Women's Stories of Reading and Writing: Three Literacy Life Histories.

Mary Annette Duchein

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5567

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
Women's stories of reading and writing: Three literacy life histories

Duchein, Mary Annette, Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1993
WOMEN'S STORIES OF READING AND WRITING:
THREE LITERACY LIFE HISTORIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

Mary Annette Duchein
B.A., Colorado University, 1971
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1990
August 1993
DEDICATION

To my parents, Mary Berdine Werning and the late Robert T. Werning, who loved me unconditionally and led me into the world of books. To my beloved grandmother, Bertha Bockhaus, who though she could not read planted the adage, "If you can read, you can do anything," in the hearts of her children and grandchildren. To her great-grandchildren—my daughter and son—Hilary and Jordan, who gave me ongoing appreciation of the wonderment that literacy brings to childhood (and who waited patiently for their mother's return from the academic wilderness). To Elaine Beauvais, Margaret Eller, and Jerry White, with appreciation for sharing their stories, their joie de vivre, and their abiding Faith.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I reflect with gratefulness upon the many "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973) which sustained and encouraged this endeavor. I wish to thank my major professor, Dr. Bonnie Konopak, for her inspiring classes and extraordinary patience in guiding me through the dissertation process. Dr. Donna Mealey I thank for sharing her research in prison literacy and her friendship. Due to the mentoring of these women I never felt like an "outsider in the sacred grove" of academia of whom Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) speak. To Dr. Miles Richardson I owe my love of anthropology and my hope for a universal human discourse. His classes taught me that in the liminal space between our finite humanity and our dreams of eternity lies the preciousness of grace. I also wish to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Earl Cheek, Dr. Yoshinouri Kamo, and Dr. Gary Rice for their helpfulness, encouragement, and understanding. I am grateful also to Dr. Petra Munro for blazing the trail of life history research in education with her work on women teachers' stories and her generosity in sharing them. I wish to thank my research team, Dr.
Connie Nobles and Dr. Deidra Frazier, for their time and valuable insights in data analysis, and along with Patsy Palmer, Linda and John Lightsey, and April Davis their spiritual encouragement and prayers. Thanks are due to Dr. Greg Nixon for his editing suggestions and discussions of the phenomenology of memory and archetypal psychology. I further wish to acknowledge the influence of the women at Louisiana Correctional Institution for Women in St. Gabriel, Louisiana who revealed to me the importance of women's stories and literacy experiences and evidenced the indomitability of the human spirit under the most oppressive of circumstances.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Charles Ortigo for leading me gently to my spiritual awakening to Jesus Christ as Lord and Son of the Living God whose Holy Spirit continues to sustain me.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .......................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................... vii

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION ............................................................... 1
  Value of the Project ........................................................................ 1
  Educational Research and Literacy ............................................. 3
  Anthropological Research and Literacy .................................... 5
  Need for Study .............................................................................. 7
  Definition of Terms ..................................................................... 9
  Chapter Summary ....................................................................... 12

Chapter II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ....................................... 14
  A Sociocultural Perspective on Literacy ................................... 16
  Literacy Across the Lifespan ...................................................... 21
  Gender Issues ............................................................................ 49
  Using Life History Methodology .............................................. 53

Chapter III: METHOD ................................................................. 62
  Participants .............................................................................. 62
  Data Sources ........................................................................... 67
  Procedure ................................................................................ 70
  Data Analysis ........................................................................... 76

Chapter IV: LITERACY LIFE HISTORIES ......................................... 79
  Elaine Beauvais’ Story .............................................................. 79
  Margaret Eller’s Story .............................................................. 117
  Jerry White’s Story ................................................................. 148

Chapter V: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ....................................... 185
  Preformal Schooling Phase ...................................................... 186
  Formal Schooling Phase ........................................................ 194
  Homemaker/Workplace Phase ................................................. 208
  Retirement Phase .................................................................. 226

Chapter VI: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................. 243
  Limitations ............................................................................. 243
  Summary of Findings .............................................................. 246
  Implications ............................................................................ 250
  Future Research Recommendations ..................................... 253
ABSTRACT

The stories of three retired women who have shown a lifelong and continuing commitment to learning and literacy were addressed through life history methodology. Three literacy life histories were produced which were then analyzed in light of current research in the field of reading and literacy. All life phases were addressed, but emphasis was placed on the retirement years.

Results confirmed prior research in the field of reading across four lifespan phases--preformal schooling, formal schooling, homemaker/workplace, and retirement--and suggested that reading and writing grew in importance during the retirement years and led to an extension or increase in mental awareness. The in-depth study of these three women's literacy experiences indicated the qualitative importance of literacy across the lifespan, and more importantly, the potentials for renewed involvement of self and world through creative writing endeavors.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my research was to study the stories of three retired women who have shown a lifelong and continuing commitment to learning and literacy. Specifically, I examined these participants' own accounts of their reading and writing practices across four major lifespan phases; (a) preformal schooling, (b) formal schooling, (c) homemaker/workplace, and (d) retirement. By focusing on their recollections, as well as the artifacts they chose to keep, I hoped to provide a picture of literacy practices across a broad 60- to 80-year time period.

Value of the Project

This project is important for several reasons. First, it addressed the nature and functions of literacy within different life contexts (Fingeret, 1985). The assumption is that literacy is context-dependent and sensitive to social and cultural factors of a certain community (Harman, 1985). Thus, literacy and literacy practices differ according to the
interpretive needs of an individual within a particular time and place (Heath, 1986).

Second, it attempted to document these literacy practices in a particular historical milieu from the point of view of persons who lived, and are living, during a particular period (Venezky, 1991). For the participants in this study, the span from early to late 20th century provided a myriad of social/political/cultural events and experiences—for example, the Great Depression, World War II, and vast technological growth—which contributed to significant changes in the nature and uses of literacy. Thus, these participants may be representative of this century and its unprecedented changes, at least to this point in time.

Third, this research concentrated on women, a group whose stories have not been fully addressed in literacy research literature or in personal narrative research (Benstock, 1988; Stromquist, 1990; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Tied to the above-mentioned components of individual and historical contexts, the lives of women have changed over the 20th century as attention to gender has increased. Thus, these three
women, to some extent, embody the changing ideals and emergent values of 20th century gender studies.

**Educational Research and Literacy**

In addressing the topic of literacy practices, educational research generally has focused on two major areas: reading processes and pedagogical methods. Topics within these areas have included (a) process components such as word identification (e.g., Ehri, 1991; Stanovich, 1991), vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985), and comprehension processing (e.g., Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991), as well as (b) their instructional counterparts such as word attack skills (e.g., Ehri, 1991), vocabulary development (Memory, 1990), and comprehension monitoring (e.g., Konopak, Martin, & Martin, 1990).

To examine these topics, educators traditionally have used quantitative methodologies in order to identify and examine process-performance relationships. Consequently, the purpose of this research has been to establish causes, correlations, and consequences among aspects of literacy acquisitions, curriculum, and practices (Kaestle,
1985). In addition, it has relied on assumptions such as large sample size, randomization of subjects, and strictly controlled experimental conditions.

However, in my study, it was important to focus on a few individuals purposively chosen so that their stories could be told in-depth. Further, it was important to connect the lives of my participants to the cultural and historical milieu in which they have lived so that their stories may be interpreted contextually. Thus, traditional empirical research was not appropriate for the purposes of this project.

Recently, many researchers have begun to address these areas of interest by exploring the uses of qualitative methodologies (e.g., Jaeger, 1988; Munro, 1991; Wolcott, 1990a). These approaches are significant in that they fill a lacuna in the body of research by allowing more in-depth examinations of individual persons and the cultures or settings in which they live.

In examining literacy from a qualitative stance, educational research has focused on broad issues such as historical trends (e.g., Venezky, 1991) and racial/ethnic patterns (e.g., Heath, 1991), as well as
on particular contexts such as early literacy development in the home (e.g., Sulzby and Teale, 1985), schooling (e.g., Hoffman, 1991) and workplace (e.g., Mikulecky & Drew, 1991) arenas. Results have shown that the nature and functions of literacy have varied according to contextual factors such as time (e.g., progressive versus back-to-basics, Goodlad, 1984) and place (e.g., majority versus minority communities, Heath, 1991). My study of three different women across a lifespan has approached this unexplored territory in literacy research.

**Anthropological Research and Literacy**

In order to examine literacy from an individual’s stance, anthropological research provides a means to allow for personal stories to be heard. For my study of literacy practices, I used ethnographically-informed life histories that focused on the participants’ own narratives (Langness & Frank, 1981). These *literacy life histories*, as I have labeled them, are the result of a marriage of the anthropological field’s life history research and an emphasis on the literacy practices of reading and writing.
Essential to this methodology is the effort to understand and learn from persons whose life worlds are different from the researcher's own, that is, the participants' points of view (emic) as opposed to that of an outsider's (etic). Such listening, understanding, and interpreting is the essential task of ethnography.

Harman (1985) has asserted that literacy is context dependent. The three participants in my study grew from different experiential contexts. All are individuals who celebrate and utilize their literacy abilities in unique and diverse ways. Consequently, it is understandable that the nature and functions of reading and writing vary according to each of the participant's life experiences.

The significance of an ethnographic study focused on literacy life histories, however, cannot maintain the illusion of studying objective entities who are unaffected by the person doing the research. In terms of the significance of the study, it must be made clear that the researcher is equally subject to influence and change through the process of human interaction.
Langness and Frank (1981) have said that "it is ... through the work of writing about lives—our own, and the lives of others—[that] we can humanize ourselves" (p. 154). I too have a gendered, historical, and cultural position, and I cannot help but interpret the data that I collect through this unique lens, and make an attempt to be aware of my own personal beliefs and biases. This awareness can be transformative: "The acts of empathy that arise in attempting to understand the reality of people sometimes very different from ourselves can be a transformative process" (Langness & Frank, 1981, p. 154). Such mutual transformations which reach across the boundaries of self and other are at the heart of ethnographic research.

Need for Study

A broad question which motivated this study was, "How are women's lives shaped by language in all its myriad forms, and how does facility with these forms help women to shape their lives?" My study seeks to understand the voices of these women as they participated in literacy activities during their lives and to make gender central to our understanding of
their experiences as lifelong learners and women who participated in diverse roles.

By studying the lives of these women, we may come to see how literacy and gender roles are culturally constructed and how they relate in the day to day lives of women who lived in this century and whose lives span many decades. By examining the daily literacy practices of these women within the broader contexts of their lives, we can gain an understanding of how women have negotiated, struggled, and created meaning through reading and writing in their lives as they juggled complex responsibilities.

These stories can be of especial importance as they may put into perspective the factors of motivation and interest which helped to create these lifelong learners. At a time when it has been said that our nation’s greatest problem is not illiteracy, but aliteracy, that is the phenomenon of being able to read but choosing not to (Baroody, 1984; Duchemin & Mealey, (in press); Thimmensch, 1984; Wilson, 1984) they may well be able to illuminate the circumstances which can contribute to the development of persons for
whom literacy practices and lifelong learning are intrinsically rewarding.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, I define the following terms:

**ethnography**: the branch of anthropology that deals with the description of various cultural groups (Spradley, 1980).

**lifelong learner**: one who acknowledges an ongoing commitment to learning and literacy practices crucial to the creation of an informed populace, particularly within the information "explosion" that characterizes the twentieth century (Peterson, 1983). For this study, lifelong learners will be identified through self-reports and current engagement in literacy practices.

**literacy**: a complex and dynamic constellation of beliefs and concepts involving reading and writing which are context-dependent, functional, and purposeful (Venezky, 1991). For this study, oral language will also be included as a literacy process, particularly for the preformal schooling stage; at that time, speaking and listening are especially
important to the young child in understanding and developing written language.

lifespan: that totality of chronological time of a person’s life. For this study, it encompassed only that time accessible by the researcher through the available data sources, limited by the participants’ own memories and recollections and the time constraints of the study. Further, data collection was necessarily incomplete, as the study cannot deal with the participants’ future lives. Within the lifespan, there were four phases identified:

  - **preformal schooling phase**: that time between birth and when formal schooling begins, usually age 5-6 when a child enters school.
  - **formal schooling phase**: that time between entering school and graduating from high school, trade school, or college.
  - **homemaker/workplace phase**: that time recognized as adulthood commencing after graduation from school or college during which the participant engaged in employment and/or maintenance of a home.
  - **retirement phase**: that time commencing upon cessation of participation in the formal work force
during which more leisure time is often available due to the absence of formal work responsibilities. It is acknowledged that this phase varies with individual lives. For the purposes of this study, its definition included not only that the participant had ceased employment in the formal work force, but also that the participant be over the age of 60.

**life history:** a retrospective account of a person's life, in written and/or oral form, that has been prompted or elicited by another human being (Watson & Watson-Sparks, 1985). Its primary goal is the exploration of the insider's, or emic, view of a particular individual or culture (Langness & Frank, 1981).

**literacy life histories:** for the purposes of this study, narratives either produced voluntarily or elicited or prompted by another person which address the interrelations between literacy and lived experience across as many of the four lifespan phases as is possible. These addressed issues of oral language, reading and writing within contextual frameworks of individual lives.
Chapter Summary

This study is important in that it sought to look in-depth at the four lifespan phases unique to my participants within the particular historical and cultural contexts of 20th century America. I attempted to learn from not only what my participants did, but what they had to say about it. Through fieldwork and triangulation—obtaining and examining information in as many ways as possible—I sought to understand the lives of my participants as they related to literacy practices both within individual life contexts and also within the broad historical milieu. Such a study has not been undertaken, to my knowledge, for neither women nor men.

Those who have reached mature age in our society deserve to be heard—not just for their sake but our sake, as well. Without listening to the voices of lifelong experience, the past may be lost to us and the experiences from which we could have learned pass lost into time. As Venezky (1991) states:

We cannot recover any more of the past than what has been bequeathed to us, but we can make better use of available historical data and of opportunities for new research. The research literature on literacy is nearly blank on the skills required for writing and their normal
development through and after schooling. It is also deficient on the development of reading and writing in adults. (p. 64)

Chapter II presents the theoretical framework and supporting literature for the study. Chapter III describes my participants, data sources, and procedures. Chapter IV presents the three participants' literacy life histories. Chapter V discusses and interprets the findings from the data analysis in light of previous research. Finally, Chapter VI suggests implications for literacy educators.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although literacy is often a major topic of educational research and practice, it has no definitive meaning (Foster & Purves, 1991; Heath, 1991). As Venezky (1991) stated, the term "has meant different things at different times and in different places" (p. 49). For example, in the Middle Ages, a literate individual was one who could read, write, and speak Latin. Between that period and the Reformation, the focus was on reading in the vernacular. After that time, writing, also in the vernacular, again became important (Venezky, 1991).

In addition, while the components of literacy may be similar (e.g., reading and writing), their nature and function may vary (Foster & Purves, 1991). According to Heath (1991), these can range from a mechanistic focus, such as "recognizing and recreating (either orally or in writing) words, sounds, and letters" to a critical focus, such as the "presentation of self-in-revision interdependent with
other speakers and readers as well as with a variety of written texts" (p. 5).

Further, an individual's literacy abilities may vary according to the literacy situation. As noted by Heath (1991), such abilities, or literateness, are only somewhat stable. For example, "a word spelled or even identified and pronounced correctly at one point slips away into uncertainty on other occasions" (p. 5). Similarly, although a person can read a poem for both individual and universal meanings, "at other times, the poet's words fall like dry chips with no connection to life" (p. 5). Thus, literacy exists on a continuum across time and settings rather than in absolute categories (Kaestle, 1991).

For the purposes of this study, I focused on reading and writing as primary components of literacy. In addition, I extended this focus to include speaking and listening as other processes which fundamentally influence written language. However, these components were not defined prior to data collection; rather, they emerged as the participants recalled literacy acts and activities from their past and current experiences.
In addition to these components, this study particularly sought to examine literacy according to other context-dependent dimensions. Among these dimensions which were addressed is the sociocultural, which refers to the way of life and attitudes, beliefs, and practices of the persons involved within an identifiable group. Another dimension is that of the lifespan/historical, which addresses the historical milieu surrounding individuals during a particular phase in their lives. The final dimension to be addressed is that of gender, as my three participants are women and therefore may share certain gender-specific patterns of experience. In order to address these dimensions, I chose to employ a kind of ethnography, that of the life history methodology.

A Sociocultural Perspective on Literacy

The field of anthropology has contributed to our understanding of literacy in two phases. Originally, development of literacy was perceived as an indication of historical, cultural, and social progress in that literate societies were viewed as more advanced than non-literate societies (Frazer, 1959; Tylor, 1958). Such a notion of cultural evolution implied that our
individualized, literate Western civilization was superior to preliterate cultures.

During this phase, anthropological research addressed such factors as if a culture were literate, when literacy developed and what the nature and functions of the literacy practices were like (e.g., Malinowski, 1922). Research also addressed such factors as at what time such literacy developed and what the nature and functions of the literacy practices were like in terms of the socio-cultural and historical context of the times (Levi-Strauss, 1966).

During the last quarter of a century, anthropological research shifted from viewing literacy as a basis of progress to a more evolved approach which addresses literacy's effects on cultural organization, social practices, and other cultural phenomena (Goody & Watt, 1968). Current discussions of culture (e.g., Geertz, 1973) have provided a way of addressing literacy events at the level of face-to-face interaction through anthropological perspectives. Geertz (1973) defined culture as "webs of significance" among and between people created through their interactions. Thus, culture is viewed as a
dynamic process evolving out of relationships with others and interpretive meanings that are perpetually being created.

Based on this research, anthropology has given the literacy field new constructs that help to broaden our understanding of literacy processes and to place them within social, cultural, and historical settings. For example, Heath (1989) has explored extensively reading and writing as cultural events. She notes that reading abilities allow for information learned in a particular setting to be transferred to other situations. Language then is extended from book knowledge as informed by readers' personal experiences to integrate with other perspectives and be expressed in diverse ways.

Heath (1989) found in a study of Black and Mexican-origin working class communities that children learn by observation and participation in appropriately assigned sociocultural roles. Additionally, her ethnographic research of these particular cultural groups reveals that reliance upon persons within the group is highly valued, thus often leading to avoidance of extensive sojourns into
mainstream institutions. Often, this reliance translates into disenfranchisement from institutions such as schools or occupational groups that can reinforce many school-taught practices. In turn, the self-protective barriers of staying within one’s cultural group can contribute to group histories of powerlessness relative to surrounding, more dominant, groups. Identity, therefore, for many nonmainstream cultures depends far more on being a member of a particular ethnic, age, or gender-determined status rather than on a sense of being literate, that is, of being an individual with access to information and developing literacy practices (Heath, 1991).

Endemic to understanding such phenomena is acknowledgement of the sociocultural and historical contexts which inform them. How do particular gendered and socio-cultural identities function in regard to literacy practices within society?

How people interact with each other to create cultural contexts in which to interpret reading, writing, and text has been the subject of much inquiry. Though all the participants of this study have gone through similar life phases, historically
and culturally, the context of those phases has been quite different. Therefore, a sociocultural approach to literacy practices was chosen for my study of the literacy life histories of three women.

The focus of my study was lifelong learning as exemplified in the literacy life histories of my participants. Heath (1986, 1988) has suggested that learning cannot be separated from the living of life, itself. Mikulecky and Drew (1991) suggest that the American workplace is becoming increasingly dependent upon persons who possess the ability and desire to continue to learn on the job. In addition, Kastenbaum (1991) and Richardson (1991) have indicated that the quality of life in the retirement years is enhanced by continued literacy endeavors. Mental acuity, itself, may be continued or even increased in older age through such literacy efforts as reading (Meyer, 1987). Berman (1991) has shown that the writing of narratives can even more strongly influence the enjoyment of life and mental acuity. Thus, each phase of life possesses unique opportunities for self-definition and expression through literacy-related activities.
Literacy Across the Lifespan

As stated earlier, the assumption underlying this study is that literacy is context dependent. Given that my participants are retired, with their ages spanning many decades and geographical locations, it was apparent that there would be multiple contexts. For the purposes of this study, those multiple contexts are described according to lifespan phases: preformal schooling, formal schooling, homemaker/workplace, and retirement. These phases were identified by the researcher as being significant to the overall literacy experience of an individual, and correspond, to some extent, with previous literacy research foci (e.g., emergent literacy: Strickland and Morrow, 1989; literacy and schooling: Pearson, 1991; workplace literacy: Mikulecky and Drew, 1991; retirement and literacy: Peterson, 1983; Simonton, 1991; Steward and Croft, 1988).

Preformal schooling phase. Recently the field of literacy has investigated the profound effects of literacy nurturing on the oral and written language development of young children. For example, many literacy educators (Cox & Zarrillo, 1993; Strickland &
Morrow, 1989) illuminated the dynamic relationships among children, print, and those older persons who introduce them to the world of books.

During these early years, children become aware of the print in their environments and develop a rudimentary understanding of the many functions of reading and writing (Clay, 1976; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). The activities of parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends are instrumental in shaping the values of the child concerning literacy. During this time, children who are read to and witness the everyday functions of reading and writing are led easily into viewing themselves as readers and writers (Smith, 1971).

Cox and Zarillo (1993) state that the simple act of reading storybooks aloud with young children may be the easiest and most effective way to help children learn to read. Often children who have extensive experience with storybook reading in the home learn to read without formal instruction. These children are referred to as early naturalistic readers (Sulzby & Teale, 1985) and their abilities indicate that formal reading instruction is greatly enhanced by experiences
in the home before formal schooling begins. Adults within the home setting have shown them through example that reading is pleasurable, interesting, and social. As Sulzby and Teale (1985) noted, this time before formal schooling begins can be viewed as a time of emergent literacy when reading and writing behaviors are developing along a continuum leading into conventional literacy.

For young children, these emerging concepts of reading and writing are closely interrelated and develop together. Therefore, it is not feasible to use chronological age, or developmental stages in understanding how children emerge as readers and writers. Terms such as reading readiness or pre-reading are inappropriate because they reflect reading as something that occurs after meeting other prerequisites. Rather, emergent literacy refers to children's development with regard to reading and writing from birth to roughly age seven, depending on when children enter school.

Critical to children's growth as readers and writers, therefore, are environmental, or contextual factors which exist in the home prior to formal
schooling. For the purposes of my study, this time is referred to as that of preformal schooling. Sulzby and Teale (1985) argue that with a print-rich environment and persons who will share that print with them, children have advantages during this phase which can enhance their literacy acquisition joyfully and happily within the home environment.

