” “My problems really aren't that bad!” My mind races.**

Brenda and I talk a little longer but the conversation is more mechanical based upon the news just received. I remember closing with the “comfort words” – “Let us know what we can do. I’ll say a prayer for him and Yvonne. Keep me posted.” I give the news to Sheila then retreat to the quiet of my soul for reflection. Today when I wake up I say a quick prayer for Timmy – as promised and then ponder what’s really important in life.

On the way home today I get another call – it’s upbeat, peaceful, and positive. “Mike this is Tim DeRouen.” I’d like to see you when you get a second. Why don’t you come by the house when you get a chance?” I’m shocked – for a moment I can’t believe it’s Tim since should not sound this happy or peaceful. I want to scream – “Didn’t you hear what you have?” I gather my thoughts and say – “I heard your news and I’ll be in New Iberia in a few minutes, I’ll stop by.”

I drive right to his house and anxiously knock on the door. Yvonne answers. She and I embrace – she’s near tears and I’m mumbling words of comfort that my heart is not really buying at the moment. (I tend to deal better with bad news in the long term than with the shock in the immediate.) She invites me into the den. Tim, looking a lot healthier than me, shakes my hand and give me a hug.

I attempt word of comfort. He gives me courage. He states simply – “Mike I know what I have and I’m not in denial. I’m just going to deal with this as positively as I can.” We talk. I want to cry. We part company. I promise to pray. I do.

June 28, 2007

Leon calls this afternoon to invite me to Pit and Pot. I accept – assuming I can get yard leave. Leon and I talk briefly about Tim and his condition. Leon was Tim’s next door neighbor for years – they are close – beer drinking friends.

I walk into the house – I put on my stressed face. Sheila’s happy and seems fairly relaxed herself. I ask permission to go to Pit and Pot. She looks at my face – permission granted. (I should be nominated for an Oscar.) Sheila is a better person than me but most of my friends already know that.

At home I find an e-mail from Johnny also inviting me to the Pit and Pot. In fairness to both parties I must accept. I suggest that I go as Leon’s guest – he invited me first and then let Johnny (he’s got plenty of money) contribute to Leon a share of my cost. I always try to accommodate friends – I’m so generous.

On the way to Pit and Pot I stop at Tim’s house to drop off a copy of a great book for someone facing serious illness – Love, Medicine, and Miracles. Yvonne invites me in, I meet Tim’s mother, and visit ever so briefly with the patient. He remains stoic – his mother and Yvonne show the stress of his diagnosis.

I’m in the first wave of “eaters” to arrive. I grab a beer and join the conversations that are everywhere. David (Big Kub) arrives and assumes his throne. He’s the

keeper of the books and the Grand Marshall of this monthly event. He questions my sponsorship for the night. I offer Leon's name but also mention that Johnny has offered. He says in his unique style, "I charge both those clowns." More beer, exaggerations, and memories are enjoyed and additional members and guest arrive. This is always a large gathering – sometimes there are even a lot of people.

About 40 years ago as many of us blossomed into manhood (a.k.a. – got fat) we created the 200 pound club. Our first event was the annual Pancake Supper. We were proud of our expertise with the fork and our individual presences at the table. These same guys were founders of Pita and Pot. Today another generation or tow assures the perpetuation of this group well into the future.

The food is fabulous – the dress code relaxed – most are in jeans or short, T-shirts (preferably stained) with an occasional visitor dressed in business casual. A card game has started in the back and sausage appetizers are being served near the beer Keg. There are doctors, lawyers, and probably a few Indian Chiefs. Some consultants, welders, sales guys, bankers, accounts etc. have snuck in during the years. This group is not about income, prestige, lineage, or success – this goes much deeper than that. This is about a shared life – friendship, our culture and our future. We are close.

The menu tonight is simple and delicious (as usual) steaks, crawfish etouffee, cole slaw, maque choux, bread, and pies, pies, pies. Bon Appetite!

June 29, 2007

In yesterday's Observational I discussed a "herd" of my friends charging headlong into their epicurean demise. Despite my comments most of these guys are really decent people and at their current age and condition most could no longer commit the seven deadly sins. The reality is however when it comes to gluttony and sloth (a.k.a. - couch potatoes) most of these folks are multiple offenders. Today I'll transition from my contemporaries living wrong to our parents who did it right.