Other researchers (Clay, 1975; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984) particularly address a child's emerging understanding of writing and assert that actually most children "write" before they read. They note that early drawing and scribbling are precursors of more traditional meaning-making through print and script. Young children who scribble on paper with crayons or draw in the dirt with a stick or sand with their toes express this phenomenon. Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) note the extreme importance of a children's cultural surroundings and their sensitivity to cultural clues. They observed that very young children mimic the culturally unique structures of writing around the world. For example, American children often scribble from left to right, whereas
Chinese children make their earliest notations from right to left.

In both reading and writing, significant commonalities exist within the family. As Cox and Zarrillo (1993) note, all children are involved in literacy experiences within the home regardless of economic status, social class or ethnicity. Experiences with literacy in the home are social and functional and serve real purposes rather than being intended to teach literacy. Individual families have differing and distinctive patterns of recurring experiences with reading and writing, and there is often great variability among families within particular socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

Regardless of cultural differences, all family environments contribute to children's literacy development in unique and diverse ways. From this cultural context, the child takes with her many kinds of understanding about language and print.

The historical milieu of this phase during the lives of my participants also has unique determinants. Families were close-knit and often the oral tradition of storytelling and reading aloud were the warp and
woof of the family fabric (Barton & Booth, 1990). The lack of technological distractions such as television which became widespread in the 1950s (Mander, 1991) and the need for communal work seem to have encouraged families who found pleasure in time set aside for conversation (Trelease, 1989).

As it is this "sea of talk" (Dwyer, 1989) or oral language development which informs future literacy growth, certain aspects of life at this time may actually have served to foster school success. For example, during this time the extended family often lived nearby or in the same residence, providing abundant personal attention to young children. It is possible that members of the extended family engaged the children in conversations about current events, community activities, and storybooks. During these conversations are many opportunities for children to engage in responses which develop their expressive abilities. Examples of this are children engaging in retellings, asking questions, making predictions, and analyzing information in light of their personal experiences (Cox & Zarillo, 1993).
Although these oral exchanges are similar to ones which occur today in literacy-rich homes, it is likely that the increased extended family and community contact along with less harried schedules of days gone by might make them more likely to have taken place. A general atmosphere of friendliness and trust may have prevailed furthering the kinds of oral exchanges promoting literacy development (Trelease, 1989).

In addition to opportunities for oral language development in the home and neighborhood, there may have been many community activities such as those in churches, and other social organizations (Bloome, 1983; Heath, 1989) which fostered an understanding of literacy in ways which are not as common today. For example Venezky (1991) suggests that church bulletins during the early twentieth century functioned in important ways to inform communities about events and happenings in the lives of parishioners. They became, in essence, a kind of weekly news bulletin which may have influenced the literacy experiences of families at a time when church attendance was very high. At this time there was also emphasis on Sunday School as a learning environment.
Venezky (1991) indicates that an overview of the history of literacy reveals that there are great gaps in our knowledge of how literacy functioned in the everyday lives of people who lived in the past. It is likely that the preformal schooling phase of persons living during the first half of the twentieth century differs considerably from persons living today due to the differing contexts created by certain demographic conditions of America at this time.

**Formal schooling phase.** During the years that most persons traditionally attend educational institutions, they are expected to acquire and extend the skills and practices of literacy. Many views regarding appropriate literacy instruction (e.g., Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985), and of what constitutes appropriate curriculum (e.g., Hirsch, 1988) have emerged. For example, literacy has been perceived as skills-based (e.g., Gough, 1985) or holistic (e.g., Goodman, 1985), with appropriate instructional approaches developed accordingly.

Regardless of the varying nature of the formal schooling experience, it is clear that a person's personal experience with formal education is a
significant factor in the life of the individual, affecting future education and employment opportunities as well as affective responses which influence the probability of ongoing participation in learning. For example, literacy has multiple definitions depending on length of schooling (eighth grade dropout, college graduate) and focus of instruction (vocational training, higher education). For the purposes of my study, I refer to this time as the formal schooling phase.

During the 19th century, formal education spread throughout North America (Barbier, 1983; Munro, 1991). Supporting this educational effort were local and national government and private organizations. Along with increasing levels of schooling came new papermaking, printing, and transportation techniques which made books more affordable to the average person and municipal school systems (Barbier, 1983). General stores, military bases, railroad stations, and neighborhoods were flooded with inexpensive literature such as newspapers, magazines, and the American "dime" novel. There was near-universal enrollment due to compulsory education laws in primary school in America
during the first half of the twentieth century, and the U.S. was experiencing widespread literacy (Cippola, 1969). This literacy explosion was reflected in the homes and communities at this time, with accompanying changes in the ways that society looked at schooling.

Some literacy educators (Roehler & Duffy, 1991; Wilson, 1984) have argued that too much reading instruction has centered on drill and practice to the exclusion of more meaningful interpretive and application-oriented experiences. At the turn of the century, though, philosophers (e.g., Dewey, 1938) were beginning to suggest that instruction be centered on interpretation of text meaning rather than on its exact recall.

During the early 20th century, an increase in mechanical devices for household care and a decrease in the length of the working day produced a climate which encouraged reading as a leisure time activity. Smith (1926) describes the effects of this climate on reading instruction:

The goal of reading instruction is no longer solely that of teaching the child to read the Bible, nor is it that of training him to read orally with such expression and eloquence that he
will sway his audience. There is now no particular need for oratory. The chief emphasis is placed upon training the child to get the complete thought from the page and to get it as quickly and accurately as possible. (p. 9)

As Smith (1926) addressed, the prior emphasis on oral reading was being challenged at this time. McDade (1944) cited research he had begun nearly a decade earlier when he argued that children actually read more efficiently and comprehend more fully when they read silently. While oral reading is important to very young readers just beginning to "crack the code" of the written word (and there were texts written specifically to make the early decoding experiences of young readers successful in the basal readers of the time), McDade argued that the most meaningful kinds of experiences with print occurred when the reader read to herself. His research set up a climate that was open to another trend in formal reading instruction during this time— that of the individualized reading.

According to Smith (1965) during the first quarter of the 20th century there began to be published programs which emphasized the use of standardized testing. In opposition to the
standardized tests of this time which emphasized drill and practice was an alternative instructional approach which stressed wide reading based on children's interests.

As educators came to the understanding that there were wide differences among school-aged children in regard to reading, they recognized the importance of individualized programs. Called individualized reading or a book-centered approach (Gray, 1933), this alternative way of teaching reading favored the replacement of basal reading series and group instruction with independent reading of books that corresponded with children's interests and reading abilities. Instead of standardized tests to assess reading growth, individual conferences provided the arena for understanding individuals and their personal reading experiences (Smith, 1965). Although Mason and Au (1990) assert that individualized reading has never won wide acceptance despite its effectiveness, they note that this is probably due to the difficulty of teachers having to provide books for every child and more individualized lessons and materials.
During the time that my participants would have been going to school, reading debates centered on two issues. One issue is that of oral versus silent reading. The other is that of curriculum, that is, whether to use a published reading series or to encourage wide reading (Gray, 1933) based on individual interests and abilities. Individual teacher beliefs and practices as well as policies of individual school districts would affect the experiences of my participants in these arenas. It is possible that teachers may have stressed wide reading for pleasure and thus encouraged the use of local library services.

Because my participants experienced life before the advent of the television, they are able to provide unique glimpses into life before this giant influence took hold and became a habit for many (McLuhan, 1964; Mander, 1991). At this time, reading silently, reading aloud and telling stories were common forms of entertainment in the home (Kaestle, 1991). The notion of context for literacy activities at this time would include influences of both home and the larger formal...
schooling environment of the participant as well as community influences due to increased independence.

**Homemaker/workplace phase.** Upon ending the formal schooling phase of life, it is common for individuals to seek employment in the workplace in order to meet their economic needs and to provide for a secure future. Rush, Moe, and Storlie (1986) define occupational literacy as the ability to competently read required work-related materials; they do, however, acknowledge that competencies vary immensely from job to job within occupations. Generally speaking, most jobs demand literacy and computation involving a variety of materials and use higher level thinking skills (Guthrie, 1988; Mikulecky, 1982).

Although literacy activity is indispensible to persons as they negotiate their paths through society (Guthrie & Greaney, 1991), it is clear that this is particularly true in distinctive social contexts such as the workplace and home. Guthrie and Greaney propose that the situation leads to the development of a purpose which is then prone to dictate a particular activity such as leisure reading, occupational reading, or community literacy, that is, literacy
activities within one’s neighborhood, social group, or cultural setting.

Although both men and women perform duties in the workplace, some women also become full or part-time homemakers devoting their energies to maintaining a home and family. Although workplace literacy has been the focus of considerable research (Guthrie, 1988; Mikulecky, 1982; Rush, Moe, & Storlie, 1986) little has been written about issues relating to the work of women in the home, and the necessity of balancing diverse roles such as caregiver, mother, domestic engineer, and worker simultaneously. To accommodate the varying nature of this phase of a person’s life, I refer to this as the homemaker/workplace phase as the women in my study may have performed either one or both of these roles.

In order to address this general timeframe, Tinsley and Kaestle (1991) explored the functions of literacy in the lives of 30 women who grew up during the early part of this century. They found that these women who wrote autobiographies were either highly educated or intensely self-schooled. They did represent very diverse cultural and economic
circumstances. Their writings demonstrated how people created their identities and how literacy activities played a role in this process.

These researchers found that literacy activities had several purposes in the lives of young women. The first three were entertainment, information, and self-improvement. The first category reflected that kind of reading which tends to transport the reader to experiences more exciting and richly captivating than those around her, a kind of escape through literature. Some of the autobiographies indicated that the ability to read aloud for others' enjoyment was an ability which could be cultivated in order to entertain others at social functions such as church. Reading for information was ubiquitous, and so mundane that it received little attention from the autobiographers. Yet there were references to reading catalogs (for seeds), newspapers (for news of river traffic) and magazines (for political background). Certainly the national attention was piqued due to wars and rumors of wars in Europe. Tinsley and Kaestle (1991) note that for many persons devotion to the reading of the Bible was intense.
Related to Bible reading was the purpose of reading for self-improvement, for the Bible was a storytbook, a devotional work, and a guide to conduct. Tinsley and Kaestle (1991) state that during the early 20th century, Bible reading was a prominent activity in America. They found that in addition to Bible reading for personal improvement there were many texts which dealt with such issues as how to have a pleasing personality, how to have a successful social life, and how to have a happy marriage and rear children well.

In addition to the three categories mentioned above, Tinsley and Kaestle (1991) note that the young women in their study read for the purposes of cultural maintenance and critical perspectives. The former, they note, refers to the kinds of reading done for the purposes of supporting social values—cultural identity in harmony with the guiding beliefs and practices of one’s own culture.

In contrast are reading practices which challenge and shape beliefs contrary to those of one’s social group (Tinsley & Kaestle, 1991). The four decades following the turn of this century were years of massive immigration and turbulent labor organization.
At this time education was often seen as a way for persons to make their way out of poverty and assimilate into the promised land of American social mobility (Venezky, 1991). Sociocultural influences were especially present during this phase of my participants' lives as their worlds widened in scope to include both the social worlds of work outside of the home and the social and familial worlds of childrearing.

**Retirement phase.** Following formal employment or employment as a homemaker is that phase of life referred to as retirement. While some reports indicate that being elderly has been associated with decay, decline, dependency, and depression (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1991), the General Social Survey (1986) reports widespread senses of positiveness and meaningfulness. This phase is particularly interesting in my participants' lives as it reflects their current interests, concerns, and daily preoccupations. Additionally, it is the only life phase with which I have had direct contact as I only made the participating women's acquaintance in February of 1991. Furthermore, this phase of a life
may be a proper vantage point from which to view lifelong literacy as it may represent the culmination, or distillation, of a life of involvement with reading and writing.

During this phase it is possible to experience the continued enjoyment of learning, particularly through social support systems that connect the elderly with the lives and stories of others (Scales, 1989). For example, in writing workshops specifically designed for elder writers, there is often a rebirth of creativity (Simonton, 1991) coupled with an increased sense of well-being (Berman, 1991; Chinen, 1991). It was based on these research findings that I chose to study elderly women who considered themselves lifelong learners. For the purpose of this study, I call this the retirement phase.

Carsello and Creaser (1982) have explored the elderly’s reading attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and habits finding them often to place higher value on literacy-related activities than younger persons. They also note that the factor of age has not been dealt with consistently, nor has the term elderly been satisfactorily defined as it involves such a complex
assortment of physical and environmental factors. Scales (1989) found that chronological ages used to denote the elderly have been reported as 60 years and over and as 70-95; still other studies consider the retirement age of 65-70 as elderly. Companionship and contextual age must be considered by literacy educators working with elderly adults in teaching/learning settings (Carsello & Creaser, 1982; Scales, 1989).

Although Scales (1989) and Lowy (1991) and Carsello and Creaser (1982), address affective factors concerning the elderly's literacy activities, Adams and Dorosz (1985) address the cognitive factors regarding text comprehension among the elderly, citing "inconsistent findings" regarding age-related differences in comprehension across the lifespan. The results of this study yield qualitative differences in the kinds of responses exhibited by the varying ages. Younger subjects tended to list or closely reproduce text information while older subjects had a tendency to transform the text into gist as well as interpretive units of meaning. It appears that there are qualitative changes from young to mature adulthood
as reflected in the nature of the transformations of information. Thus, as individuals age, their knowledge processing style may become more heuristic, analogical, and figurative.

In regard to reading materials, O'Keefe (1990) found that many elderly persons read the newspaper regularly, and appeared to be more greatly attuned to this activity than their younger counterparts. Explanations include their having been socialized into mass media before television appeared and thus having developed more of a basic affinity to newspapers as information sources. During retirement, larger amounts of leisure time also allow more attention to media, including newspapers, and it was found that adults 65 and over do spend more time than younger persons reading the newspaper, with most estimates running about 45 minutes a day. There are significant readership drops during the mid to late 70s, however, likely as a result of vision problems. Furthermore, it was found that increased contact with neighbors correlated with greater newspaper exposure lending support to the connections between newspaper use and community ties. In conclusion, it was found that use
of mass media for informational purposes appears best predicted by greater income and to a lesser extent education, more personal interaction with the community, and organizational involvement (O'Keefe, 1990).

It is impossible to view literacy practices outside of the context of the culture, which is at present dominated by the media of television (Mander, 1991). Surprisingly, this is true in many countries around the world. Altergoot's (1988) comparative study of daily life in later life in Sweden, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Hungary, the U.S., Canada, and Japan concludes that when at home, the dominant leisure activity in modern nations seems to be television viewing. This form of leisure involves 40% of all leisure time among Swedish elders, almost three hours a day in Canada, and an increasing proportion of time among older people in Japan. It is dominant as a form of leisure for all age groups in all countries considered, but it is generally more time-consuming among older people than among younger people, presumably because the onset of retirement means more leisure time. Altergoot (1988) suggests that the
challenge of the future will no doubt center on how the aged will be motivated to devote their talents and abilities to more meaningful and productive activities than mere absorption in television viewing. A related aspect which was emphasized in the literature on literacy during the retirement phase is that literacy activities have the potential to be therapeutic both individually and in communities.

**Therapeutic literacy potentials.** Some gerontologists feel that reliance upon passive and socially isolating forms of entertainment such as television viewing may be combated by course offerings and practices such as reading and writing for pleasure and communication (Goff & Torrance, 1991; Kastenbaum, 1991). In addition to the personally satisfying outcomes of reading clubs and writing groups among the elderly, there are cited benefits to the community as a whole and the psychological well-being of the populace via such contributions to personal growth and increased quality of life.

Peterson (1983) describes the United States as being a "learning society" in which educational opportunities are open to many persons including the
elderly through off-campus courses, activities in retirement communities and nursing homes. He suggests that as more elderly persons participate in these programs, curriculum can be better linked to their interests and goals, and educational institutions can enhance their commitment to the lifelong learner. In turn, participants in educational programs can teach others and positively influence their surroundings through increased knowledge and abilities.

Richardson (1991) describes a successful effort to bring stimulation and enjoyment to a nursing home through a Fine Arts for Elders program. In addition to music and art appreciation, the program featured courses in autobiographical writing and writing for fun and profit. The residents were observed as being deeply involved with their projects.

Although some programs have focused on the affective effects of literacy programs for the elderly, the research also revealed the use of literacy programs as memory enhancers. Meyer (1987) and Meyer, Young, and Bartlett (1989) note that memory can be improved by the teaching of particular text structures. The relationship between memory and
strategic text structures is explored by Meyer with the goal of the research to determine if instruction focusing on an effective prose learning strategy could improve the reading comprehension and memory of young and older adults. Research revealed that there exists a subgroup of older adults that remember about as much as young adults. This subgroup had important characteristics in common: They were frequent readers, had acquired at least one college degree, attained extremely high scores on vocabulary tests, and could use the top-level structure in reading materials to guide their learning and memory. Some or all of these characteristics generally fit the profile of my literacy participants.

In the studies of Meyer (1987) and Meyer, Young, and Bartlett (1989), it was found that the total time spent reading in everyday life correlated with recall performance in the laboratory. It was suggested that a certain commitment to time spent reading would be helpful in combatting the forgetfulness and decline in memory that are often reported by the elderly. The motto of the Meyer program—"Use it or Lose It"—could be applied to participating in literacy activities as
opposed to the passive engagement which television provides.

As research in communities of elderly writers and readers has suggested (Chinen, 1991; Kastenbaum, 1991; Simonton, 1991), the notion of the sedentary octogenarian can be replaced by the notion of a lifelong learner, actively engaged in enriching and mentally stimulating dialogues in supportive social groups. The resulting improvement in quality of life through social stimulation, enhanced creativity, and improved self-esteem are also significant. These private benefits cannot help but be expressed socially, producing a general uplift in the community as a whole.

Additionally, studies by Coberly, McCormick, and Updike (1984) and Steward and Croft (1988) suggest that reading and writing workshops evoke life memories that serve to provide a medium for active construction of coherency in one's present life. While attempts to create coherency of experience are not limited to any one age group, it was found that writing is particularly appropriate for elderwriters who seek a sense of continuity and coherence in their lives.
This process is further echoed by Berman (1991) who professes the tremendous psychic empowerment available through writing of one’s life at a time when coherence and closure become very important. Thus, participation either solitarily or in community becomes a therapeutic activity. Not only does engaging in literacy activities produce therapeutic results for the elderly, but the enormous aesthetic appeal of their work gives proof that creativity thrives in old age in spite of or inspired by its obstacles and constraints (Kastenbaum, 1991).

Berman (1991) describes the process as a kind of revealing of the inner landscape which is revealed through aging, and describes a catharsis, or transformation, from a state of isolation through healing and opening up in the narrative form of journal writing. This claim is consistent with Chinen’s (1991) observation that there is a reawakening of childlike wonderment and mystery in elders who write their eldertales. This may be especially true for women whose role as nurturers of others often has relegated their sense of life histories to the sidelines (Benstock, 1988).
As Coberly, McCormick, and Updike (1984) describe, there are unique opportunities inherent in participating in literacy communities for older persons, female or male:

Older adults are potential writers possessed of rich lodes of experience to mine and the leisure and solitude for work....they crave the experience of wrestling with something, making something emerge from their vigorous effort. Why not wrestle with themselves, as they confronted and continue to confront their own lives? Writing class is a place to be heard and enjoyed weekly, a class that capitalizes on a lifetime of fine work as a proper subject for art. Writing allows older adults to continue to enjoy a sense of power and control over their lives, to retain the sense of being the acting agent instead of the acted upon, the constrained, constricted object of other people's attention or neglect. At a time when many seniors are relegated to the rocking chair, those fortunate enough to be involved in the arts can retain their sense of self. (p. 10)

Thus, a vibrant alternative arises to meet what Altergoot (1988) suggests will be the greatest challenge of the elderly: that of finding meaningful activities to combat more passive and isolating activities such as TV viewing. There is ample evidence that engagement in literacy activities across the lifespan holds benefits of well-being and cognitive stimulation. Although some persons, like the women in this study, continue the literacy
practices of their youth and early adulthood into old age, for others, the autumn years bring discovery through literacy of new dimensions of self.

**Gender Issues**

Adrienne Rich (1973) suggests that there is no discipline that does not obscure and devalue the history and experience of women as a group. Women’s lives have been considered to result from biological motivations and to have remained outside of history (Estes, 1992). Because women’s literacy is determined by language, however, it is very much intertwined with historical and cultural forces as are all of our lives.

Continuing into the 20th century, woman’s place was generally considered to be in the home (Benstock, 1988; Gordon, 1990). Therefore, it is likely that my participants would define themselves either by fitting into this traditional role or by departing from it. Although there may have been a large, supportive family living nearby or in the same home, it was usually the woman who stayed at home and took care of household responsibilities.
The period 1890-1920 has been described as a period of female separatism, social activism, and belief in a special mission for educated women (Gordon, 1990). When the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, accompanied by supposed political equality, there was a decline in separatism and women's reform networks. Nevertheless, despite the victory of suffrage, inequality prevailed, and it was not under the 1960s that there was a new flurry of feminist activity (Gordon, 1990; Munro, 1991). Because the women in my study were living during this timeframe in American history, they can provide unique glimpses of and responses to these events which have shaped the role of women at the present.

The historical events of the 20th century, including the The Great Depression of the 1930s with its widespread poverty and World War II, brought sweeping changes. A growing number of women entered the job market because the men were away at war. This resulted in workplace training programs and the "war classes" which brought women into fields which were traditionally considered "men's work" (Gordon, 1990; Munro, 1991). The war also necessitated communication
through writing letters, as loved ones spent years apart due to the war.

As the war-weary soldiers returned, there were marriages and resulting offspring which brought role changes for my participants. In addition to roles as mothers and homemakers, women at this time also assumed roles in the workplace (Guthrie & Greaney, 1991). For the first time in history, they contributed to their families economically by working outside of their homes during the times before and after which their children were born.

The women chosen for this study represent voices which will not always be available to tell the stories of the 20th century through the eyes of women who cherish their experiences with reading and writing. They represent a diminishing resource which must be honored and remembered. The telling of their stories may recapture and reveal the experience of being women who loved learning during the twentieth century. In the words of Gilbert and Gubar (1979): "Women will starve in silence until new stories are created which confer on them the power of naming themselves" (p. 11).
Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) further explore the formidable social and cultural barricades which have served to limit women's access to formal higher education and put at risk the efforts of those women who attempt to develop their literacy abilities. Further, Stromquist (1990) notes that worldwide women's literacy efforts have been thwarted by societal and cultural situations which have favored the efforts of men: "Illiteracy does not occur at random but is typically the plight of poor and powerless people and is a fundamental manifestation of the problem of social inequality" (p. 97).

The women in my study are lifelong learners who certainly do not reflect conditions associated with illiteracy. Nevertheless, it is possible that within their lived experience which expresses a commitment to the value of literacy practices are obstacles and incidents which may suggest that they too were affected by sociocultural gender factors, similar to what Jahner (1985) found in her life history study of a Native American woman.
Using Life History Methodology

Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging to our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with the threads of time, place, character and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. Decisions as to which stories will be told and which suppressed not only give definition to a life but serve as a form of power for the writer. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.1)

When considering my research purpose, I hoped to design a study which would allow my participants to tell their stories in their own words and in their own voices. In addition, I wished to encourage a collaborative approach in which I was not a "scientist" seeking to study "subjects" but rather a fellow human being seeking to understand the complexities and subjective nature of the lived experiences of my informants. Finally, I wanted to be able to take into account my own reflexivity necessary in the transformation of my own evolving understanding, as discussed by Myerhoff (1978).

Given these concerns, qualitative research offered the most appropriate methodology. Qualitative research--particularly ethnography, a kind of
54

anthropological research—addresses experience as it is felt and lived (Wolcott, 1988). In other words, it acknowledges the intersubjective nature of knowledge construction and the importance of contextual descriptions (Agar, 1980; Langness & Frank; Richardson, 1989; Wolcott, 1988).

Ethnography. Ethnography was originally used to document Native American lives as it appeared their traditional culture, language, and way of life were disappearing (Britt, 1938; Radin, 1913). There is no simple definition of ethnography, for it involves not only representation, but also interpretation by the anthropologist. As James Clifford (1986) suggests: "The predicament of ethnography is the fact that it is caught up in cultural interpretation, not cultural representation" (p.7). Clifford Geertz (1973) suggests that "anthropological writings are themselves interpretations and second and third order ones to boot. They are thus fictions: fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned'" (p. 15). The ethnographer must be evermindful of the responsibility to "fashion" the telling of a life or a way of life as truthfully as possible. This is often
difficult, as one cannot separate one’s own beliefs from the production of the account as the anthropologist constructs a document in order to tell a story.

Wolcott (1988) argues that the term ethnography refers to both the research process and the product of those efforts—the written ethnographic account. From an etymological point of view, ethnography means, literally, "writing about a way of life" of an identifiable group of people. The anthropologist's task is to study, write about, and ultimately describe the culture of this group (Richardson, 1989). A challenge of this kind of project is to walk the fine line between distance, which can also promote insensitivity and superficiality, and too much empathy wherein the ethnographer is vulnerable to the accusation that she has "gone native." Thus, it is important that the stance of the participant-observer be a balanced one.

As Powdermaker (1966) cautions, it is imperative that ethnographers balance the dynamics between distance and empathy. Powdermaker also stresses the importance of the depth and breadth of the fieldwork.
The strength of fieldwork lies in its numerous exposures and opportunities to gain insight in many ways over time. Only through triangulation of many sources can the ethnographer attempt to describe culture in a meaningful way, for it is more than its appearance (Richardson, 1989).

As Geertz (1973) suggests, ethnography requires conveying the insider’s, or emic, point of view which necessitates addressing the biases, opinions, and beliefs of the researcher before this can be done effectively. Writing an ethnography is therefore an intersubjective process (Crpanzano, 1980; Langness & Frank, 1981; Powdermaker, 1966; Wolcott, 1990a) from which it is difficult to separate one’s own beliefs. Feminist ethnographers, including Stacey (1988), Roman (1989) and Munro (1991), have had concerns regarding ethnographers who present dematerialized accounts of their work, that is, writing without addressing the implicit biases which may influence their own research experience (Munro, 1991).

Although observer bias is a challenge to every conscientious anthropologist, it is particularly important when dealing with individuals and
relationships with them in the field (Crapanzano, 1980). When individuals volunteer their stories, the listener (the anthropologist) draws upon the personal resources of empathy and reason in order to understand them. Because this process demands a stance of extreme cultural relativism in order to be successful, the collaboration necessary for ethnographic accounts of individual human beings can be transformative for the informant, researcher, and reader. This particular branch of ethnography is referred to as life history research (Wolcott, 1988).

The life history. The goal of the process of life history research is to provide an account of one person's life in her own words elicited or prompted by another person (Langness & Frank, 1981; Watson & Watson-Sparks, 1985). The life history studies provide an opportunity to portray the ways in which people themselves create culture (Dollard, 1935; Langness & Frank, 1981).

As Langness and Frank (1981) have suggested, life history methodology assists anthropologists in understanding how people see and choose to represent their own lived experience. Through the memories and
reminiscences of individuals, it is also possible to gain glimpses into times other than the present which has been affected by the presence of the anthropologist.

Using varied sources of information, the life history researcher then prepares the written account from the myriad products of her simple activities of watching, listening, and asking. This task is intrinsically incomplete by its very nature as no document could ever adequately portray something as precious and complex as a human life. Nevertheless, understanding can be gained in small increments that can inform wider topics. By studying the lives of the three women in this project, I hoped to inform the wider field of literacy by looking at individuals through a kind of qualitative research, that of life history methodology.

Life history methodology and women. This method is particularly suited to recover the voices of women who have been denied a more visible role. Through ethnographically informed life history methodology, I sought to recover the voices of three elderly women for whom reading and writing had played major roles in
their lives and to explore the importance that these women gave to their experiences. "Invisible mending" is the term that Marcus (1984) gives to this process during which the ethnographer's evolving perceptions and understandings are open to transformation through shared experiences.

Benstock (1988) relates that historically women have always written about their lives, but usually in private because the public domain dismissed their work as trivial or frivolous. Often women authors had to use male pen names in order to be considered for publication such as in the case of Mary Ann Evans, the great English novelist, whose pen name was George Eliot.

As a literacy ethnographer, I was particularly interested in interpreting the participants' stories in light of current research about reading, writing, and oral language. I also wished to address the literature which described the formidable obstacles to women pursuing higher education (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988) and more general constraints on their person freedom and opportunities (Estes, 1992). In order to do this, I was mindful to address
particular aspects of the literacy acquisition process such as preformal and formal schooling phases, and then how these were further extended and expressed through the homemaker/workplace and retirement phases.

It is understandable that these experiences were different from those of the participants' male counterparts due to the fact that they are women. In light of the sweeping cultural and historical trends during this century, World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, emergence of women in the workplace, and the development of so-called "Women's Liberation" and the women's movement, the stories of these women provide the opportunity to explore individual lives in a unique sociocultural and historical context. I wished to hear their stories and learn about their experiences as daughters, sisters, lovers, wives, and grandmothers. I wanted to hear about the printed materials which affected them and the persons who led them into the world of literacy.

Life history methodology is particularly appropriate to do this because it allows for these concerns to be addressed. It can illuminate certain
aspects of culture and lived experience not generally recognized, such as women's views of life and their varied roles. In addition, it provided the opportunity for more in-depth understanding that is not attainable with other research methodologies. Thus, through the stories of my women participants, I hope to discover insights into their experiences with literacy practices which have not been portrayed in more quantitative kinds of research. Further, these insights will be more purposeful and contextualized than empirical means would allow.
Participants

Three participants were chosen for this study. Although three is a relatively small number, this allowed for an in-depth qualitative analysis (Borg & Gall, 1989) of the multiple data sources to be collected on each participant's literacy life history.

Selection criteria. The selection of these participants was based on five main criteria and a potential sixth. First, the participants had to be age 60 or older and retired from formal employment. This criterion allowed for investigation of literacy practices which have occurred across all phases of the participants' lifespans.

Second, the participants had to identify themselves as lifelong learners, based on (a) their self-reports of personal literacy practices, and (b) their voluntary enrollment in a writers' workshop for senior citizens. These self-reports and current writing interests served as justification for the
identification of persons for whom literacy activities have been, and still are, significant in their lives.

Third, the participants were women. Because women's voices have often been marginalized, that is, heard as "other" from the cultural perimeter (Benstock, 1988; deBeauvoir, 1952; Edgerton, 1992; McCarthy, 1990; Pagano, 1990) their reading habits and other learning practices have not been granted much significance. My investigation has allowed for exploration of women's societal roles and personal experiences.

Fourth, the participants had to be domiciled in the local community. This allowed for consistency and continuity of data collection. Finally, they had to be willing to give of their time to tell their stories for this project. Such communication proved to be important in a study based on the ongoing and trusting give-and-take of information and experience.

In addition to these five main criteria, I hoped for a sixth: to address diversity in its educational, personal, and geographical/cultural forms—if such diversity existed in my participant pool. Educational diversity referred to the level of education attained,
as well as to the kinds of post high school training opportunities in which the women participated, such as trade schools or university settings. Personal diversity referred to marital or family associations such as becoming widowed, divorced, or married. It further made reference to ethnic, linguistic, or religious affiliations which might distinguish the participants. Geographical/cultural diversity referred to the physical settings or cultures in which the participants had resided, such as rural or urban upbringing, or native-born Louisianian.

Participant selection. On the last day of a "Lifewriting for Seniors" course which I facilitated at a local senior center, I mentioned that my area of interest was people who were lifelong learners, specifically, how reading and writing had interrelated with their life experiences. I explained that I would like to begin a research project which would look at individual lives in some detail. I intended to investigate the nature and functions of literacy within different life contexts using ethnographically informed life histories which would focus on the participants' personal stories. Further, I noted that
this research would involve several extended interviews.

Throughout the course, class participants had noted how their own experiences had differed from those of their grandchildren, and we had discussed topics such as literacy, illiteracy, and aliteracy. Therefore, they were acquainted with these topics and seemed eager to share their experiences more fully with me. There were, however, only nine women and three men on the official roster of the class, due to space limitations and my desire to have a small group of students so that we might share our writing in an intimate setting. Thus, the pool from which I drew my participants was limited.

First, Elaine and Jerry volunteered to work with me. They both met my five major criteria. In addition, Elaine was from a regional subculture, thus meeting my potential criterion of diversity. I had already noted their enthusiasm for speaking and writing, so I gratefully accepted their offers. I then specifically approached Margaret to ask if she would participate because she represented two other sorts of diversity, one professional and the other
familial; she willingly accepted. I now had three women participants.

Participants chosen. Elaine Beauvais, aged 62, was the only native-born Louisianan. Her family background is Cajun-French, and she speaks the non-standard dialectical forms of the Cajun culture. Before having two children, she worked as a cosmetologist and a secretary in a department store chain. Later she worked in her home as a seamstress so that she could be a financial contributor to the household as well as being home with her children. She is now widowed and is active in her church and writing groups.

Jerry White, aged 78, was born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. She attended Tulsa Business College and worked as a clerk/stenographer and a legal secretary before her marriage. After her three children were born, she became a secretary at the Louisiana Department of Education. She has always been a devoted poetess and writer of prose and has published locally and nationally. She and her husband live in Baton Rouge.
Margaret Eller, aged 80, was born in Detroit, Michigan. She received two masters' degrees in Industrial Engineering and worked in industry and academia until her retirement. She was active in the National Organization for Women, American Society of Women Engineers. She enjoys competitive dancing, aerobics, and swimming. She has three children, was divorced twice, and now lives in Vero Beach, Florida.

Data Sources

As data sources, I employed the extended interview as the primary data source, including both formal interviews and informal conversations. Additional data sources were literacy artifacts of the participants, my own researcher's fieldwork journal, and the literacy life histories developed from the other data sources.

Extended interview. A primary source of data was the extended interview. Denzin (1970) states that the prolonged interview is the chief feature of the life history. In actuality, it is a series of interviews in which interviewer and participant interact to probe and reflect upon the participant's statements. For
purposes of this study these interviews were of both formal and informal nature.

The formal interviews were designed to elicit information and consisted of three approximately one and one-half hour sessions with each participant. These were audiotaped, transcribed, and condensed into one-page synopses for participant review. This was to ensure that there was congruency between the perceptions of the researcher and the participant. It must be noted that these interviews were the core of my research material from which I derived their personal narratives because they provided the exact words of the participant, necessary for accuracy in producing the literacy life history.

The informal interviews were held in the form of conversations and shared experiences to seek a more holistic understanding of one another. A great deal was shared through these less formal activities which served to develop bonds of friendship and trust and which, inevitably, revealed qualities of personality and character in the participants. This revelation of character was ongoing and dialogical and the reflexivity of relationship was mutually affective.
Literacy artifacts. This data source included a number of different documents and varied by each participant. First, there were works by the participants themselves, from their school days until the present. In addition, there were works by other authors (e.g., books, family correspondence) which were deemed important to the individual participant. Further, there were articles which had been written about the participants in journals or newspapers, including some photos. Finally, there were letters and communications between each participant and myself.

Fieldwork journal. Another data source was the use of the fieldwork journal along the lines suggested by Malinowski (1922). Here, I recorded my notes, observations, and reflections. This procedure allowed me to record information not necessarily addressed in the literacy life history narratives, and encouraged reflexivity within the collaborative nature of writing a life history. In addition, the keeping of the fieldwork journal served to illuminate my own observer bias (e.g., Langness & Frank, 1981; Richardson, 1989; Spradley, 1980) both through the awareness created
through the written text and by allowing me to review my own emerging understanding at a later date. This fieldwork journal was begun in February, 1992, and had its last entry in November, 1992; at that time, the data analysis was completed for the purposes of this study.

**Literacy life history.** Finally, the ethnographic life history narrative or, more specifically, the literacy life history, was an important data source. In this study, it was a narrative elicited by the researcher which addresses the interrelations between literacy and lived experience across as many of the four lifespan phases as possible. On the basis of the transcribed audiotapes of the participants' own words and with the inclusion of some literacy artifacts, these literacy life histories were compiled.

**Procedure**

The formal interviews were spaced over a period of six weeks during the summer of 1992 in order to meet the scheduling needs of the participants and the researcher, as well as to allow time for individual reflection. Overall, three formal interviews were
conducted with each participant, with variations of focus among the interviews.

The first interviews were arranged with the simple expedient of a phonecall. Each of the women invited me into her home. This was fortuitous in that a home visit showed me their residences and lifestyles. This interview was primarily nondirected, allowing for spontaneity of participant responses. Thus, it allowed me to learn what the participants themselves viewed as important and addressed issues which a predetermined set of questions would fail to reveal.

The interview began with the broad invitation to "[t]ell me about how reading and writing have been important in your life, and the people, places, and situations that have contributed to your being a lifelong reader and writer." In addition to gaining a perspective on the participants' notions of importance, the resulting recollections and reminiscences provided the contextual framework for more directed questions on the four phases of the lifespan in this and future conversations.
The second and third interviews were arranged in the same manner as the first and, with one exception, were held in the same settings as before. Elaine's second interview took place in my home because it was convenient for both of us. These interviews were more researcher-directed than the first, allowing me to probe into areas significant to my study. At the same time, I was mindful of not reducing the interview into an oral questionnaire.

My direction also led into unforeseen territories. For example, broad questions included what literacy materials and services were available, what persons were influential in their literacy development, and how these literacy practices functioned in their daily living. Their responses, in turn, led me to new questions or to intense listening.

It was important to me that the interviews be as open-ended as possible in order to encourage the participants' reminiscences of their own literacy experiences and expressions, as well as to allow the participants to take part in the direction of my overall project. It is, after all, a process of mutual discovery. Though the questions were initiated
by me, too much guidance on my part, I felt, would result in leading questions and too much of my control over the results. I attempted to be more an ethnographic listener than a scientist doing research on subjects, as the anthropologist Miles Richardson (1989) has encouraged.

The formal interviews inevitably grew into the fertile realm of informal conversation. In essence, we became friends through time spent together even though I continued to be deeply aware of my role as literacy ethnographer. These activities included numerous telephone conversations, informal visits, lunches at restaurants and in our homes, and the general sharing of the ongoing stuff of life revolving around family, friends, and interests. Among the activities were included going to Cajun dances with Elaine and a "Take Back the Night" protest march for battered women with Margaret, as well as garden visits with Jerry. No doubt, these shared experiences had an effect on me which, in turn, must have found its way into my interpretations of the data of their lives.

Over the course of such data gathering and sharing of experiences, I not only gathered the
participants' oral reports of their literacy practices but also was able to have access to their written texts including collections of poetry, prose, and family documents that revealed their personal literacy histories. Examples of photograph albums, letters, certificates of marriage, birth, baptism, and death were freely shared with me. Correspondences the participants had received, newspaper and magazine articles that featured them or their families which had been preserved, were included in these literacy artifacts to which I had access. Most of these, however, were unavailable to the other members of the research team due to logistical reasons. That is, the quantity of the artifacts was great, and the nature of the family documents made them irreplaceable.

Because the women in my study had been working on documenting family stories and history, there was a rich source of materials in their own writing which indicated their devotion to this labor of love. Thus, I was able to explore how the literacy practices of reading and writing have and continue to function in the participants' lives as well as in the lives of their family members. I have included some of these
artifacts such as poems or letters within the literacy life histories. I was further able to meet and talk with Elaine’s son and her brother and his wife, and Jerry’s husband, sons, daughter, and grandchildren, but was not able to talk with Margaret’s family as they lived out of town.

Using all the data sources, I constructed an individual narrative of each participant’s literacy life history spoken from her point of view and using her words in the first person. These were 30-40 page documents in the informants’ own words which addressed the four lifespan phases including memories and reminiscences which contextualized the areas of oral language, reading, and writing in a very personal way.

I was mindful of my responsibility as an ethnographer to tell the story as accurately as possible while exercising my task as editor. In order to merge the raw material of the transcripts into the literacy life history I often had to make decisions such as which of several accounts of the same incident to include in the final narrative and where to include a particular discussion that technically addressed, say, retirement, although in the course of the
participant's tale, the emphasis was clearly related to the preformal schooling phase. Thus, the final literacy life history narrative may at times appear to skip across life phases, but the decision-making process was influenced by my desire to retain the integrity of the participants' own concepts of the interrelatedness of time and experience.

This document was presented to each participant in order to solicit feedback and to ensure that it was factually correct and not inconsistent with the participants' perceptions of their own stories across their lifespans. Minor adjustments were made to add embellishment or to clarify accounts or to further explain items in the drafts. For instance, minute details which had been overlooked at the time of the initial interview were remembered, including dates, specific locations, particular names, and even emotional reminiscences.

Data Analysis

The data sources included the participant-approved synopses of each interview and interview transcriptions, my fieldwork journal, and the researcher-generated literacy life histories. The
totality of literacy artifacts were accessible to the researcher only. Relevant excerpts were included in the fieldwork journal and literacy life histories. These data were analyzed by a research team using constant comparative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The research team included the researcher, a doctoral student whose background includes life history research and a minor in anthropology, and a PhD literacy educator with experience in qualitative research.

The analysis of the extended interviews and fieldwork journal began in June of 1992. After each round of interviews was conducted with the participants, I met with the other two team members individually in order to discuss the content of the interviews. During these conversations, the analysis involved the recursive exploration of the data and allowed for the emergence of meaningful trends and patterns among and between the participants. In addition, where appropriate, future directions were suggested for the upcoming interviews.

Then, during August, September, and October, 1992, the research team met three times as a group to
analyze the literacy life history narratives, as well as the other data sources. This included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Matrices were constructed in order to clarify the large amount of data which was analyzed. The analysis involved the recursive exploration of the data and revealed trends and patterns across and within the participants. Data were triangulated across the three evaluators and the data sources to allow for the emergence of multiple perspectives as well as consensus and to account for possible biases.
CHAPTER IV
LITERACY LIFE HISTORIES

Elaine Beauvais' Story

Preformal schooling phase. We had a farm with horses and cows and grew corn, sweet potatoes, and Irish potatoes near Greenwell Springs in Central, Louisiana. I was born in 1930, and people told stories a lot back in those days. My grandma in New Orleans, Daddy's Mama, and Mama's Mama would tell stories about the olden days, family stories about relatives and friends, and what it was like to live back then, and Grandpa liked to tell ghost stories and so do I. My children loved them and now my grandchildren love them too.

I have memories of Mama reading to me. All of us would gather around the old wood heater, and Mama would read us a story and we'd all listen. That was before the age of TV. We'd have more fun playing simple games back then, and picking up something to read.

You know, I think television has done as much harm as it has good to our children. I don't find
they read as much as we did. They're not as creative, generally speaking, as our generation was for the simple reason because they sit there in front of that TV and watch it, instead of thinking up games and doing things to occupy themselves. I think a certain amount of TV (if it's quality programs) is fine, but to just sit there day in and day out, like a couch potato, I don't think that's good at all. Give them a book instead!

I can't remember the first time I saw words. I'm not sure, but I do know I knew what words looked like long before I started school. I saw a big burlap bag of feed for our cattle, and it said COW FEED. And there was MARTHA WHITE FLOUR with how many pounds in it. It was a couple of feet tall, give or take a foot wide, and it was a soft white. After Mama finished the flour, she'd rip the cord out of it and roll it into a ball. She always kept the string and, if you soaked the wording on the sack real good, it would come off, and they made real good dish towels. And I remember a metal can of tobacco that said PRINCE ALBERT TOBACCO.
My family heritage is French, and I remember especially my grandmother on my Mama’s side who drove the car through the garage speaking it. She married a Morgan: Daniel Boone Morgan, but she was a Burke. The whole family spoke nothing but French for a long time, and then they would speak both languages. I used to go to help Grandma gather the eggs, and she had a big egg basket and she said, "I’m gonna teach you how to count those eggs in French, and when we get up to a dozen we’re going to start over. Then you bend down that finger for every dozen and, for every dozen more, bend down another finger." Thanks to Grandma, when I took French, I knew 1 to 12 perfectly. Lordy, she should have taught me from then on. Taking French in school was never as easy as taking it from Grandma. I think it’s easier to grasp languages at a younger age.

Mama and Daddy were the most important people in my own love of reading because I saw what pleasure it brought to Daddy to read those Zane Grey western books after his work was done, and he’d really enjoy them. Every morning, the first thing he’d do was to put on the coffee in one of those old white granite coffee
pots and go out and get the newspaper. Then he'd come back on in and read it and drink his coffee. Now, Mama read too, but she didn't get to read as much as Daddy, but she did enjoy it. She enjoyed her magazines, some books, and the newspapers, but she really had her hands full with all of us children. We would get Woman's Home Companion and American Girl and the Grit paper. Now that was just a little small paper. It had world news and recipes, and patterns, and it was sold once a week. Usually a little boy on a bicycle came around selling it.

I remember my grandfather writing in the most beautiful calligraphy. All of his capital letters were calligraphy but the script letters were not. And it looked so pretty when he wrote it, and I guess ever since I saw grandpa do it I've wanted to learn it, but I just haven't buckled down yet to learn it. But one of these days, I'm hoping to take time to get to that.