Earlier in the week we got word that Ed had died – a sad fact but Ed was 94 when he died so he certainly had a good run. Ed was the husband of Betty – Lela's sister and Sheila's aunt. I met Ed about 34 years ago when Sheila and I were first dating and Ed was my age now (59). I'd see him about one or two times a year at Sheila's family gatherings that I like to call Redneck Festivals. I never got to know him that well so what follows is more perception than reality.

Ed had one trait that I really like in people – he was genuine. What you saw with Ed was what you got. There was no pretense. I appeared to enjoy the love of his wife Betty and adevotion to and with his son Eddy or Pumpkin. I can't remember Ed working – I think he was disabled but it was easy to see at one time he had – his hands were calloused and he carried a few scars.

If memory serves me correctly he had been in the service and once played professional baseball. Ed was in my mind reminiscent of the “greatest generation” and their “father knows best” position in the family. I was always envious since I never saw Ed ask for yard leave or have to explain his request. My lady friends may have resented Ed and his kind but I often fanaticize about their world.

Ed loved his yard and garden. He was still cutting his own grass into his 90s. He preserved much of what he grew and graciously shared what was preserved. I can buy my own figs, peaches, and tomatoes what I would really have liked from Ed was whatever it is that preserved his body and his health. I don't know what he did right or what he did wrong but he did it for a long time –R.I.P. Ed.

The balance to guys like Ed are the women that they loved and that loved them. I know those were different times and to a certain extent our “Ozzie and Harriet” view our that world was naïve and best and wrong at worst but I will always admire what that generation did and endured and their honoring of their commitments when today we are to quick to divorce, quit, give up, or not try.

I watched today the Golden Girls here at the house. These are representative of the female version of Ed and his generation. Peggy is the oldest – blind, independent and relatively healthy. Lela is in slight decline, less independent but still “fighting the good fight.” Momma has always been the picture of stoic – independent, reticent, and controlled – now in fairly rapid decline. They are now wringing the life out of their golden years! They like Ed have had good, full lives.

June 30, 2007

My Momma lived at 627 Weeks Street all of her life. Her original home stood several feet off the ground. Momma would talk often about playing under the house. From her comments I'm guessing that the house was elevated 5 or more feet.

Momma, Uncle Booz, Mamam, and Namam lived in this house. This was after Momma's daddy was sent to Carville. Sometimes in the 1930s (I'm guessing) Namam (Momma's grandmother – Mamam's mother) had a stroke and could no longer climb the steps. This house was torn down and a new house was built. Mr. Peter Langlais – a neighbor across the street unbuilt the old home and rebuilt the new one. I think he charged \$6,400.00 for the entire job. It's a great house.

On the north side of this house, Mamam and Uncle Claude built the Warehouse. On the south side was Uncle Claude and Nan Nan's (Gragnon) house. Momma and her family lived with the Gragnons during the rebuilding of their house.

When Momma and Daddy married they bought our home on Harriet Street. It was 6 houses down from Mamam's. During the war Momma and Daddy lived in Charleston and Boston. When they returned they moved to Harriet Street. Momma has probably not left home for more than 5 or 6 days at time since WW II.

**As a child – her world was at the corner of Weeks and Harriet Street. As an adult her family was her world and this family resided at this same corner. About 2 weeks ago – because of Momma’s deteriorating health and the inability of her “adopted daughter” and current “sitter” Lynda to take care of her, she moved in with us – Back to her Future – back to Gragnon’s Wholesale and into the shadow of her childhood home.**

**This update is being written as therapy for me. It’s 7:06 a.m. on June 30, 2007. I’ve been up since about 4:30 and Momma’s been up since 5:00. During the night I believe Momma had a stroke or some other contingency of aging. During the past year or two she has gotten disoriented on occasion. In the past few months she has repeated herself and become confused and forgetful. This morning she woke up in a total new and unknown world.**

**She doesn’t know where she is. She recognizes me as her son. She did not remember that she has been living with us for the past 3 weeks and did not recognize the warehouse. She didn’t remember that Sheila and I began renovating this place two years ago. She doesn’t remember spending nearly every Saturday and Sunday afternoon here with Lela and Miss Peggy. She didn’t know Lela has been living here for the past 6 months. Momma is lost at home – ours and hers.**

**Momma has always been the picture of control. She’s never gotten excited and never let go of the world in her grasp. Last night she lost it. I hope her internal knowledge is as confused as the external one – she wouldn’t want to be this way!**