I loved hearing the family stories. I used to love those old time stories of what happened years ago, how Mama used to like to ride the horse and round up the cattle for Grandpa to feed them and all sorts of things--country-type stories. My parents were
always telling stories, and my grandparents too. I was really close to those on my mother’s side, and I remember Daddy’s mother. She lived in New Orleans.

People back then talked to each other a lot more, so now I’m writing my family history and researching my family members. I’ve been doing research on the genealogy of the Broussard family. That’s what got me started with the writing about the old timers, because there’s so few people left now in the older generation that I think I’d better get something down on paper ’cause my grandchildren won’t know what kind of people they really were. And some of them had interesting backgrounds. Before this, I haven’t written too much except letters to people, but I sure have read a lot. I think life would have been pretty boring without reading. When I get a good book, I just forget about going to bed. If that book keeps me interested, I’ll read ’til I get to the last page. You know, reading means so much. There’s such a wealth of knowledge between those covers of those books.

Formal schooling phase. When I went to school, there was one building for kindergarten through seventh grade, and another building for grades eight,
nine, ten and eleven. We called them elementary and high school, but there was no twelfth grade; high school only went up to eleventh grade.

After I started school my Mama had to teach me to read. She would read to me and liked her books too, but she sure helped me out a lot. In first grade, the teachers would teach us how to read and assign us a few pages to read at home. Well, if you don't know what the words are, you need to get Mama or someone to tell you what the words are. Mama would read it the first time, and then I would look at those words real good and then she'd read it again, and then I'd read it a couple of times. So by hearing it first and seeing the words at the same time it all made sense.

In class, everybody read the same book because it was close to 30 in our first grade class and we had just one teacher, and in those days the teacher didn't have no helper. So everybody read the same thing. And our first grade reader was about a little dog named Spot. "See the dog." That was on the first page, and then, "See the dog named Spot?" on the second page down the line. Even though it was so many
years ago, I can still see the little black and white dog on the page. The words that I recognized leaped out at me, and the ones that I didn’t know, they kind of hung back. But Mama and I would sit side by side, looking at the book. We could both see the words. She would point and show me what that word was in the beginning, but the second time she read it she wouldn’t point.

Not everyone was as fortunate as I was to have help at home. There was a few in the class that didn’t get any help at home, and the teacher would help them more one on one in class. She didn’t have any discipline problems like they do today.

First of all, being in the first grade, we was eager to see what was gonna take place and what was coming next. We really loved it when the teacher would read stories to the class, and she’d read the reader first and then she’d help us. She’d read it along with us or as a class in unison. Everyone had a book, and she’d read the whole story and then we’d go back and read the first page and she’d tell us, "Turn to the page that has this picture on it," ’cause at that time a lot of us didn’t know our numbers. But
you could find that little dog's picture, and she'd read it and we'd all read it together. It was nice that way, because some of the slower readers picked it up that way without being humiliated that they were slow.

You might say that I had trouble with math from the arithmetic in grammar school and right on up, but then when I got into high school and got in algebra I could lead the class in that, and why I had absolutely no problems with that I don't know. I was in the top of the class in algebra. Of course, Daddy never knew geometry or algebra so, when he got into Exxon--of course back then it was called Standard Oil--and he was learning to make all these cuts with the pipe and stuff and he needed to know the algebra and the geometry, so I could return the favor and teach him. And I thought that was unique, because he had helped me so much with my homework and all when I was younger, and then I could turn around and help him. So that turned out real good.

About the time I was 10 and my brother was 12 my Daddy would let my brother and me ride the train to New Orleans to visit his mother, my grandmother. She
was a sweetheart and would meet the train when it got there. I used to look forward to that so much. We'd get there and she'd take us to Pontchartrain Beach and let us ride all the rides they had there and let us flip in the water. That was some good memories.

She read papers and magazines more than she did books. She liked Reader's Digest and that old-timey book that's not in print anymore: The Saturday Evening Post. She loved that. I remember it being a big magazine compared to Reader's Digest. Like Mutt and Jeff.

My favorite subjects in school were the English and the literature and the writing and the reading. And then I also loved band and PE. I played the French horn and then I played the tuba, and then the slide trombone.

During elementary school we had one teacher each year, but when I got to high school we started changing classes, and every class was in a different room with a different teacher. It was fascinating and something special happened to our class. We had one homeroom teacher, and it so happened that every time we went up a grade our teacher did too. And, believe
it or not, she kept us all four years we was in high school. She said that was the only time in the 32 years that she taught that that happened. She was surprised and said it couldn’t have happened to a better group. She liked us and knew us all so well. She got to be like a second Mama to us after awhile.

When I was a teenager, I had an elderly friend who was in her 80s and her birthday was the day after mine and I always brought her a piece of my birthday cake because she said she got too old and she didn’t need birthday cakes anymore, and she didn’t dare let her family make her a birthday cake with that many candles on it, but I knew she loved cake so I brought her a piece of mine. One year she told me, "I don’t have it for you today, Elaine. It’s going to come every month of the year." And guess what? It was a subscription to American Girl. It became my favorite magazine. And it was special, coming every month, like a birthday that lasted all year long.

This woman, Estelle Burnham, she read quite a bit, and she was also an artist that painted with pastels. She influenced me quite a bit. I think I started to paint because of her influence. I don’t
get along good with the pastels, but I love to paint with the oils. One of my favorite books is one about landscape painting by an author named Carlson.

When I was 12, Mama got sick. Actually, I guess it was kind of a nervous breakdown. My baby sister was only 11 months old at the time. I’ll never forget the afternoon that we had several relatives come to the house. They told Daddy that they had made a special trip to get us because they knew he couldn’t handle raising all us kids all by himself. And my aunt on my mother’s side was going to take me and baby brother, and the two oldest ones because we were old enough to work in the fields. And my grandma wanted the baby, and my mother’s aunt would take the other sister.

I think that’s about the maddest I ever saw my Daddy. He said, "These children are mine, and they aren’t going anywhere, and I fully intend to take care of them as best as I can, and I do not intend to see them split up and distributed through the community." And after they left, he said, "The only way I can manage it is if you help me." It really hurt him deep, and it hurt us, too, to think that all we had
left was each other. And Mama was in the hospital, and all we had left was each other and then they wanted to split that up. That was hard for a child to swallow. Daddy told me, he said, "Baby, if you help me, I think we can make it, but I don't know if I can pull it off myself, but together we can." And we did, too. And he never remarried until his last child was married, 'cause he said we'd never have a stepmother, and he held to it.

To this day, one of my most memorable books I've read is All My Children, although I can't remember the author. It was about an elderly man who had lost his wife and was forced to raise his children by himself, and I guess the reason that that book is so outstanding to me is because I saw such a comparison there between that book and my own life. This man in the book was just as determined as my daddy was to hold his family all together, which he did, and he got each one of us settled in our own lives before he remarried.

I had a teacher who influenced me quite a bit. At the time I thought she was the meanest one could ever lived. I look back on it now and see that I
learned more from her than others. She didn’t put up with guff from anybody. She was not a brutal teacher. In all ways she was kind and gentle. She just didn’t put up with any foolishness from the boys and, when you heard that rap with that ruler on top of that desk, it made everybody shudder.

She taught eighth grade at Central which at that time was considered high school. She made you learn, and I can look back and thank her today. She taught English and literature. We had Shakespeare 'til we thought we'd die with Shakespeare. There was so much of it. It was hard to understand the way it was presented. She would read a section and then she’d have different ones in the class read a couple of paragraphs and then she’d say, "Next!" and then the one behind you would take the next section until she hollered, "Next!" again and again. We just took turns. I found that very difficult. It was very difficult to concentrate. The change in the tones and the voices were really distracting, and one person really had trouble reading it. He was doing the best he could, though.
I think it would have been better if the teacher or one person who was a good reader would have read it. Shakespeare's kind of hard to understand to begin with, the way it's written. There was several in the class during that time we were taking turns reading that said, "We're not getting anything out of this. Do we have to?" And the teacher said, "You will. Just hang in there."

When we took tests, she would write the questions on the board, and you'd better know the answers. A lot of it was true or false, and she'd make up a fictitious character and put it on the board. It was more or less to see if you absorbed anything and to see if you paid as close attention as she thought you should.

Our class had 20 girls and three boys. For some reason, boys outnumbered girls in the class behind us, but not ours. For graduation, us girls said we wanted white evening dresses and red roses. But with World War II going on and two out of the three boys had already got their draft notices, so--since we had them outnumbered and they would have to be leaving--we left it up to them what they wanted us to wear. So we wore
maroon caps and gowns so they wouldn't be stuck with suits that they'd be outgrown when they got home from service. We felt sad for them, knowing they'd have to leave right after graduation. One had six weeks and another had three weeks. That was in 1946. We've had two class reunions, and they all came back OK and now are well-adjusted and happy families.

My school days were happy days. I really enjoyed school. Of course, I got help at home when I needed it. Times have changed quite a bit and I know that teachers really have their hands full. If I could change anything about schools today, I'd give the teachers the right to discipline the children the way they did when I was in school. One particular class, we had 35 students and that teacher handled it quite well with no help whatsoever, but she also had the right to discipline those children and everyone paid attention which made it easier for the teacher to teach and we learned more. We knew how to write, to read, and we knew how to work our math when we graduated.

Seems that they don't always do that this day and time. To think of a student graduating who don't know
how to read is unthinkable to me. I think that part of the problem might be social promotion. From what I understand, a child can't be failed but two years. A teacher friend of mine was telling me about a little child who she asked if he had done his homework. That little child said, "Hell, no. My mama tell me I got to go to school, but I don't have to study." Now, a child with that attitude problem, a teacher can't teach him anything. Tell me I got to go to school but I don't have to study, you can't pound it into a child like that. I don't think that a parent is doing a child justice to send him to school with an attitude like that. The schools and teachers really need that parent support in order to be effective.

After high school I went to Julie's Beauty School. It used to be on Perkins Road but no longer exists. We had to take 1,000 hours and take the State Boards both write and hands on--too many pages. And then there was the demonstration test, a two-part deal. The whole thing took about a year. It took plenty of time, plenty of work, and plenty of reading. You had to learn every bone in the body. Every muscle in the body. The proper way to shampoo their head,
but if that person had a headache, you massaged their neck and shoulders to release the tension to relieve the headache. You had to study the body and their health situation as much if not more as you had the actual working on the hair and the nails.

It worked real good to study with a friend for those tests. We'd read and ask each other questions and explain the hard stuff to each other. Learning together was good. Especially on the State Board Exam, you knew it was going to be a long, drawn-out affair. A hundred questions. You couldn't miss but very few or you flunked it. And back in those days if you flunked the written part, you flunked all of it. You didn't have a chance to take it over. You had to go back and study some more before you was allowed to take the State Board again which at that time they only gave once a year in the Old State Capitol building.

Boy, were we nervous until I got there and I saw that two of the State Board ladies was giving the exam and I told my friend, Boots, that had been studying with me, I said, "Shoot, they look like our mamas. Let's just go and take them like that and go ahead
She said, "Yeah, but my mama would never give me a test like this!" And I said, "Let's pretend that they do and we'll answer them like that." And Boots and I, neither one of us had had biology in school, so of course we really had to study on the body and all of that. But we made it. I made a 98 on that test.

**Workplace phase.** I really enjoyed working as a cosmetologist at Greenfield's Beauty Shop on Plank Road and at Bertha's on St. Ferdinand. I was living at home with my parents at this time. We always had magazines at the beauty shop that the patrons liked to read like *Home Companion* and *True Confessions*. I made a lot of good friends and enjoyed the fellowship with the patrons.

Seeing the movie, *Steel Magnolias*, really brought back a lot of good memories. But back then, the majority of the beauty parlors have the concrete floors or the tile and carpet over the concrete floors, and it just got the best of my legs 'cause I had weak veins and it was too much for my veins, so the doctors recommended that I quit.
During World War II, I wrote to cousins in the service. My godfather, who was stationed in Belgium, would send me postcards because he didn’t like to write long letters. I enjoyed seeing the scenery of Belgium. I wrote to quite a few servicemen during the war. They got my letters and answered them, too. It was great, but when you got one with a whole page missing, you knew it had been censored because the first line of the next page was cut out and you wondered what they might have been trying to tell you to try to get to their parents and they were hoping to slip it through your letter and hoping you could pass on the word to their Mama and Daddy. But those letters were kind of an uneasy feeling because you didn’t know what they were up against. You wouldn’t know what they were trying to say. Sometimes you’d have words cut out and sometimes whole sentences and paragraphs. It was nothing to open a letter and get a page with a hole cut out in it.

You know, war is a terrible thing. Carl [her husband] worked on death detail during World War II. They issued each man in his division a bottle of alcohol to use to wash his hands with. Well, you can
imagine what a horrible job that was. Carl said that even though the purpose of the alcohol was to wash your hands with, by the end of each day, the soldiers were drinking it just to put the horror of it out of their minds.

After working as a cosmetologist, I went to work at Sears Roebuck company. The reason I had to stop was because standing those long hours on concrete floors had given me problems with the veins in my legs. I started out ordering soft line merchandise, clothes, and linens and that type of thing, and I made out the orders and ordered the merchandise, and then I had to check it in and make sure that it was the amount and the price I ordered. If it didn’t match, I had to follow it up. We used order forms that you filled out with ink so it couldn’t be changed. If there was a problem, we’d follow it and find out where the error was made and take it to the boss.

At this time I joined the Book of the Month Club—Doubleday. I acquired quite a number of books that way and passed the rest on to other readers. That book club kept me mighty busy, but then after we
moved and the children came along two years apart--Michael, and then Connie--I had a lot less time.

Homemaker phase. I had met my husband, who was the brother of a friend of mine, while I was going to beauty school. I didn't pay attention to him, though. Then, one weekend, she invited me to come home with her and I said, "This guy ain't too bad!" He was two years older than I was. Carl wasn't brought up with books or stories or anything like that, but he liked to see us read and enjoy them and we'd tell him about them. So, in 1950 we got married and went to live in Pointe Coupee.

I was a lonesome housewife, and reading the books helped me to pass the time. I didn't know a soul over there other than his family. I was in the midst of a bunch of strangers but, as it turned out, Carl's teenaged cousins would come to visit and that helped quite a bit. And I loved to read my books.

Then, after we moved here when Carl took a job at Kaiser, I started using the library. I had to drop the book club because I didn't have the time as fast as the books were coming in, and along about then I didn't feel there was as good a variety to choose from
as there had been earlier. We'd use the library on Laurel Street, and then the one they built over in Goodwood. If the children needed to do some research I'd take them in the section that they needed and they'd ultimately choose the books they needed because they knew what the teacher wanted for the assignment. I'd always let them do their own choosing as to which books they checked out, but then I'd usually go and find something for me to read too.

As a housewife I did all of the shopping, kept the house organized, made lists of all the things that needed to be done and paid all of the bills. Carl made the money and gave me the checks and said, "Honey, stretch it!" He knew that I could make the money go farther than he could. I did the family correspondence, cards and letters for both sides of the family. I also did the planning for vacations. One year we took his parents to Arkansas and I made all of the arrangements for that.

Those were good days. We'd go hunting and fishing, and when the children got big enough, we'd go as a family. We'd go down to the woods and to Morganza Spillway and catch rabbits, woodcock, quail,
squirrels, and coons. And we'd fish for sac au lait, catfish, and bream. We had fun. My kids still love the outdoor life. Little Chris, Connie's son, he'll tell me when he skunked his daddy by catching a fish bigger than he did.

The children adjusted beautifully to our move to Baton Rouge and went to St. Anthony School during their elementary years 'til eighth grade, and then they went to Redemptorist High School. They both graduated from there and both started LSU. Connie didn't finish LSU because she got married before she finished, so she finished at the University of West Florida. She went on to get her master's in counseling, too. She married Ralph, a chemical engineer from North Louisiana. Times were tough back then, and it looked as if he couldn't finish because he couldn't afford the tuition, room and board, so Carl and I had quite a talk about it, and let him stay here at the house with the understanding that if there were any hanky-panky, he'd be packing.

Both my son and my daughter just loved to read. I read those bedtime stories to them every night, and if I hadn't finished folding the clothes or some chores
that needed to be done, I would tell them stories about adventures and animals and family stories and the same kind of ghost stories that my grandpa told to me. As a matter of fact, I might have overdone it.

My son was laughing the other day because he said, "Mom, you told me there's a wealth of knowledge to hold onto between these covers of books, to hold onto them. You never know when you might need to refer back to them." He said, "My books have outgrown my space, and some of them have got to go." So now that he's teaching at Southeastern Louisiana University, he's decided to part with some of the books that he's got through all the years. He graduated from LSU, and then went to Texas A & M every summer to get his PhD in industrial education, which means he can teach photography, welding, carpentry, drafting, and robotics—that's when you use machines to do the work of men. Getting that degree was a long, hard process. Then he looks back and says, "Thank God I stuck with it. It was worth it." He'll be building on some land he bought near the university in Hammond. He has two beautiful adopted children.
You know you don’t think of them as adopted. I feel the same way about them as I feel about the other one.

My daughter’s just as bad. She loves to read too. She’ll get to reading and she’ll forget about cleaning house, cooking, or anything. She used to work outside of the home ’til year before last when she quit.

She realized that her son needed her more than the job did. He was having problems with school. He has a learning disability, and the little fellow’s eyes just don’t focus like ours. He could see straight ahead, but his focal point is like two feet in front of the object and the muscles in his eyes didn’t want to move from left to right, and this really gave him trouble trying to read. Connie found a doctor in Georgia that specialized in children having troubles in school, and she drove that child from Tennessee to Georgia plenty times for eye therapy and checkups, but today he’s wearing glasses with bifocals in them. But he went home saying, "I believe I got the greatest report card I got yet. I know that stuff." He was so thrilled he said, "I got to call Mawmaw and tell her her prayers have been
answered because I’m seeing a whole lot better. I see so much better that I just wear them all the time."

Now, Connie read to Chris since before he was born. And he loves books as much as we do. He goes to the library and his Mama has to limit how many he can take home because, if he looks at the cover and it looks interesting, he wants it. His eyes was so bad that he failed kindergarten. Connie and Ralph really didn’t know what to do and asked me what I thought, and I said that to let him go on like that with as weak a foundation as he has, I think it would do more harm than good. But everything has turned out OK. Chris and I write to each other. When he was little before he could read, I’d cut out a picture of an eye and cut out a heart from some red contact paper, and he knew the letter U and he could read that. "I love you." That was his first letter. He writes me now too. His last letter said, "Mawmaw, I love you every day." It’s wonderful to be a grandma!

Connie got her master’s degree and enjoyed her work, but she really realized at one point that her son needed her more than a job did. Just like I did. I saw when Connie was working, poor little Chris would
say, "Who am I going to stay with today?" That would break my heart. I wish I was close enough to keep him, but it just couldn't be.

I looked into working at a bank as a teller while my children were in school thinking that I would be able to work outside of the home, but found that the hours wouldn't work so that I could be there for my children when they came home from school. I always said my children would come first and I couldn't afford to do outside work because of the cost to my family, so I became a seamstress and made the work come to me.

As a seamstress I would mostly make alterations and make ready-to-wear items. I would read the patterns and make changes and improvise. Sometimes I would put three or four patterns together and make a different style. It was good working as a seamstress. That way my children were never latchkey children. My kids were so glad, they say today, that they didn't have to stay with babysitters. Working outside of the home when the children are young is quite a stress on a mother, and children are only young once.
Retirement phase. Carl and I loved Arkansas, and we even bought some property up there where we hoped to retire, but he developed a heart condition and died before we were able to use our new camper trailer. We always enjoyed the out-of-doors kinds of activities together. I lost my daddy one year and my mama the next in 1991 and 1992 but, if there’s one thing that my two sisters and two brothers and I really value from our parents, it’s a strong faith in God. It’s given me the courage to go on when sometimes I don’t think I could have made it without it. You know, you’re never really alone, and the good Lord’s always there and there’s always a way if you try.

My sister and I were talking while we were sewing last night. If there was one thing that Mama and Daddy gave us, if we had to forego everything else, it would be the strong faith to hold on to. I go to Mass most every day, usually the seven o’clock one at St. Anthony’s.

It wasn’t until about six years ago that I got a real easy to read Bible. You know, the Latin version of the Bible can be quite difficult. You read and you
read and you read and you say, "What did I read? My goodness, I didn’t absorb a thing!" I think a lot of us felt that we didn’t get it. But this version is real, real easy and I’ve enjoyed it tremendously. Connie found it, and she told Ralph that she thought I’d enjoy it, so she got me a copy and I’ve enjoyed it so very much. I remember reading passages that I didn’t understand but just letting it go on without understanding, but this version, The Holy Angels’ Edition, has been a blessing. Since then, I’ve found another one that’s even better because it’s even easier to understand. It’s strictly in story-form. It’s made the scriptures easy to understand and come alive for me.

I’m a reader at the eight o’clock service at St. Anthony’s on Sunday mornings. I wind up serving about three out of four Sundays. A lot of people are intimidated to get up in front of a crowd. They won’t even try, and I don’t guess I would have tried either but both of my children used to do that before they got married. But then, when they got married and left, that was two less readers at St. Anthony’s. So one day the priest came along and said, "Well, your
children have gone. You’re going to have to take their place. I need some help." And I said, "But Father, I don’t know how to do that. I never spoke on no microphone before." And I said, "Standing up in front of all those people?" And he said, "Don’t let that bother you. Don’t look at none of them people. Look over their heads. And I found out that worked out real good. I don’t see anybody. I look over them all. But it’s meaningful to be able to do it.

When my mother died, Connie did both of the readings at the funeral Mass. And when she finished, she came back to the pew and said, "Now I can cry like the rest of us." But she held herself together to do it for Grandma. It’s not always easy to read in public, but I have a little prayer I always say before I do the readings between the pew and when I go up to the altar to get the book. I say, "Lord, please guide my mind and my tongue." And He let me do and say the right thing at the right time. And He does a good job. He hasn’t let me down yet. It’s always worked.

Life would be pretty boring without books. I like all kinds of them: autobiographies, biographies, fiction. I always keep one by my bedside. If I wake
up in the middle of the night, I’ll just pick up a book and read until I get sleepy again or until it’s time to get up. Sometimes I’ll sew too. I started my seamstress business while the children were in school. I made the work come to me, but I enjoy making bridal party dresses, prom dresses, cocktail dresses. You name it.

Right now I’m reading an anthology of several Louisiana writers. I got it at the wholesale bookstore for $2.75. When I saw it, I knew I had to have it. Books can be awfully expensive, so I use the library, and I always get my daily paper, the Morning Advocate and I read most of it most days. At one point I thought I might give up getting the paper, thinking it was an expense I didn’t need since some days I get so busy that I don’t get around to reading it. But then the day I didn’t read it there was a death I needed to know about and nobody called me, so I thought, yeah, you’re going to keep on getting the paper because you need it. As I child, I remember my parents getting the newspaper in the evenings, and when we were in school, we had current event reports so we’d cut out articles and do a class on newspaper
articles. My children had the same kind of assignments using the newspaper, and I think that that's important to stay informed about current events.

I don't watch much TV. I only watch the news or a good movie to hold my attention. I do enjoy listening to music on my stereo. I have quite a collection of old phonograph records. I like it all: classical, country, big band sound, mom and dad waltzes, marches, and gospel music.

I've noticed that, when people don't read, their minds stop working. It's just not as active if you don't read. Now I've noticed this particularly in old people. There's a lady who lives across the street from my aunt, and she is 90 years old. She reads plenty. She writes letters to her children that live out of state. She listens to stories on the radio. Her mind today is as sharp at 90 as it was at 50. Now my aunt who did no reading except for an occasional magazine or an occasional crochet book to find a pattern, well, today her mind is so that she's in her own little world. Some days she doesn't even know her own children. To me, that's quite a contrast.
I've noticed this particular phenomenon in other people too. Now both of those ladies I mentioned were in their 90s within a couple of months of each other in age. But I've noticed some people in their 80s that are pretty close in their ages, and it's practically the same thing. Now, I don't know whether their minds would have gone anyway and they would have been in their own little worlds regardless of whether they read or not, listened to stories or not, but I can't help but think that keeping the mind active makes a difference.

I guess I've passed this love of reading on to my children and grandchildren because I see it in them too, but I believe that the more you read and the more you find out the more you want to know. I see those couch potatoes sitting there day after day eating munchies and getting fatter and fatter watching that boob tube, and I think what a waste of time that is. Well, maybe they might look at me and think the same thing. I don't know, but I wouldn't trade places with them. No way. And what we do affects our children. Children love to be read to and, if you're a parent
who knows how important reading is, you'll just naturally want to share it with them too.

There are lots of things I want to do. I just love traveling and visiting friends and family, and I've been enjoying genealogy and family history so much that I've joined a second writing group and have been attending Friday Freelancers—a continuation of the initial lifewriting course—at the Center for Aging Resources for over a year.

Our assignment this week was to write something about our emotions, so I wrote about breaking my arm on the dance floor of the VFW Hall while at a Parents Without Partners' dance. Well, that experience must really have affected me, because I wrote twelve pages on it! I got back out on the dance floor six weeks later and enjoyed some Cajun dancing.

Learning and writing about my family history has been very meaningful to me. Here's something I wrote about my Grandpa:

Daniel Boone Morgan II

Daniel Boone Morgan II was a small built man with a head full of beautiful snow white hair that remained with him until his death at 83. He was always clean and neat. If he was working in the shop or about the place and a button came off his shirt, he would take a nail and use it where
the button was by making two small holes in the button area and inserting the nail.

He was the father of five children. He had a great love for all his family and encouraged each to always do their best.

Grandpa dearly loved Grandma and enjoyed teasing her. I remember being one of several grandchildren at their dinner table one day when Grandma served smothered liver and onions along with fresh vegetables. Several of us children were very slow to taste the liver. Finally, Grandma said, "You really should eat it, you know. It’ll make you pretty and, besides, it’s good for you!" She got no comments at first. Then Grandpa said, "There is one thing I don’t understand." Grandma said, "Well, what don’t you understand?" Grandpa replied, "Why didn’t it work for you?" Everyone laughed! One by one we children tasted that liver and onions and, you know, it wasn’t as bad as we thought it would be.

You knew to practice good table manners when you ate at Grandpa’s table. Otherwise you saw a red-faced Grandpa with a rising Irish temper that promptly sent you away from the table.

Grandpa drove a school bus when very few people had cars. If there was a sports event or some other meeting or entertainment at school after regular school hours, he would drive the bus again picking up parents, children, and all that wanted to attend. Parents gave nickels, dimes, or what they could afford to help pay for the gas. No one was refused a ride for lack of funds. As long as the donations covered the price of the gas Grandpa was happy.

Zoar Baptist Church had many members with no transportation. Their congregation decided to talk to Grandpa to see if he could help them. The decision was made that Grandpa would drive his bus to pick up church members, bring them to church, wait ‘til service was over, and return them to their homes for $2.00 a Sunday. In those days, all their travel was on gravel roads.

Grandpa was forever building fences. He had a fence around the yard, garden, barn, pasture, farm, chicken-yard and you name it, Grandpa
fenced it! He would get several of the older grandsons to help. They would build a first class fence one week and two weeks later tear it down and move it to a different place. After several more such moves, some of the grandsons laughingly said they were going to wear out the wire and posts just moving them places! They soon nicknamed Grandpa "Chief Fencer."

During World War II Grandpa was a postman serving a rural route from a post office located near the tuberculosis hospital on Greenwell Springs Road. He was met at the mailbox by many worried mothers looking for a word from their sons in service.

One family had gone quite a long time with no word, until the day Grandpa was given a letter from the War Department to deliver. Fearing it might be bad news or something most urgent, he didn’t leave it in the mailbox. He carried it to the house because he didn’t want that mother to be alone if it was bad news. She tore that envelope open and soon shouted, "He’s alive, but hurt!" Grandpa told her he had waited to see if she would need help. He would have asked a neighbor to walk over.

He delivered his three grandsons’ letters to their parents. He was proud they were serving their country and worried about each of them. This postal route of gravel roads served only by Grandpa has been replaced by hard service roads and four postmen.

Grandpa was a funloving man. He had use of a cousin’s camp at Bay St. Louis on the Gulf for one week each summer. He took only the older grandsons who had been helping him. They came home excited and said they didn’t know Grandpa could be so much fun away from the house. He played in the water with them. Each trip was a memorable occasion for those who got to go.

A trip to the ice house in Denham Springs was made just about every Sunday afternoon by Grandpa and a couple grandchildren. Once home the children got the ice cream freezer ready while Grandpa chipped the ice and Grandma finished cooling the custard. Then it was properly assembled and a burlap sack folded in
four was placed on top. I was asked to sit still on top the sack and freezer while different ones took turns turning the freezer handle. When the handle got hard to turn, Grandpa would finish the turning and everyone knew it was near time to get your bowl and spoon, for it was treat time. When I see or hear of lemon ice cream to this day I think of Grandpa. The End.

It’s important for young folks to know about their family members. I think it gives them a feeling of belonging and a sense of history. I’m enjoying my writing and hope to be able to compile these family history writings for my children and grandchildren.

Researcher’s addendum. Elaine wrote the following poem while she was decorating her church for Thanksgiving, 1992. Later, she told me that she had been touched by the plight of a woman from Thailand who had been disowned by her family because she wished to become a nun. Moved by the preciousness of religious freedom and the beauty of the season as she decorated the harvest table at St. Anthony’s, Elaine wrote the following poem:

THANKSGIVING THANKS!

The horn of plenty filled to falling out:
So much to be gracious about.

Free to worship if we want,
Yet free to go if we don’t.
Friends to cheer us when we feel low.
Places of interest if we want to go.

Mountains, valleys, deserts, streams
Intrigue folks of any means.

Colored foliage far and near
Announces the autumn harvest is here.

Thank God for America--each
Mountain and tiny nook

Where I'm free to enjoy it all,
Or curl up with my book.


[Permission to use personal writing granted by the author.]
Margaret Eller's Story

*Preformal schooling phase.* I have memories of my grandmother on my mother's side, who was blind, sitting in her rocker wearing a long black dress and a little white apron. She would sit in the rocker and sing hymns and she would teach me my ABCs and counting. She lived with us in Detroit, on Brush Street, where I was born in 1912, leveled now, after the race riots and all.

My grandmother would tell me stories. Of course, I wish I'd listened better now. She would tell me how the Indians, men, women, and children wrapped with brightly-colored blankets around them would come into the house in the Michigan Territories before it became a state. They would come in to get warm by the fire, and then get up and leave without saying a word. I don't know if she was scared or what. Oh, it irks me that I didn't listen more carefully. Grandmother would tell Bible stories like Daniel in the Lions' Den. She would also tell me Aesop's Fables. It's hard to remember the specific ones, but what she told me, later I'd build upon it by reading them myself.
When I started to do genealogy, I had all these names and dates which didn't mean much, and I tried to find out who these people were. And every once in awhile I'd come across these stories and find myself doing what my mother would do, thinking, "Gee whiz, I ought to write some of these down. My kids would get a kick out of this," and that's how I started doing genealogy.

I remember my grandmother, who was born in 1835, telling me the story of how her mother and father came to Michigan Territory from Mayfield, New York. He was a pillar of the Dutch Reformed Church which turned into the Presbyterian Church, and he came to set up a church in McComb County, but I can't seem to find anything that says he did that. I've got to write somewhere to find out where the head of the Dutch Reformed Church is. I've driven all around Mt. Clements in McComb County, though, trying to find something. All I've found are the accounts of property he used to own, so I know he was there. I had to use this as proof that he was there when I applied for Pioneer of Michigan. If your family was in Michigan before it became a state, then you were
eligible to apply for the title of "Pioneer." I am an official Pioneer of Michigan.

I can't remember if anyone else would tell me stories, I just can't remember, but my grandfather on my father's side, he wouldn't talk. I don't know if he could or not. He came from Switzerland and was immediately thrown into the Civil War. He was in a unit that spoke German, and he was shot six times. He never worked and always traveled about with a couple of canes, but he would take me to the GAR, Grand Army of the Republic meetings. Now say "GAR" to any Southerner, and they'll say, "You mean DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution], don't you?" Know what? Just to be obstinate, or on the other side, I applied for membership to the Daughters of the Union Soldiers of the Civil War, and I got it. Just to be contrary. I remember kissing my grandfather on the cheek, but one time I kissed him on the mouth, and since he was a chewer of tobacco, boy, did I get a surprise!

Now, Grandmother was a schoolteacher, and I remember her telling me that the first money she made she used to buy a dictionary. She had been orphaned, so she went to live with a minister's family. Perhaps
it was there that she was educated. At any rate, she loved learning.

I don't remember mother or father reading to me, but they were always giving me things to read—children's books, mostly. When we would go to Ohio to visit my father's sister, she would read to me in the parlor. There was a large table with a lamp—the lamp table, we'd call it—with chairs around it. It was where all the reading was done. This was when I was about four.

My mother was always very supportive of me. Sometimes I'd mention I'd like to do something, and she'd come back later and say, "Well, when are you going to do that?" She always gave me the idea that I could do whatever I wanted. She was the first woman court reporter in Michigan. She was a legal secretary and then she was a fulltime homemaker, but called herself "The Kitchen Engineer."

Formal schooling phase. I can't remember when I first realized that there were letters that meant something around me, but I do remember living on Brush Street when I was three or four and loving to play in a sandbox. We were living on Hill Avenue when I
started kindergarten and there was another sandbox. I know I was precocious in first grade there, but I don’t remember what I was precocious about, whether it was anything to do with the printed word or it had to do with drawing, probably. While I was in grade school, our family moved to Massachusetts so that my father could work with his cousins in the Weber Shoe Factory. I was forever cutting shapes out with scissors and pasting things together. I always had a dexterity in things like that. Maybe I did those things because the teacher had told or suggested for us to do them, maybe we did projects in response to something that we saw in a book or something, I don’t know. I was always good in math. I always had trouble with history, but I enjoyed arithmetic, excelled in handwriting (the Palmer Method), loved English, and I loved diagramming sentences.

Of course, back then, we all went to public school. There was nothing else. The only alternative was Catholic School or the military academy, and you only went there if your parents didn’t know what else to do with you. In Massachusetts, I went to a little
school that had two grades in one room, and so I skipped two times because I would do all the work that was assigned for one grade and then go on and do the work assigned to the other. I'd listen while the teacher told the fourth grade what to do. So I completed all the requirements for third and fourth grade so they couldn't do anything else but pass me on. I guess I was an accelerated student. It always made me feel a feeling of accomplishment to do more. Socially I was very young, though, and it was hard for me to be accepted.

While we were in Massachusetts my father was somewhat of a VIP and, while we weren't that wealthy, my cousins were. They were also poor students, and always doing mischievous things. Since they were older than I was and preceded me in high school, it was almost a foregone conclusion that I would be a poor student. Actually, I shined in mathematics, but I got into this ancient history class and the teacher, a Miss Collins, said right off the bat, "Just because you're a Weber, don't think that you're going to slide through here without doing any work!" I thought that was quite unfair.
When we moved back to Detroit, though, I didn't have any pattern I had to follow. Back then everyone took literature classes and they always assigned certain things to read. Shakespeare was rather difficult for me, but I remember this actor who made Shakespeare live for me. He was at the Masonic Temple. There were other actors there too. It was a play, and since then I've always wanted to do Shakespeare on stage but I've never had the chance.

Oh, there's so much I want to do! I have helped teach acting classes, though. The Little Theatre is having a summer course in improvisation and they wondered if I could teach it, but the timing conflicts with my whitewater rafting trip.

Back when I was in school, there was no TV. Eventually there was radio, and every Sunday a program would come on for a full hour which would discuss world events with commentary. The family would sit around the radio and listen. I remember how much I loved to read books about animals, particularly Laddie and Lassie. There was one particular author named Albert Payson Terhune. I was so fond of his dog books that I wrote to him when I was only eight or nine
years old and he wrote me back the loveliest letter. I wish I'd kept it, but I don't know what happened to it; maybe it was lost in one of my moves.

Besides the books about animals, I remember reading a series of girls' adventures, about Girl Scouts and their adventures and mysteries. I remember lots of mysteries and adventure stories with hidden treasures and such. I can't remember the particular names of any of them, but I do remember that I read the entire series. We used the library a lot in those days, and it was close enough to home that we could go by ourselves. Times were different then. We lived in a suburb and had to go into town. It was a Saturday expedition. I'd go by myself or with friends or cousins.

I also enjoyed reading magazines specifically for girls. I remember looking forward to their coming in the mail. There was a St. Nicholas Magazine that was written for young people that my folks gave me. But we also got subscriptions from a friend of my mother's. This was all in Massachusetts, and then we moved back to Detroit while I was in high school.
My parents were wonderful people. They never attended church or forced a religion on me. My father was a good man. He wouldn't swear. He wouldn't do anything bad, but he never went to church. He never would preach to me, but to this day there are certain things I wouldn't do because he set an example for me because I wouldn't see it at home. One day he smashed his thumb down in the basement, when I was very little, and ordinarily men would swear a blue streak and rant and rave, but he grabbed it and obviously in pain went up the stairs to my mother and she fixed it. For me, too, though, spirituality and religion are two different things.

As far as church was concerned, I'd go where my friends went. If I had a friend going to a church she would ask me to go with her, and I'd say: "I'll go." I didn't know what I was doing, but I was having fun. We'd go a couple of evenings a week. One year my mother and I experimented by going to a different church every week just to see what it was like. In Ohio, my father's birthplace, my aunt would try to get me to go to church when I stayed there for a summer, so I'd go, but I didn't like it.
I remember the Sunday School having a Raspberry Ice Cream Social, and they had all these fresh, red raspberries to put on your ice cream, and it was so good. I ate so much that I got sick. Funny, the things you remember.

After high school I went to college at Olivet and the University of Michigan for three years. I was the only woman in Mechanical Drawing at the University of Michigan. All the way through college I was aware of gender discrimination. First of all, I had to wait for all the veterans who came back from the war, because they got to have the first pick of classes and they were served first. I wasn't eligible for scholarships since I was a part-time student. The Depression came along then and I had to drop out. It wasn't until my kids were school age that I got my bachelor's degree in science when I was 40. I went to night school after my children were older. It took me four years of night school to make up the courses I needed to take in that one year. I was going to go into engineering at that point, but I didn't.
**Homemaker phase.** I had married an insurance adjustor who went to law school at night. He failed the bar three times and always blamed me and the children. I guess my being pregnant and our being around upset him. As a matter of fact, I used to read novels to make the morning sickness during pregnancy disappear. It worked!

Back in those days a father didn’t do anything with the children. He never had time to read to them although he was always studying and reading himself. He was fascinated by Napoleon Bonaparte and would spend hours reading about history. He wouldn’t have time to help with the children or around the house, but then he’d criticize and bat me around. I was very happy when he left.

We had three beautiful children, though. My husband’s father was a bookbinder, and he always gave the children beautiful books. Every Christmas he’d send books, and he would also rebind their books when they needed it. They read them so much they fell apart. My children would read the books again and again. He was very interested in the technical
aspects of a beautiful book—first editions and things like that.

I would always read to my children, and so would my mother. I still own the rocking chair that I would sit in and read to them. Sometimes I might be ironing a dress and they'd read to me, but as soon as they could read, they didn't want to be read to anymore. This happened sometime while they were in grade school.

By this time I was living with my folks trying to save up enough money for a down payment on a house. Of course there was no bussing then, and my children were all able to walk to gradeschool just two blocks away. I did my best to make them self-sufficient by giving them responsibilities around the house. I would write lists of jobs for them to do and leave them notes, and they would leave me notes too.

They loved to read and went to the library more often than I did. In those days you could let a kid walk on the streets and not be afraid. So they could walk the four to five blocks to the library on their own and check out their own books.
My children did their own assignments for school, and they were pretty much on their own. After all, I was a working mother, and I didn't have a whole lot of time, and sometimes I would stay up all night making costumes for plays, making things out of cardboard, or helping them with school projects and then go to work the next day. It wasn't easy.

Thank goodness for my mother's help. She would be there when the children came home from school, and she would have cooked dinner for us. I guess I was like the daddy who came home from the office to a hot meal and my children.

I always liked to spend time with my children one on one. It was understood that in the summer, when I took a vacation, I'd take, say, two days for something with one and then two days with another child and so on. If one wanted to go bicycle riding, well, we'd do it, and even if I hadn't been bicycle riding for years, I'd say, "Let's do it!" At one point my son was particularly interested in transportation, so we took a boat from Detroit to Cleveland, and then we took a train from Cleveland to Ravenna, which was my
grandparents' home, and then a bus back to Akron and then we flew from Cleveland to Detroit.

This was just after the war. I'll never forget how we celebrated D-Day. We made a big bottle of Kool-Aid and we went out on the main street that was near where we lived, and we watched everybody yelling and whistling out there, not organized at all, but just thrilled that the war was over.

I have three intelligent children, but I didn't really do anything special to get them that way. I played with them, and we read together. I remember my children doing their homework around the dining room table. Whether they were reading something that they didn't have to read at that time, I don't recall, but I remember them sitting on the back porch and reading. They read whenever they felt like it. I didn't schedule them or anything. They might have read in the afternoon while I was working.

My oldest daughter lives in Seattle and is a psychologist with a master's degree. She's with an equipment firm. My second daughter is a Certified Public Accountant. She has a VIP job with NASA now in Washington, D.C. She certainly feels the gender
differences because she has had managing positions. It's very difficult for her. There's always one man who won't knuckle under depending on what he thinks.

My son is a research scientist with a PhD in physics. At one point when he was 10 or so, my son was very upsetting—incorrigible, I guess—and I found that the secret was to have at least one hour alone with him every night. We'd read and discuss anything he wanted to. As long as he had my attention things went fine. He spent one year in high school in Detroit, and then was offered a scholarship to Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. The reason I let him go—because normally I wouldn't—was because he had two sisters, a mother, and a grandmother all telling him what to do. He was the baby, and I just figured that that was not good for him. Actually, I cried mountains and tons. But later he went on to Harvard and to the University of Rochester.

I stayed home with my children until World War II. Thank goodness that my mother had come to live with us. I don't know how I could have worked and cared for my children without her. Times were really
hard back then financially. I remember that one of
Mother's jobs was to keep Sue from drinking all of the
milk when she came home from school. We couldn't
afford it. Milk was a food—not water.

Because of the time constraints of working
fulltime and trying to raise a family, it was
difficult to read as much as I would have liked while
my children were growing up. A novel would have been
out of the question, so I read mostly magazines and
short stories. It was possible to pick up a magazine
like McCall's or Ladies Home Journal and get a bit of
reading in between interruptions. For some reason,
their father didn't stick around. It was up to me to
support them.

Workplace phase. I looked in the newspaper and
found that Male Wanted ads published better salaries
than Female Wanted ads. That's when I got interested
in the fields more closely associated with men's work.
I was with a friend who showed me what she'd been
learning in the war classes, and I said, "I can do
this. It's simple." So I said, "OK, I'll be a
draftsman," and I went looking for a job.
That's when I found out that I had to hop around from place to place to get my salary up. The first place I said, "Just let me prove myself. I'll work for nothing." I started out at 40 cents an hour. The next place I'd say I need 50. So I got my salary to go up that way.

At that time my father died, and my mother came to live with us. He had been working with the Work Pricing Administration. We used to vie with each other. We'd compare paychecks. The last thing he did for me was to co-sign the note on the house I'd saved enough money to put down on.

Entering the workforce had its own set of challenges. I think it would have been easier for me to get a job at the old bomber plant riveting or something rather than getting into engineering with the white-collar workers. The men there weren't used to having a woman around. Quite often I would get, "Why aren't you home taking care of the kids?" And I'd come back and say, "Why aren't you?" And at lunch time, I'd be walking down the street and they'd whistle, so I'd stop and whistle right back. Those men didn't know what to think of me.
After I got my bachelor's degree, I went into teaching because that was the easiest thing to do for a woman with a family to care for. I got my master's in vocational education and was the only woman in the vocational department apart from home economics. I got my master's degree in engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago in 1972. My thesis topic was "Analysis of Acoustics in the Dome Room."

The student center at Farris State was in the shape of a dome so that we had theatre in the round, and off to one side was a square area and a big porch on another side. I used to experience difficulty in hearing when I was in certain positions attending performances, and I thought that it would make an interesting study. In case of music or a lecture, I would like to know where the hearing was best. In the case of this ceiling, the sound goes up and then bounces off that way because the two angles are equal. It took a lot of math and understanding of graphics to do it. It was a wonderful feeling to get my Master's degree.
Then I taught drafting and I can remember the department head telling me later that the principal had asked how he'd feel about having a woman in the department. Anyhow, I guess I proved myself. I taught there for five years. Then they had this opening at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, and I went there to teach. In fact, I went there precisely to teach a program called Technical Illustration. I'd done a lot of that while I was teaching—taking motors and autos apart and showing how to put them together, making manuals for assemblers or welders, so that was a two-year course, and I went there particularly to teach that. I liked being a college professor. I felt less discriminated against there than in industry, but I had to be careful of the wives who might get jealous, and I didn't get much social life.

I did have one friend who was an economics professor. We faced the same problems because she was also in an all-male discipline. We'd go to local fairs and take little trips. We'd have some fun together.
Then the Union came in, and I had bargained for myself all those many years, and I objected to having a Union bargain for me and probably not do as well as I could do myself and charge me $170 a year and not do as good a job as I could do myself. I said: "No, I won't pay it, and I don't want to belong to you!"

Well, it was part of the contract that I be fired. The administration offered to pay my dues, but it was against my religion.

So I looked around and LSU was the place that flew you down here and showed me around the place for four days. Everyone was friendly and helpful, so I agreed to come to LSU in Baton Rouge as a professor in Engineering Graphics.

I taught at LSU for five years. Little did I know that they were going to kick me out when I was 70. I hadn't realized that when I came down here, because I wouldn't have 10 years vested to get a pension. So at 68 I said: "To heck with you! I'm going to quit." I did have a little pension coming from Michigan, but I don't get any library privileges or parking privileges from LSU—nothing. It made me mad, because I worked hard there and set up a lot of
programs there. You see, I had a big load of students. Plus, they were always after me to publish.

When I first went into higher education I thought it was going to be a breeze, and that it would be so much better than what I'd had to put up with in industry, and then all these instances of gender discrimination surfaced. When I first got here, Dr. H., my boss, he'd open the door for me. The next one I'd open for him. That was terribly upsetting for him. When I got here, I was shocked that they didn't have a branch of the Women Engineers, so I started a section for students at LSU and for Baton Rouge women. Well, Dr. H. and I were talking about women and engineering, and I said: "Well, women are just as good as men, aren't they?" And he said in all sincerity: "No, the Bible says they're not." I just got up and walked out. It really changed my attitude about him. At first, I was just kidding, you know, getting the door for him and such, but he took exception to it. I didn't realize that the attitude down here in the South was like that at the time.

I enjoyed teaching my courses in technical drawing. When I was teaching, I always tried to make
allowances for individuals to do things in different ways. I don't know if you can do that with kids. I was teaching a subject, not people; and in the grades and high school you teach people, not a subject.

I did run into some trouble with administration. They got awfully mad at me because I wouldn't pass a football player at LSU. Somehow the administration made a shift of some kind so it wouldn't make any difference, but there was a tremendous amount of pressure on me to change the grade. I suppose a lot of professors would say, "Heck, we'll pass him." But that happened at Michigan too, and the assistant dean came after me several times asking if I wouldn't change my mind. This was not in terms of passing, but changing a grade. I said, "No, look at the numbers. The numbers come out that grade."

It's hard to say how far we've come as women today. On the average, I'd say that we've progressed, but for those who have made more progress than others, there's a helluva lot of backlash. There's a personal price that's often paid when you're a woman in a traditionally male workplace. I wish I were younger
and going through it all again knowing what I know now. I would fight harder.

My daughter, the CPA, is going through this now. She's fighting it. I don't have any advice for her. She could probably explain a lot to me. You see, I've been out of it for awhile, particularly academia—and that is not the mainstream. I was in academia for 13 years, but I was in industry for 30 years, during WWII and then up until the time I started to teach.

The sexual harassment didn't bother me for some reason or another. I was able to handle it. I never answered them back and swore at them. Rather I ignored it or returned a quip of some kind, you know, I brushed it off. Now, they take exception to things like that. I don't know if that's good or bad. Some of these things they call sexual harassment, well, who knows? For instance, in competitive dancing we get to know each others' bodies really well and we communicate very closely. I know what he's going to do, and he knows exactly how I'm going to react. So we kid each other about sexual harassment. If any of the other students came in at the same time, they might think we were crazy. There's a place for
lightening up about certain things, and some of the younger women don't seem to know when that might be a more appropriate response.

There's a lot of confusion today as we make transitions from the old molds to new ways of doing things. For instance, I hate to think about the altercations between the Right-To-Lifers and Pro-Choice. I have utter disgust for the whole thing. What gets me is all these legislators telling women what to do with their bodies.

**Retirement phase.** My retirement has been a marvelous time for me. There just aren't enough hours in the day to do everything I want to do. In the mornings, I go swimming and to aerobics class at the YMCA. I really need to stay in shape for my hobby of competitive dancing. I also like to sew my own costumes for the competitions. I just got back from snorkeling in Jamaica and whitewater rafting out west. That was a beautiful experience, sleeping out under the stars every night.

Since I moved from my house into this apartment, I've discarded a lot of books and publications, but I
still have a fairly extensive library, and I've organized them according to category. I have sections for genealogy, gardening, herbs, health, cooking, and a section on women and religion—well, actually, women, money, and religion. I grouped these together because I only have a few per category. And then I have a section for technical books. I just can't seem to get rid of lesson plans and research in mathematics, I'm so afraid I might need them again. I just have a feeling they'll come in handy someday.

On another bookcase I have books on crafts, travel, photography, and another bookcase with sections on calligraphy, sewing, lifewriting, and architecture. Then, there are the books on English and grammar and the favorite paperbacks I've read. I just love Michener, Chaim Potok, and all the Herriot books on the veterinarian's experiences. Those are delightful books: The Lord God Made Them All, All Things Wise and Wonderful, All Things Bright and Beautiful. I don't want to be a veterinarian, I just want to hug them. I'm really not home enough to have any pets. As a matter of fact, I'm hardly home enough to straighten up.
I still take several magazines: Genealogy, Modern Maturity, Women Engineers, Natural History. I have so many magazines that they threaten to overtake me if I'm not careful. On plane trips I always like to have a paperback book or two to read.

I checked out a book from the library that touched me deeply recently: Sir Walter Scott's Heart of Midlothian. I really want to find a copy to own so I can read it again and again. Midlothian is a county in Scotland, just below Edinburgh. This John Swann, one of my ancestors was born there, and I got his birth certificate when I went to Scotland and I played hookey from one of the classes I was taking through Elderhostel, and I found his birth certificate. They sent me a copy later since I couldn't get it right then. The Scott book talks about Vail Heath and Newbed Alley where I stayed when I was in Scotland.

The topic of genealogy just fascinates me, and I'd like to write a synopsis of each of the great grandparents. I have pictures of some of them in Volume I of my family history, but I'm reading county and state histories to find out what kind of lives people of that era were apt to lead. In the early
counties, particularly in New York, there weren't photos available, but through books I can find out what kind of costumes they wore and the things they had to work with. If I hear "the deep forest," I'll say "No, there was no street there." So the books help me to visualize the kinds of experiences and lives my ancestors had.

I wrote Volume I in longhand and included pictures and stories from as far back as I can remember. Then, Volume II I had typed and included more pictures. Finally, Volume III I did on my computer. It's funny, but I never really learned to type officially. As a matter of fact, if I'd been able to type, I probably would have gone into secretarial work and never been able to "get on the board," as we say, referring to working on the drafting table. I really do think that if I'd been a typist, I would have been channeled into secretarial work with the built-in glass ceiling. Then I don't know how I would have been able to make it taking care of my family those years. I'm a member of NOW and always have been, and of course I'm for the ERA and Choice. Somehow I don't think that women who work in
the home feel gender discrimination the way that women in the work force do. That's where you really feel it.

When I read a book, I can hardly put it down. I have to be very careful about choosing a novel, fiction book, because I'll never get anything else done. I do think that reading and writing do something to foster the imagination. Reading and writing encourage the imagination or help to perfect it. I believe that the imagination must work better through reading products of other people's imagination.

Although I'm not around people of my age very often, except at the courses at the Center for Aging Resources in Defensive Driving and Lifewriting that I took, I do notice that people who don't read very much tend to be interested in rather mundane things. Although to be honest, the people that I choose to be around don't fit that category. All my life I've been with people who've been interested in books and learning, you see. It's hard for me to know a lot about people who don't share those interests. Perhaps that's why I enjoyed the academic community so much.
While I was in industry, I was the only woman among all the men, so I had no companionship with anyone. So, it was just my family for me.

In the future I'll be going to live in Florida where I've purchased a home in Vero Beach. There is a vital community there of older folks who do things. And I don't mean BINGO!

I'm really not very much for sitting around. I like to be active, and there'll be a lot of dancing there. I'm really in "seventh heaven" while I'm dancing. Now, I've always danced since I was knee-high to a grasshopper, but then I saw an ad in the paper and answered it and started dancing competitively. I also have enjoyed doing some racewalking, and taught a seminar on it at the Y this summer. About fifty people attended. Basically, I'm having a ball with my life and I'd like to enlarge my scope in dancing to include the interpretive and theatrical types with the strange ballet-type movements and lifts in the air and such. I'm taking lessons and really enjoying them. And there's so much I want to read, and I definitely want to finish Volume
IV of our family history. Also, I'd really like to get back to Scotland.

Researcher's addendum. The following is a sample of the type of writing Margaret Eller wrote in my Lifewriting for Seniors class:

Remembering Pearl Harbor

The children were playing ball in the yard, the animals—dogs and cats—were playing hide and seek in the weeds, my husband was measuring and sawing lumber and I was converting the lumber to shelves for the kitchen. It was a warmish, sunny day in Detroit, and the sun was sinking low over the back field. We had just decided to put the shelves on hold for another week, thus permitting us to relax with a cocktail and turn on the radio.

Between the noise of the children coming in and the stacking of lumber, an announcer's voice told us that Pearl Harbor had that morning been attacked by Japanese planes. We were jolted to attention and looked at each other in disbelief. Immediately we expressed concern for the soldiers and guessed at what impact the situation would have on the family. I remember experiencing a rush of patriotism.

In November, 1992, Margaret moved to Vero Beach. She returned to Baton Rouge briefly during January of 1993 at which time we met for lunch and conversation. She mentioned how much she had enjoyed a used bookstore in Vero Beach, and how enjoyable the mysteries by Koontz had been to her. She was excited
about reading about the history of Christianity that had been left in the unit that she had purchased and some books on Masonry, as her father had been a Mason.

In February, 1993, Margaret sent me a valentine announcing: "Have a part as one of the sisters in Arsenic and Old Lace. Also in training for Olympics. Also am learning 'quilling,' tap dancing and yoga. Bought another p.b. by Michener. Think you might enjoy it: The Novel. Keep Plugging!"

[Permission to use personal writing granted by the author.]
Jerry White's Story

Formal schooling phase. I was born October 1, 1914, in a little town about 50 miles from Tulsa, Oklahoma. I was an only child, and my parents divorced when I was four years old. I had some good friends who lived close by, and we had wonderful times together. I still write them. Hallie's bad off now, and Emma Jane, well, she's quite artistic and has talented children. One year we visited her when we were in Oklahoma to visit Mama, and it was just like old times. You know, time is really relative. When you like somebody, when you enjoy somebody, it doesn't seem to matter that you haven't seen them in ages.

My father was a circuit preacher and really a preacher at heart although he had to take up dry cleaning to make a living. He would tell me many things about how to get along in the world, and many of them were quite good. My mother was a practical person, and I could tell and knew from an early age why their marriage didn't work. She was an exact opposite of my father. She was practical, and he was a dreamer. She needed to know where her next meal was
coming from, when her water bill would be paid. I can see why she was unhappy with him although he loved her to the end, 'til the day he died. My mother worked in the courthouse and in an abstract office. Her boss once said he’d never lost a nickel off any work she’d ever done, and that really says something about how meticulous she was.

Daddy would tell me Bible stories. As a matter of fact, he would relate everything to the Bible. He was a Methodist minister, and then he was a Jehovah’s Witness, and then he converted to the Seventh Day Adventist. He was always talking about the Sabbath being on Saturday instead of Sunday, which they believed in, but they stress that more than anything else. It’s strange to me that such a small thing could be taken out of the Bible and stressed so much when so many other things are overlooked.

Grandmother Amanda Melvina Calvert would tell me stories, too. We were related to the Lord Baltimore Calverts—the whiskey-making people. They [relatives] sued once to try to get part of the money, but anyway, they didn’t get it. And Grandmother said she was related to Roy Rogers some way. I don’t know just
how, but I think he has a little Indian in him, and I think we have just a teensy bit of Indian too, but I never have pinned it down, and I don’t have anyone to pin it on.

Now Grandma was small. She must not have been five feet tall, small built, small bones, with a wonderful sense of humor, and it must have been tremendous for her to live with someone who was the exact opposite from her. Her husband, Theodore, was a swashbuckling, loud, profane character, although Grandmother got him to cut way down on his swearing. She would tell stories of how he liked small feet on women and he would buy fancy slippers for her shoes and get them a size too small and they would kill her feet, so when she mopped, she would slosh the hot, sudsy water on them and about the time they got comfortable, he’d buy her a new pair.

She told about the time they visited someone for breakfast, and they passed a platter with two pieces of bacon left on it, and the hostess said, "Now, Mr. Calvert, don’t be afraid of the bacon." And he said, "Oh, don’t worry, I’ve seen more than that and not been afraid." Back in those days, the Fords just came
out, and he was one of the first people to buy one. Since he was used to driving a horse, and I think he put it in reverse, not forward, and it was on a hill, backing down to the creek below, and as it reached the water you could hear him yelling, "Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

Grandmother enjoyed her reading. But one day I came home from school, and she was reading a little magazine, and I said, "What are you reading?" She looked kind of sheepish, and you know what it was? She showed it to me, even though it obviously embarrassed her. She was reading Love Story Magazine. Someone had given them to her, she said. She read those magazines for two weeks, and then she told me, "You know, these are really good, but they’re all the same." Wasn’t that cute? You know, I used to love True Romance when I was a teenager. I must confess, I even sneaked them!

I tend to be a bit of a worrier and so was my Grandmother Calvert. Now she had a teacher who was afraid of storms when she was young and she frightened my grandmother, so when the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, she’d wake us up and take us into the storm to get to the storm cellar. We’d open the door
and go down into the cellar with the kerosene lamp. That's where we kept all our fruit, and it was dark and dismal and we would sit the storm out. Now those midwestern cyclones are really something. My mother would never go, but my grandmother and I would go.

My mother worked fulltime through the Depression, so she was quite busy. I don't have any memories of her reading to me, but Grandma did, and Daddy would tell me those stories and read to me from the Bible. I loved those Bible stories. The story of Ruth and Naomi is one of my favorites, and Jonah and the Whale, Daniel in the Lions' Den, and Shadrach, Meachak, and Abednigo. I like the verse in Corinthians that describes a good woman being industrious in the world and a good homemaker too.

Formal schooling phase. I always loved to read; it wasn't anything that was forced on me in school. It came to me naturally. I had seen the enjoyment that others got out of it, and it just seemed to be a part of everyday life.

My mother saved my report cards. The categories were different then. Back in 1922 and 1923 when I was in third grade the areas we were graded on were
arithmetic, art, grammar and language, music, physiology, reading, spelling, writing, care of teeth, and cleanliness. Under a conduct category were indolent, wastes time, gives up too easily, restless and inattentive, inclined to mischief, rude, discourteous to others, whispers too much, and shows improvement. Now, my mother never put much importance on grades. Whether I brought home As, Bs, or Cs, it didn’t really matter to her. I probably would have tried harder if it had, but I guess I was weakest in math but I did go on to get an A in algebra. My favorite subjects were reading, literature and journalism. I just loved book reports. I used to do them early. As a matter of fact, in art and arithmetic I got an E which was barely passing. Another semester I got a C in arithmetic, a C in art and a C in grammar, but I went on to do well in these.

I had the same first grade teacher as my mother, Mrs. Andres. She taught Mama and then she taught me. She married the math professor. She was good. She read a lot to us, and you could tell she really loved poetry. I just loved English, book reports, and journalism. My English teacher, Jeannie King, she was
tall and skinny and engaged. After her fiancé died, she never married, and I remembered when she read "the bells, the bells, the bells, the tintinnabulation of the bells," her Adam's apple would go up and down. That's what I remember. And I remember my lunches. In grade school I'd get a ham sandwich with a dill pickle, and in high school they'd fry eggs and put mustard on them. Those were good.

I went to Union School for elementary and Pawhuska High School about a mile from our house. I don't remember being read to much at school, but I did love to read myself. The public library was within walking distance of my house, and I think I read everything in that library. There were some books that I didn't understand, but I read them anyway. Maybe I don't understand them yet, but I sure enjoyed the reading. There was nothing wrong with going places by yourself then, so I would walk to school and the library.

One of my favorite books was Ten Famous Women in History. It was about Clara Barton, Florence Nightingale, and other great women. Oh, I loved that book! Mama asked me when Grandma died what I wanted,
but I didn’t have enough sense to ask for it [the book]. ‘Course I was in Washington at the time. I loved reading about these women’s lives. It was interesting to me, and it sort of inspires you to see what women could do. You see, we had heroes in those days. Back then, we had George Washington and Abraham Lincoln as the big male heroes. Those women I read about were heroines to me because they accomplished things under adverse conditions. Florence Nightingale had a tough time of it at first. You know, I would have loved to have been a nurse. I just love to help people.

Another of my favorite childhood books was *Emmy Lou, Her Book and Heart* by George Madden Martin. It is one of the nicest books as a kid I ever read and it had the most beautiful old-fashioned illustrations. Even though it was published in 1859, it’s as relevant today as it was then. You know, people are the same. Just like they were a hundred years ago. The inside core of people is the same. It reminds me of a poem I wrote that comes to mind: "She sat outside my self one day and looked upon her face and wondered about the ancient one come to take the place of the young
girl that she was many years ago she has not ceased to know." It's funny, but there's a big mirror in our church, and when I see myself walk in there I don't recognize myself. I say, "Can that be me?" And it is! I still feel inside like I did when I was 18. Time goes on, but we stay essentially the same.

In high school I had a girlfriend who loved to write poetry as much as I did. I wrote a lot then and I saved everything I'd written. She and I had a lot of fun together. I still remember something she wrote: "A woman's eyes are made of something that resembles jade: of priceless stuff that will not fade. A woman's eyes of jet are something one will not forget. A woman's eyes of blue promise to be true."

She was killed in an airplane crash between Kansas and Chicago going up to stay with her daughter after her second baby. It was the fault of the airline. It was leaking oil in Omaha and they patched it up: such a waste of life.

While I was in high school I took some business courses--typing, shorthand, bookkeeping (I took all the business courses that high school had to offer, but I didn't like bookkeeping)--and after high school
I went to business college in Tulsa. My father wasn’t able to be very generous in supporting me, but everything he sent, my mother kept in an account. So when I went to business college she took that money which was $186.50 to pay my tuition. Don’t think I didn’t work, ’cause that was MY MONEY. I think I worked harder because I knew this was an opportunity.

It was the Depression then, and my mother’s job cut her back to half time, so I think she put me at the YMCA or someplace when I first got to Tulsa, but she couldn’t afford that, so I found myself a job working for a lady who had one little girl. Her husband was a barber. Now I had never ironed a shirt in my life, but one of my duties was to iron his shirts. I had never ironed a shirt in my life because we didn’t have any men in my family [She lived with her mother and grandmother after her parents divorced when she was 4 years old.] He [the barber] wore a clean one every day. I was outraged. Those were the days before permanent press, and you ironed and starched everything. Starched shirts are murder to iron. He must have felt terrible the first ones I did. I would wash dishes when they entertained, and
there was a lot of that, but she was lovely, and I was very fortunate.

**Workplace phase.** When I finished business college, I went home and worked for two weeks without pay to get experience in a lawyer's office. Holcomb, Lohman, and Barney was the name of it. After that, the regular secretary went on vacation, and I took her place, and for the next two weeks I got $55, and that was big money in those days. I bought a watch, a coat, groceries, and lots of things with that and gave my mama a present and still saved some. I sure saw my education pay off! And after that I got another job with a lawyer where I got the munificent sum of seven dollars a week. That nearly killed me. I worked nine hours a day for that for awhile. Not only did I do his typing and shorthand, but I filed papers in the courthouse and he made me a Notary Public.

Down here in Louisiana you have to be pretty sharp to be a Notary Public, but up there, anyone can be one. Everything my boss needed notarized I did for free but for everyone else I got a sum. He also got me a job in court doing a partition case, and I got
$100 for that, and that was unheard of. He wasn’t a great lawyer, but he was a good man. He owned a lot of property, and one time he asked me to go to a house that he owned that a colored family had, and we walked in the door, and you should have smelled the dinner she’d cooked. Pork chops, beans, and cornbread, and the floor was so clean you could have eaten off of it. He was so mad, he said, "Those darned people, they’re living better than I am!" You can really live well on a little money if you manage it well and work hard.

About this time Mama was afraid I was going to marry someone she didn’t want me to marry, so even though I was an only child, she sort of pushed me out of the nest. You know, I only had a temporary position up there in Washington and that’s a long way to go for a temporary position, but I went anyway with my makeshift suitcases and cardboard boxes, and my job played out so I went to my congressman and I worked for him. When you dictate you should give the steno the copy of the letter you’re replying to, and it was really murder trying to figure out not only the words, but the address when he didn’t give me that. I always like to do a good job, and that worried me. Maybe he
was trying to test me. At the time I was a steno/clerk. That's someone who takes shorthand and types. Later I became a secretary.

I'll never forget being invited to the White House. I was working at the Veteran's Administration at the time in the stenographic pool, when this garden party at the White House was planned for the patients at Walter Reed Hospital. Now this was several years after World War I. The girls were invited for the purpose of handing out cigarettes, talking to the veterans, and making them feel at home. I bought a special pink chiffon dress which I never wore after. Now, the White House has this huge circular driveway, and President and Mrs. Roosevelt stood at one place as the veterans came by. Now it's clear from the pictures that Eleanor Roosevelt was less than physically beautiful, but you didn't see that. Her entire personality just radiated in that place. It was a revelation. Anyway, as far as the eye could see came the line of veterans. Some being pushed in wheelchairs, some on crutches, some with one leg, some with one arm, some with a vacant look in their eyes to shake hands with the President and Mrs. Roosevelt.
And it was the most effective denouncement of war that one could imagine. After all those years to think that they were living out this life this way because they had been in war.

While I was in Washington, I worked for my husband in the investigations division of the Department of Agriculture which was a particular kind of place. We had a very strict boss there. When we would proofread things, whoever read the document would initial above the initials of the person who proofed it, so if anything turned up wrong they would know who was at fault. You know what I mean? I was a good proofreader. To this day, when I open a page and there's something wrong with it, it just jumps into my eye. One time I picked up a law book and I said to my husband, "Judge, there's a typo in here." He said, "They don't make typos in law books." But sure enough there it was!

There was some kind of an anthology that someone was putting together while I was in Washington, and I entered something I wrote at the time. I was about 20 then. It was published in the anthology. I still can recite it: "Someday, said I, I'll write a lovely
song, but not today. Today I am too young, and needs must have the wisdom of the long and fruitful years, and so it was I flung aside that brief ambition until time should give sophistication to my phrase. For who, thought I, cares to peruse a rhyme with shallow thought that may be faulty lays. Years passed, and I acquired experience. The time has come when once I said, 'I ought to sing that lovely song.' But thoughts of rents frighten the muse and now too old am I, though once too young, excuses made to find my song unsung." So I guess there's no time like the now to do it if you're going to.

**Homemaker phase.** You know, Judge, my husband, worked in the same office I did in Washington, but I never knew him there. He was a lawyer in investigations. One day while we were working together in a field office in Mississippi, he said to me, "Miss Hendrickson, I want you to take down the minutes of this meeting (I'm pretty fast in shorthand) but don't change the meaning, but make it sound like better English." I said, "Mr. White, we take it verbatim, and we type it verbatim." He says, "You're working for me. You do it my way." I said to myself,
"That's going to be a hard man to get along with." So I married him!

He was from Alexandria, Louisiana, but he had a football scholarship to LSU. Both of us were sent to a field office in Athens, Georgia, where the college is. And a friend of mine in the office, we roomed together and we'd go to Atlanta on the weekends. Then they opened a field office in Houston, Mississippi. That's where I got to know Judge more. We were married in 1942. We're celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary this year.

I've always loved babies. They are a joy to me. In fact, when I didn't get pregnant right away, I was 28 and he was 30, so we didn't want to wait too long. I went to the doctor, and he said, "How long have you been married? And he sent me home. Well, later when I found out that I was pregnant, I walked home on air I was so happy, and I had a delightful pregnancy. I never had any trouble with my three--never got nauseated. I was as happy as could be.

We were living in Providence, Rhode Island, and didn't have a car so the Red Cross would take me in for my checkups. It was a snowy January. I think I
was three weeks late and the nurses were kidding me. "Do you think this is a baby or a tumor?" So they welcomed me with open arms when I finally made it in. I remember it snowing and having to hang those long diapers outside and they’d freeze when I put them on the line. Of course, back in those days, you washed by hand, and Judge got me a big milk can and he got a plunger like you use in the bathroom to go up and down, and that’s the way I washed my diapers. It was a lot of work. We were lucky to find a place to stay. Housing was hard to find after the war.

We lived in Rhode Island for about two and a half years, I think. I remember driving a beat up old Ford to Oklahoma with a blizzard behind us. You couldn’t buy good cars back then and we didn’t have money enough either. We canned a lot of fruit back then. Where the base was, the boys gathered fruit from abandoned farms and they came home loaded. So we canned fruit— I never had canned any before but I learned—and we always had applesauce. I would make pie crust out of bacon grease that I’d strained, and it was delicious. Well, there we were on the Pennsylvania Turnpike with baby Michael in the back
seat and there was a short in the car and the lights went out. It just all went dark, and boy was I scared. Fortunately, Judge was able to fix it.

Two years after Michael was born we had Darrell. But four years after Darrell was born we had Ginny. La Lagniappe! Now, when you have children it’s just natural to want to share the things you love with them. I always read to my children. I remember reading *Black Beauty* while the boys would take their bath. We were always reading. It was a real event when the children were old enough to write their names so they could get a library card. They rejoiced when they could get eight books on their own. It was like a reward. Judge, the children, and I would go to the library every week or two weeks. It was a ritual. We’d take our books back and get eight more apiece. That was the limit at the time.

Darrell is still quite a reader. One time he entered an essay contest for lawyers and won $1,000. Now Michael has had problems with his reading, so he’s not a reader. Ginny’s not particularly a reader either, which is strange, because she heard all the
stories too. Maybe I didn’t read as many when she got bigger. I don’t know.

My grandchildren love to read. You should see little Hamilton read. He’s got the best memory for books I’ve ever seen. He’s only three, but he would pretend to read that book and laugh after each page. It would have made a great World’s Funniest Video. Darrell and his wife Fran homeschool their children. Their oldest, Ehren, is in vet school, and they have a baby. Fran is a dietician and Darrell is a judge. I feel that they are doing a beautiful job with their children, a remarkable job. They teach their children, take them places, expose them to different sports. I think too much permissiveness is really sad. Children need boundaries or they don’t know where they’re going. I don’t know that I did such a wonderful job, but I think Darrell and Fran are doing a good job with their six children.

My daughter Ginny is a marvelous Sunday School teacher. She’s remarkable. She has those little children memorizing whole chapters of the Bible and saying them in programs at church. She’s devoted to her church. She and her husband have two boys. The
oldest, Jason, just got married and the younger one, Roger, well, he just loves to read. Ginny is short for Virginia Nell. We named her after her Uncle Virgil and her Aunt Nell to please my mother-in-law.

You know, it's interesting, the differences between children raised with books and those who haven't been. Fran usually brings the children over on Thursdays, and they bring five or six library books with them and I read them to them. Well, I brought them over to a neighbor's who had her grandchildren over, and I was trying to read the cutest little story about a little girl who wouldn't eat anything but bread and jelly and how her mother cured her by giving her bread and jam for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Well, those children couldn't even sit down to hear the story. One would scream, and the other would just run around. I don't think that anyone reads to them at all, and their father is a doctor and a lawyer, and she works and is a wonderful person, but I do think that children benefit so very much by being read to.

Now Judge is a reader and he would take the children and me to the library. I was lucky that I had a husband who would help me with the children, but
taking care of children takes a lot of time. It was hard to find time to read when the children were little. Of course, I read to them, but as far as having time to enjoy a novel. Well, that was tough. It seemed like every now and then I could find a moment to pick up a magazine or read a short story, but there wasn’t very much time left after a day of caring for three children. Fortunately, Judge’s mother lived with us and she was just a beautiful soul, a delightful person, a joy. She would read to the children. She would do anything for them and was always willing to help in any way. We were very close, and she helped me a lot with the children.

Times were different then. It was before the time of the television. We’d read. We’d go out for walks. We would play games. We played Rook, Old Maid, and different card games. Checkers, dominoes, and every kind of sport. Darrell would jump high jump. He was good at it, and he taught the boys next door. Darrell belonged to a baseball team. Ginny would play football too. She could kick as hard as the guys— but when we started at the sewing machine, we both nearly lost our religion. Girls’ stuff didn’t
come easily to her. In fact, one story I had in Readers Digest was about her: The lady next door, well, her boy was moping around one day, and she said, "What in the world is wrong with you, Stevie?" He said, "I want to play football." And she said, "Why don't you go next door and get Ginny?" And he said, "Aww, she's turning into a girl." That was back in December of 1964. I got $74 for that story, but they changed it a lot. They said it was touch football. I sent the check to my mother. Ginny was furious. She said, "At least you could have given it to me!" I've sent them several things, but that's the only one I had published.

I had a dear friend who helped me so much in my writing. Mary Wall organized the Louisiana State Poetry Society as well as the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. She really encouraged me. She belonged to the Penwomen. You have to have sold three items to get in. It may be more now. I had already sold two to the Denver Post, and Mary said, "Jerry, I want you to get in." She helped me fill out my application and, then a few years after I got in, she got out; the dues were too high. She couldn't
afford the dues. We have artists and writers, and we have meetings. Different people present programs and some of the people are really, really good. Some write humor; some write poetry; some write prose pieces. We publish books. *Louisiana Landmarks* and *Louisiana Leaders*. I'm in both of them. It's a wonderful support group for artists and writers.

Mary Wall was a great encouragement to me in everything. She and I read Great Books together and would talk about them. She encouraged me to enter contests. She'd say, "Jerry, you must enter this one. You must enter this." She was a great encouragement and a wonderful poet. Oh, I was so trite in my early work, you know, crystal clear. But she helped me a lot. I joined Louisiana Poetry Society because my children didn't need me so much anymore, and I needed to be more independent. It's really been enjoyable to have a support group like that.

It's also been nice for me to be able to help others in their writing. One friend gave me the beautiful floral painting in my dining room for helping her to write up a story for a contest. She came over one day and said she had a chance to enter a
contest, and would I help her. Well, I think the contest specified something like 1800 words, and she just brought over a few things paraphrased from the Bible, and I said, "Don't you have anything longer?" "Well, I have my testimony." Well, once a month we have women's meetings at the church, and we give our testimonies, so Ginny and I went to hear it and it was exactly what we wanted. I asked her to bring it to me, but she said, "Oh, it isn't even typed. You won't even be able to read it." And I said, "I had bosses who never learned to write. Bring it to me. I'll type it, then I'll edit it, and we'll go over it." I had several suggestions beside the editing. She had mentioned that three miracles had happened to her and I said that was exactly what they wanted. Give me one of the miracles, write a little more about your husband in there because they like the human interest, and bring it to me. I think I typed it three times and she sent it off. She didn't win a prize, but she did get to attend a writers' workshop in Minneapolis for Guideposts.

I just helped another friend of mine who I used to help edit. She writes beautifully. She said she
wanted to enter this contest because some of the winners get to go to New York for a workshop, and was dying to go. So I pushed it back to her right away and said, "Just take what you want and forget about the rest." I don't have any feelings about it, but if I see anything, I have to mark it down. I have to let it be known, and then if they discard it, that's their problem.

I edited the piece about how she survived a robbery. These three disreputable characters came in to the place she was working, held a gun to her head, and took her purse and car. It was a terrible ordeal for her, but years later she realized that she had recovered and forgiven them. You know, just like the Bible says: Forgive my trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. That lack of forgiveness can be a poison.

You can't understand why things happen, but there must be a reason. The world is too complex and too wonderful a place to have just happened. It had to have been arranged, you know. Scientists, even scientists admit that. Darrell has a lot of information on Creation. It just couldn't have
happened. The Big Bang Theory just doesn't sound right to me. All things work together for good for those who love the Lord.

Another time I helped a friend edit her first two books. They were romance novels. We worked together at the Department of Labor. I taught letter-writing and she taught shorthand to some of the employees. My boss said to me, "These people don't know how to write or spell. Would you teach them?" I made my own lesson plans and worked with an English teacher and held classes for them. Anyway, my friend's book was really quite good, and not torrid; it's in libraries. One day I met her brother at a function and said, "How's Reetsie?" He said, "She's fine, and she's published two books." "That rascal! She promised me a book when she published," I said, so he went home and told her and she sent me a copy.

I really began a rebirth of my interest in writing in the mid-60s when my children were older and didn't need me as much any more. They were all in school, and I needed an outside interest. Of course, I always wrote. I wrote before then, but it was then
that I really had the time and the encouragement to do more of it.

I don't really like to write. I like to have written. To tell the truth, it's like having a baby. It's not any fun, but when it's over it's wonderful. You see this thing you have produced. You can hold it. You can touch it. You can feel it. It's some of you. But to really say, "I like to write"... well, I don't like to write. I'm too lazy to write, but I do. I have to be motivated by a certain amount of emotion. Now, Mary Wall could write a poem by looking at a picture. She was inspired. I couldn't do that. A picture does not inspire me unless it's a picture of something that touches my emotion. And most pictures don't. But I admire anyone who can do that. I remember my mother was visiting in a hospital and there was a room across the hall, and the woman sitting on the bed and she had long hair and her husband was brushing her hair, and it sort of touched me, so I wrote a poem about that. And one time the little four-year-old girl on Easter Sunday sang at our church, and I thought that was a very moving thing for a girl of four years old to get up in front of all
those people. I couldn't have done it myself, so I wrote a poem about her: "Kristen sang at my church today, wearing her ruffled Easter dress and a tremulous smile as she made her way to the altar side..."

Writing can be agony. It can be torment. But you do it when you feel like you have to. For instance, the piece I wrote on a 50-year romance, now that was done because my sister-in-law wanted it, and it was torture. I thought I would never finish it. I can't let anything go unless it satisfies me, and if it satisfies me it's as near as I can do. It may not be perfect, but it's the best I can do. I have to polish and polish prose. It doesn't come as easy to me as poetry does. I'm just cutting my teeth on the prose. I don't really feel that I'm accomplished, but I do like to do things.

I like to help people. I like to bring them vegetables. I like to bring them food, and this is one way of doing things by writing and helping others. An elderly friend of a neighbor put together a hundred poems and illustrated them with Christmas cards. I
was so touched at the beauty and effort that I wrote to her telling her what it had meant to me to see it.

Once I visited an old teacher in Gueydan. She was on her deathbed, paralyzed, and she could hardly speak. It moved me so that I wrote about it and sent it to my friend Martha who was very close to her. She died about three weeks later. Another time I went to a birthday party for a 100 year old man. When I published things in little magazines, I got lots of letters. One came from a man named John Mason. He was self-educated, and wrote for a little paper in Otoka, Oklahoma. We wrote each other for years. He gave me a book that he had published of other peoples' writings Great Minds: Liberating Thoughts. One year when Judge and I were driving across country through Oklahoma, Judge said to me, "You know, we're going near Otaka. Would you like to stop and see John Mason?" How I loved that. He was in a rest home then--99 years old, and I said, "I'll bet you can't guess who I am." And he said, "No, I can't." "This is Jerry White." "Oh, I'm so glad to see you." "Just think," I said, "Your birthday is in August, and you'll be 100 old." His reply was, "Well, I can't
think that it's very enlightening to be called the oldest cadaver in the cemetery!" Such humor! His mind was as sharp as a tack.

All my life I worked. Before Ginny was born, I worked at the Highway Department and then stayed home with her for a year. Then I worked at the Department of Education for 30 years. I loved people and enjoyed the work. I was editing all day long. And some of the supervisors resented my corrections because I didn't have more than high school and business college. Now my state director of school lunches, which was where I worked, knew what I could do and appreciated it. Later my boss called me and offered me a job at the Department of Labor. And then I was offered an inducement for early retirement. The Lord was looking after me.

Retirement phase. One thing I really want to do is get my poetry in order. I have so much of it, and I'd like to get it organized, put it in categories, in alphabetical order by title, but I haven't really done much. But I want it to be organized so when I pass on it won't just be in boxes. I'd like to get a lot of my poetry in better shape, retype some of them, and
have them bound for my family. I’ve written two books for Ginny’s boys and one for Ehren. When they turn 13, I make my grandchildren each a book about themselves with pictures, poetry, and family memories. It’s almost time for me to do one for Lexie. Time passes quickly. Ginny made me write my Christmas letter one year on a computer. I had to call her every five minutes to say, "What do I do now?" I just still do my writing on the typewriter. I can see where the computer could really save time and be easier to edit, but I’m used to my own typewriter.

You know, some people say that retirement is boring, but I just keep so busy that I hardly have a spare minute. I just love to garden, and it keeps me busy from March through October. I just love growing things, starting the little seeds in my greenhouse, and planting them, watering them and watching the vegetables grow and bringing them to people. I save the rainwater for them too. They like the "real" water much more than the "chemical" water. My father loved to garden too. I have a picture of him from an
Oklahoma paper with two HUGE tomatoes that he'd grown, tipping the scales at about a pound and a half apiece.

Judge has been working hard on his family genealogy. He's fallen in love with Kinko's. Now he enjoys reading Readers Digest, National Geographic, and he loves the nature shows on PBS. He's spent a lot of time at the Louisiana Archives researching his family history and then takes the pictures to be reproduced at Kinko's.

I attend Louisiana Penwomen meetings every month, and meetings of La Lagniappe Writers' Guild. I still judge poetry contests when I'm asked to. This is a really good time for me. I enjoy my grandchildren so much, and I'm lucky to have them all living here in Baton Rouge, so close.

As I look back at my life as a reader, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Emily Dickinson are among my favorite poets. Edna St. Vincent Millay had such rhythm in her poetry, while Emily Dickinson had the slant rhyme and the looking beyond the visible to the background. As a young person I think I really was influenced by the book about famous women, but a book that really stands out in my memory is The Rosary. I
think I read it six times. It was a delightful book about a woman named Jane who was plain, and it was so refreshing to see some heroine who was not breathtakingly beautiful. I could really relate to that, because I felt rather plain.

These are such different times we live in. I feel very happy with the fact that I'm a woman, fulfilled in my role as a woman. I do not envy successful, politically inspired women. I feel the good they can do should be commended, but I've never wanted to be one. Judge was pretty much the boss around our home. The Bible said the man should be the head of the family, and that the man should call the shots. I believe that a successful marriage is certainly based on that. I've had a happy life. I have been so blessed. There's a lot more to do, too.

**Researcher's addendum.** The following was written by Jerry at the request of a family member on the occasion of her 50th wedding anniversary:

**The Beginning of a Fifty-Year Romance**

Since Mr. Right had not made his appearance by my 27th birthday, I had almost assumed that he would not, but in the meantime was enjoying living and working in Washington, D.C., attending
plays, hiking, and making occasional trips to New York and Baltimore.

My first federal appointment was for two months with the Treasury Department. When it ran out, I started at the Veterans' Administration across the park from the White House, where I was in a stenographic pool. With no raise forthcoming after three years, I transferred to the investigations section of the Department of Agriculture.

A couple of years after I started work there our section set up a field office in Athens, Georgia, which was in need of clerical help. So Nellie Mae Anderson (A personal friend and co-worker) and I were sent there for several months. Besides working together, Nellie and I roomed together and drove to Atlanta on weekends. Nellie, who is also retired, lives in Florida, and we still keep in touch.

Several months later I was sent to a field office in Houston, Mississippi, where our supervisors were conducting investigations. I arrived in Houston on July 4, which date has since proved a joyful and eventful occasion in our family. Before this, I had worked with and for all but one of the investigators at the central office.

One investigator, however, Gordon White, was a newcomer, a young lawyer, tall, personable, and moustached, who drove a new Buick. Moreover, he had a delightful southern accent, and was single! I soon learned that he not only smoked a pipe and cigars, but was a hunter, fisherman, sports enthusiast, inveterate coffee drinker, and was from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which accounted for his southern accent.

In the course of the days, we crossed paths at work, at the coffee shop, and at the cafe which the office force usually frequented. Sometimes, a group would eat together, and sometimes two or three. All of us were on expense accounts.

Perhaps my interest in the new supervisor, rather than my taste for coffee, prompted my frequenting the coffee shop more often than I usually would have. At any rate, we shared
coffee breaks frequently and started having lunch and sometimes dinners together. Then drives in the country on off hours in his new Buick.

One day Mr. White instructed me to take a meeting in shorthand, but told me not to change the meaning, but to make the English sound good. Since I had worked in the office before he was hired, I replied, "Mr. White, it is the procedure in this office to take the meetings verbatim and type them verbatim."

He retorted to the effect that I was working for him and to do it his way. I thought to myself, "That is going to be a hard man to get along with."

Most of the investigator’s wives did not travel with their husbands because of their jobs or children in school. But, being childless, Mr. Loweree’s did. Hilda and Ed were from Mississippi, had the typical Southerner’s hospitable nature, and often invited other supervisors and me (I was the only clerical employee in the office) to home-cooked meals at their place. Hilda’s delectable dinners were a welcome change from the monotonous restaurant fare in the small town.

Hilda shared her kitchen with me sometimes and I remember Judge’s enjoyment of my homemade divinity candy. He had had his fill of dancing while attending Louisiana State University, but since my dancing had been limited to high school proms and some weekly dances the boarding house group in Washington used to attend, dancing was great fun for me. So, where there was music when the four of us went out to eat together, Ed and I would dance while Judge and Hilda talked.

Judge and I used to take long drives in the country in his new Buick. He has always loved to drive, and we talked of what we had done, what we would like to do, the work, the supervisors we worked with, and many inconsequential and important issues. I learned he loved ice cream and boating and that his athletic prowess had won him a football scholarship to LSU. He told me of his mother in Louisiana and his sister and her fiancee, both of whom had recently graduated from medical school in Texas. His sister was then
interning at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. He told her of her helping him financially to get through law school.

After some months, when my letters began to contain more and more mention of Judge, and since I was an only child, my mother and Robert (my stepfather, whom I dearly loved) made the trip from Oklahoma to meet him. We have pictures of the six of us (including the Lowerees) at a picnic. Mother was impressed with Judge, but not to the extent I was, of course, as mothers of only children seldom find their children’s chosen worthy of them.

When our feelings for one another grew beyond the supervisor-employee relationship, we thought we acted very cool, making plans for our life together. This was during World War II years and we knew Judge would eventually be called to service if he did not enlist.

When we decided to marry, we slipped away to Boonville, Mississippi, on Saturday, November 7, 1942, and were married by a Methodist minister, Reverend Thompson, in his rectory. He conducted a beautiful service and I still remember his likening the wedding ring to love, which has no beginning and no ending.

There was no rice throwing, but when Judge slipped that simple gold band on the appropriate finger of my left hand, we began the first of almost fifty years of marriage, years which have been filled with love, problems, pleasures, starting a law practice, raising children, frustrations, but with the realization that a higher power had guided us and was guiding us still.

After the Houston investigations were completed and the office closed, we all went back to Washington, I turned in my resignation, gave up my apartment, and moved to Baton Rouge to live with Judge’s mother with short visits from him from time to time until he volunteered for the Navy. Signing that paper permitting him to go was one of the hardest things I have ever done. He was sent to San Diego, Bainbridge, Maryland, and finally Rhode Island where I was able to join
him and where our first son, Michael, was born on January 27th, 1945.

Because both Judge and I are the children of divorced parents, we were determined to make a go of our marriage.

I was right when I thought, "He'll be a hard man to get along with," but he has also been a good man to live with, and we have been abundantly blessed by having three wonderful children and eight delightful grandchildren as evidence of the love we have shared through the passage of these almost fifty years. The End.

Finally, here is a poem which expresses Jerry's philosophy about the quality of life in past when even small moments or small items came to be treasured:

*Gay Patterned*

"Poor People have poor ways," she often said,
Converting what she had unto her need,
As cornhusk dolls took shape within her hand
And strands of beads were strung from melon seed.
The Irish chain, old-fashioned quilt she made
Gay patterned from bright blue bits of calico,
Was warm upon the waist-high feather bed
On winter nights that country houses know.
When hungry children hurried home from school
To sniff aromas of her fresh baked bread
She'd spread large buttered chunks with summer's jam
From purple grapes and plums she'd harvested.
And though she said poor people have poor ways,
Her labor minted coin of golden days.

Jerry White, 1965
American Poetry League

[Permission to use personal writing granted by the author.]
CHAPTER V
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research project revealed many aspects of the literacy practices of the three participants across their lifespans. In particular, commonalities and differences emerged between and among the three women's experiences which served to illuminate these practices within the specific socio-cultural and historical timeframe of the 20th century in the United States of America. Understandably, it was impossible to separate the role and function of reading and writing from the myriad complexities of life itself (Heath, 1991). Thus, the findings on literacy practices are emphasized within the context of a life history approach (Langness & Frank, 1981; Radin, 1913; Wolcott, 1990a, 1990b).

In an attempt to organize my findings, I address the participants' literacy practices according to four life phases. As described in Chapter I, these divisions were made for the purposes of this study; they are not to be understood as absolute but are,
instead, useful generalizations for looking across the lifespan.

Preformal Schooling Phase

Within this phase, four patterns emerged from the data that appeared to be common to all three participants: (a) oral language and the family, (b) modeling of literacy behaviors, (c) the importance of being read to, and (d) direct instruction. In addition to these patterns, one of the participants displayed an awareness of environmental print, an important, and relatively recent, focus in literacy research.

Oral language and the family. The participants’ narratives revealed early childhoods which included extended families that had a significant influence upon them. Close proximity to grandparents and other family members gave them valuable oral language development and feelings of belonging and caring. In particular, all of the participants voiced delight in the oral tradition of storytelling within the intergenerational family setting. Elaine’s memories of her grandparents’ stories of life on the farm, Jerry’s memories of the runaway car and her father’s
Bible stories, and Margaret's memories of her grandmother's accounts of life in the Michigan Territories were related vividly to me decades later.

The importance of family experiences of storytelling for later print-oriented literacy is well-documented and supported in the literature on language development. Such storytelling has been cited by Rubin (1993) as whetting children's appetites for books. As Dwyer (1989) states: all reading and writing float on a sea of talk. The recollections of my participants support the notion that these oral skills are foundational to the later branching out into the media of print.

Telling stories has been found to be a natural drive which, as Barton and Booth declare (1990), shape "our lives and culture—we cannot live without them" (p. 12). Oral language development begins at birth and is entirely dependent on the human environment into which the neonate enters (Cullinan, 1974; Halliday, 1982; Heath, 1989). The storytelling environment into which my participants entered seemed especially rich. Reciprocal intergenerational
storytelling, as well as simple oral communication, was active in the lives of my participants.

**Modeling literacy behaviors.** In addition to a family oral tradition which brought rich oral language development, the participants were led within the patterns of their family lives to experience vital links with print. Each participant had vivid memories of parents and grandparents reading periodicals, newspapers, and fiction in the home. Jerry’s memories of her grandmother reading *Love Story Magazine* and her father studying the Bible, Elaine’s memories of *Saturday Evening Post* and *Grit* and her father reading Zane Grey westerns, and Margaret’s memories of periodicals and newspapers are examples of this.

The families of these participants modeled the comparative silence of reading and writing behaviors before the participants evolved into their own literacy experiences as readers and writers. Such modeling behaviors have been shown by Cullinan (1974), Heath (1986, 1988, 1989, 1991), and others as being a primary influence on oral language development and in reading and writing activities.
Some studies (Clark, 1976; Clay, 1975) have shown that writing skills are first learned by observing other writing, both in act and product. They learn through role models and through graphically mimicking the scratches and doodles of writing (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Such composed scribbles may well have been the first writing experiences of the three women in this study.

Galda, Cullinan, and Strickland (1993) believe that the reproduction of literacy styles reflects the broader culture. Metalinguistic awareness—which allows for further individual incursions into the language-world—develops in such active intersubjective environments through the encouragement of children's practicing of the reading and writing activities which have been modeled for them. My participants had such models and did mimic experiences of literacy which they observed.

**Importance of read-aloud.** Furthermore, all three participants had memories, admittedly vague, of being read to by family members in this preformal schooling phase. In Jerry's words: "My mother worked fulltime during the Depression, so she was quite busy. I don't
have memories of her reading to me, but Grandma did, and Daddy would tell me those stories and read to me from the Bible." Margaret related: "I don’t remember mother or father reading to me, but they were always giving me things to read—children’s books, mostly. When we would go to Ohio to visit my father’s sister, she would read to me in the parlor. There was a large table with a lamp—the lamp table, we’d call it, with chairs around it. This was when I was about four." Elaine’s memories were slightly more vivid: "I have memories of Mama reading to me. All of us would gather around the old wood heater, and Mama would read us a story, and we’d all listen. That was before the age of TV. We’d have more fun playing simple games back then, and picking up something to read."

The relationship between one’s family environment and the development of literacy is discussed by Taylor (1983) as he notes that literacy has its roots in the family environment. This is where the styles and values of literacy are transmitted to the children by the parents, and then in turn shaped by the personalities and preferences of the children, themselves.
Recently, many literacy educators have suggested that such early experiences of being read to in the home are an important component of metalinguistic awareness: the nuanced understanding of cultural-linguistic meaning (e.g., Cox & Zarrillo, 1993). My participants indicated that they were read a wide variety of materials and it has been suggested that this experience of hearing of different text structures (narrative and expository) assists in the totality of future reading comprehension (Galda, Cullinan, & Strickland, 1993; Trelease, 1989). This indicates how lifelong literacy practices may be dependent on such early factors as verbal interchange in the home, parental modeling of literacy behaviors, and the reading of bedtime narratives to children.

Direct instruction. Direct instruction in the home also occurred during this preformal schooling phase. Margaret's blind grandmother taught her her numbers and ABCs, and Elaine's grandmother shared her own native French language as they counted eggs in the chickenyard. Jerry's father gave her instruction in the meaning of the Bible stories which he read to her.
Direct instruction is a precursor of the major pedagogical pattern of the school system. Instruction in the home has been shown to have long term positive effects on later learning (Goodlad, 1984; Mason & Au, 1990). It should be recalled, however, that the literacy practices of the participants were learned as deeply through being read to, literacy modeling behaviors, and through the rich oral language life of their families.

**Environmental print.** It was interesting to note that of the three participants, whose ages were 62, 72, and 80 at the time of the interviews, the youngest, Elaine, was able to remember the most about early environmental print awareness. Her vivid recollections of MARTHA WHITE FLOUR, COW FEED, and PRINCE ALBERT TOBACCO indicate that, for whatever reason, some people have a closer affinity to early childhood experiences of recognizing environmental print than others. Neither Jerry nor Margaret had memories of environmental print prior to attending school.

Taylor (1983) also observes that children are attentive to the uses of print more so than to the
print itself. That is, words and letters were not valued for their own sake but were seen as means to an end. Children learn about the way print is used to accomplish different purposes before learning about the alphabet and conventions of writing. The participants' varying recollections of awareness of environmental print may support Taylor's assertion that reading is part of the larger process of being literate and participating in a literate environment. Memory screens out the skills-oriented details of print processing, and retains a more gestalt awareness.

In conclusion, Elaine, Margaret, and Jerry had similar experiences in their preformal schooling phases. All had family systems which included both father and mother, and there was close contact with grandparents. Storytelling and family stories provided a rich legacy of oral tradition which offered valuable connectedness between generations and a sense of place and belonging which later continued in their own writing efforts. Older members of these families all modeled reading and writing activities. Being read aloud to by other family members was a mutual
memory for my participants. All the women received some degree of direct instruction before beginning formal schooling. Furthermore, the homes in which the participants spent their preformal schooling years provided print-rich environments. Such environments are consistent with what Strickland and Morrow (1989) cite as being crucial components of an enriched setting for emergent literacy, namely, print and persons who help unlock its secrets. Both parents and grandparents provided rich legacies of various forms of literacy which emerged decades later to take written form in my lifewriting class taught at the Center for Aging Resources.

Formal Schooling Phase

Within this phase, four patterns emerged from the data which appeared to be common to all participants. They included: (a) the importance of the family, (b) various school practices, (c) personal reading, and (d) the participation in post-secondary education.

Importance of family. Although all participants had vivid memories of certain aspects of formal schooling, when they were asked the question: "What contributed most to your commitment to lifelong
learning?" their answers were emphatic that school was not the major factor. Rather, the personal experiences in the home and community outside of school fueled their curiosity and creativity. This is consistent with Taylor's (1983) premise that literacy develops out of participation in a literate society. Even though individual teachers may have been inspirational and memorable, school was not seen as the major influence in their love of learning and lifelong preoccupation with reading and writing. In short, specific persons from schools may have been an influence but not the material with which they were taught and not the educational institution in itself.

In Elaine's words from Chapter IV: "Mama and Daddy were the most important people in my love of reading, because I saw what pleasure it brought to Daddy to read those Zane Grey western books after his work was done, and he'd really enjoy them. . . . She [Mama] enjoyed her magazines, some books, and newspapers, but she really had her hands full with all of us children."

Margaret related a similarly powerful role that individuals played in her love of learning: "Now
Grandmother was a schoolteacher, and I remember her telling me that the first money she made she used to buy a dictionary. At any rate, she loved learning."

And, of the encouragement she received from her mother, Margaret remembered: "My mother was always very supportive of me. She always gave me the idea that I could do whatever I wanted." Similarly, Jerry noted that her father's love of reading the Bible fueled her interest in stories. These recollections of the importance of learning in the home are consistent with the powerful influence of family relationships on literacy (Heath, 1988, 1989, 1991; Trelease, 1989).

School practices. Although the influences of the home continued to be powerful, the formal schooling experiences began another phase in the participants' lives bringing with it the experience of the educational institution. Memories of such experiences included: (a) the importance of influential teachers, both positive and negative, (b) being read to by teachers, (c) round-robin reading, (d) Shakespearean studies, and (e) subject preferences.
First, it is no surprise that teachers often left impressions which existed throughout the years following formal schooling. Elaine related this description of "a teacher who influenced me quite a bit. At the time, I thought she was the meanest one could ever lived. . . . She made you learn, and I can look back and thank her today. She taught English and literature." Jerry related the following about one of her most influential teachers: "I had the same first grade teacher as my mother, Mrs. Andres. She was good. She read a lot to us, and you could tell she really loved poetry." Perhaps it was Mrs. Andres who planted the seeds of Jerry’s future as a prolific poetess. This is consistent with Trelease’s (1989) notion of the long-term effects of reading aloud to others and the modeling of love of literature. It seems clear that reasons vary for the particular remembrances of literary experiences.

Margaret recalled an example of injustice on the part of one of her teachers: "While we were in Massachusetts, my father was somewhat of a VIP. . . . but I got into this ancient history class and the teacher, a Miss Collins, said right off the bat, 'Just
because you're a Weber, don't think that you're going to slide through here without doing any work.' I thought that this was very unfair." Margaret expressed relief from a family identity which could be burdensome when the family moved back to Detroit. Teachers' words and actions carry great weight in children's lives and continue to influence later experience, as Dewey (1938) has elaborated.

Second, being read to by the teacher rings clear in memory, as exemplified by Jerry's memories of her elementary teacher reading the words: "The bells, the tintinnabulation of the bells..." The memory has the same physical immediacy for Jerry as does her remembering eating ham sandwiches with dill pickles. Elaine's memory of her teacher reading the story about the little brown dog is notable. Margaret, the oldest of the participants, did not remember specific incidents of teachers reading to her, but this may be due to a lack of interesting materials or interesting teachers, or even, perhaps, her memory. Margaret did remember her parents giving her lots of "things" to read. The significance of teachers and other role
models reading to the students in a classroom cannot be overemphasized.

Spiegel (1989) suggests this practice is an integral part in the cultivation of lifelong readers. Being read to by a more fluent reader from texts which one could not readily decode herself provides the aesthetic arena in which the joy of reading is born. This is consistent with the findings of Duchein and Mealey (in press) who found that college freshmen recall vividly stories read to them as elementary students.

Third, each participant had memories of round-robin reading in school, a common practice, though often not an enjoyable one. When a person had difficulty, it was a pain shared by the rest of the class as well. In Elaine's words, it made it "difficult to concentrate. . . . There was several in the class during that time we were taking turns reading that said, 'We're not getting anything out of this. Do we HAVE to?' And the teacher said, 'You will. Just hang in there.'" Elaine's suggestion was, "It would have been better if the teacher or one
person who was a good reader would have read it. It would have been better for the rest of us." It has been long noted that silent reading produces better comprehension than oral round-robin reading (Smith, 1965), but that during the early decades of the 20th century, an abundance of in-school reading was done orally (Hoffman, 1991). McDade’s (1944) research confirmed that non-oral classrooms perform better on standardized tests than oral classrooms and paved the way for the acceptance that mature reading is silent reading.

Fourth, all three of the participants mentioned the study of Shakespeare as an important aspect of their formal schooling phase, but found it challenging and often difficult. It was helpful to have the teacher read it aloud, or to see it performed. In Margaret’s words: "Shakespeare was rather difficult for me, but I remember this actor who made Shakespeare live for me. He was at the Masonic Temple. There were other actors there too. It was a play, and since then I’ve always wanted to do Shakespeare on stage, but I’ve never had the chance." Perhaps some literary experiences are best undertaken in the form in which
they were first intended, as Barton and Booth (1990) have suggested. Drama, like poetry, was intended to be heard--live, as it were--and this is how my participants seemed to have experienced it most deeply.

The women’s experiences with studying Shakespeare may be symbolic of the transformation of literary experience so many of us have gone through. When Shakespearean prose was force-fed from the dry page alone and then regurgitated in typically short-answer tests, the women in my study found his works unpalatable. Elaine vividly summed it up: "Shakespeare: We had Shakespeare and more Shakespeare until we thought we’d die." Later, however, after at least one of them experienced the dramatized text and thought about it on her own, the Shakespearean text came to be a vibrant manifestation of the literary art: a deeply meaningful interpretation of life’s perennial vicissitudes. The study of Shakespeare may be representative of the powerful effect of dramatic involvement in the creation of personal meaning in literature (Cox & Zarillo, 1993; Wagner, 1988).
Finally, Jerry and Elaine voiced a preference for reading and writing activities in school over mathematics, except when Elaine excelled at algebra in high school. Of the three participants, it was Margaret, the child who remembers most vividly cutting with scissors and playing in the sandbox, who went on to be the engineer and the participant who was most mathematically inclined. Elaine's career as a seamstress, and Jerry's sewing, gardening, and even poetry-writing, all demand mathematical understanding.

**Personal reading experiences.** Significant to all of the participants during this phase was their own love of reading as school-aged children apart from assigned school readings. Such personal readings had two aspects, one being the need for its extracurricular pursuit and the other being the benefits for later literacy. The importance of personal reading has been discussed by McCracken (1971). It has been encouraged by many literacy educators including Cheek (1989), Cox and Zarillo (1993), and Mason and Au (1990).
Margaret loved animal books, particularly about Laddie and Lassie, and girls' adventure stories. She also received a young people's magazine, St. Nicholas on a monthly basis. As a student, she was precocious, doing the work of both her own grade level and the one beyond it in a single classroom that held two grades. Thus, in this third grade year, there was a rapid acceleration of academic progress that accompanied the wide reading that she was doing on her own at home.

Elaine, too, reported the enjoyable reading that she did on her own during this formal schooling phase, including reading her American Girl magazine as well as a variety of other kinds of books. She recounts that in sixth grade, her reading for pleasure "took off" and she was, as she says, "always reading." Jerry described a burst of reading enthusiasm as well at this time, reporting that she read incessantly from the community library, and "read about every book in it--even if I couldn't understand them."

All the women seemed to awaken to the world of literature in the same general period, roughly the third to sixth grade. It is interesting to note that Elaine, Margaret, and Jerry related a particularly
intense time of seeking out print and learning, wherein it almost became an obsession. This was evidenced in Jerry’s wide reading at the community library, Margaret’s efforts to accomplish two years’ work in one, and Elaine’s voiced delight in reading all kinds of books from the library and "any magazine I could get my hands on."

Most of the reading for pleasure engaged in by my participants, however, took place outside of the school setting. They obtained their books or magazines from community libraries or their home libraries. Literature may have provided escape into greater worlds where their dreams and emerging sense of self had the potential for fulfillment (Grumet, 1992; Sanford, 1938). Outside reading also may have provided an avenue for vicarious experiences not readily available at this time in their own lived experiences.

Perhaps the lack of stimulus to do exploratory reading in schools can be blamed on the school curriculum of the times. Roehler and Duffy (1991) have written that the curriculum of the times was oriented to "reinforcement and repetition" (p. 861).
Given this model, it is no wonder that so many students had their enthusiasm for private reading dampened in a school system which only enforced specific activities for behavioristic ends. Perhaps their strong home background of literacy activities allowed my participants to overcome any negative effects of a repressive school system.

Throughout their lives, the women in my study enjoyed reading for pleasure, but the actual beginnings of this lifelong avocation began during the elementary school years. In Jerry's words: "I always loved to read. It wasn't anything that was forced on me in school. It came to me naturally. I had seen the enjoyment that others got out of it, and it just seemed to be a part of everyday life." This natural acquisition of a love of literacy assumes a more global approach than the discrete skills orientation so commonly found in many classrooms (Wilson, 1984).

In addition, the benefits of the wide reading done by my participants cannot be overestimated and contributed to their reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency. It is no surprise that people get better at doing what they practice, and
reading is no exception. Good readers—like Elaine, Jerry, and Margaret—read continuously, and children who read continuously are usually excellent readers (Galda, Cullinan, & Strickland, 1993; Trelease, 1989). When readers respond with pleasure to the materials they read, it is likely that they will reach for another piece of reading material and the cycle goes on. Such private reading facilitated later literacy and supported the major social pursuit of this phase in the participants’ lives, that of formal schooling.

**Post-secondary schooling.** The primary pattern of this time in their lives is that all the women in this study chose to enter into post-secondary education. Each of the participants chose to extend her education immediately after graduating from high school. Elaine attended Julie’s Beauty School and passed the State Cosmetology Boards. Margaret began college but had to quit after two years. This was because of financial difficulties as her aunt had been paying her tuition and could no longer afford it after the banks closed in 1932. Jerry graduated from Tulsa Business College qualifying her to do secretarial work. Margaret earned her bachelor’s degree in science years later.
after she had her family, whereas Elaine and Jerry began their professions immediately after training.

Both Margaret and Jerry worked without pay for a time in order to "prove" themselves to their employers and to get experience on the job. This technique was effective as both were hired fulltime, as a draftsperson and secretary respectively.

I include this information in the section on formal schooling because it can be considered a kind of on-the-job training, voluntarily acquired. The question arises: Did this willingness to work without pay represent the greater effort that women have traditionally had to make in order to compete in the employment arena? Jerry and Margaret may have been exhibiting the "overcompensation—investing more time, greater effort in their work than is objectively required" (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 68)—displayed by women who enter the workplace after generations of being denied this experience by patriarchal oppression that discouraged gainful employment outside of the home.

In conclusion, my participants continued their involvement in literacy practices into post-secondary
education. The requirements of such education took time from their previous immersion in private reading but demanded, instead, other literacy-related activities. It was suggested that their continuing educations were beyond the usual notions of necessary in that time period.

**Homemaker/Workplace Phase**

Within this phase, all three women experienced three major commonalities. They included (a) parenting literacy activities, (b) their own literacy pursuits, and (c) continuing literacy activities in the workplace. In addition, the issue of gender bias was raised by one participant.

**Parenting literacy activities.** The women in my study all seemed to feel that the first and chief cause of continuing literacy among their children was to be found in the quality of their relationships with them. Two of them further noted how assistance in primary caregiving was essential to their roles as literacy nurturers. The literacy and educational attitudes of their children were looked at as tests of the ongoing success of the literacy cycle. Finally, the influence of extraneous and factors in their
children's and grandchildren's literacy patterns was discussed.

The women in my study are all mothers and were married to their husbands at the time of the births of their children; however, Margaret went through a divorce soon after the birth of her last child. Elaine had two children, a boy and a girl. Margaret had three children, two girls and a boy. Jerry had three children, two boys and one girl. All of the women in my study valued their roles as mothers very highly, and all incorporated literacy-nurturing activities into their childrearing.

The parenting activities which fostered literacy in their children included reading to them. Elaine, Margaret and Jerry gave accounts of reading to their children from trade books. The books were often given as gifts or checked out from the public library. Elaine would accompany her children to the library where she would also check out books for herself. Although she noted that her husband was not an avid reader, he would enjoy seeing the family read. Margaret's children were able to visit the library on their own as it was nearby, and in Jerry's case, her
husband, Gordon, would accompany the family on this outing.

Jerry noted: "When you have children, it's just natural to want to share the things you love with them. I always read to my children. I remember reading Black Beauty while the boys would take their bath. We were always reading. It was a real event when the children were old enough to write their names so they could get a library card. They rejoiced when they could get eight books on their own. It was like a reward. Judge, the children, and I would go to the library every week or two weeks. It was a ritual."

Elaine recalled: "Both my son and daughter just loved to read. I read those bedtime stories to them every night, and if I hadn't finished folding the clothes or some chores that needed to be done, I would tell them stories about adventures and animals and family stories and the same kind of ghost stories that my grandpa told to me."

Margaret read to her children as well. She recalled that the hour or so a day she spent one on one with her pre-adolescent son, reading or talking, seemed to make him easier to get along with. Margaret
also said that she would "leave lists of things to do" and "notes" for the children to read when she was working.

This quiet, intimate time of reading with children held value for the participants and it is likely that it assisted in their children's educational attainments. The importance of parent encouragement and modeling in literacy activities has been discussed previously in the Preformal Schooling Phase section and is further substantiated by my participants' experience with their own children. These children, it is worth noting, have in turn largely carried on this tradition of literacy emphasis with their offspring.

This finding corroborates with research which reveals intergenerational literacy patterns are deeply embedded in the culture of the family and community. This cycle of literacy functions primarily through human relationships regardless of socio-economic status (Heath, 1989; Reder & Green, 1983; Sulzby & Teale, 1985; Taylor, 1983).

The issue of primary caregiving for children emerged in the stories of each participant. After her
divorce, Margaret was grateful that her own mother was there to care for the children while she was working. Margaret recalled: "I would always read to my children, and so would my mother." Although Jerry had her mother-in-law, and Margaret had her mother to assist her in parenting, Elaine had no live-in help. She found that working as a teller in a bank was impossible given childrearing responsibilities, and consequently began a sewing business so that she could "make the work come to me." Elaine noted that her children were grateful that she was there for them when they came home from school, and Margaret recalled that her own daughter, Connie, quit her job so that she could be more available to her son. Their commitment to motherhood went hand-in-hand with their commitment to fostering literacy development.

The incorporating of such literacy activities as those listed above in the daily lives of their children seemed to bring more joy into each of these families and to be an advantage to the children in their educational endeavors. Notably, each of the participants had a child who went on to achieve doctoral-level accomplishments.
Nevertheless, coming from a heritage of literacy does not necessarily ensure success in literacy-related activities. Elaine's grandson had difficulty in reading, and a specialist diagnosed the problem as relating to an eye-focusing problem. Jerry noted about her other son: "Michael has had problems with his reading, so he's not a reader. Ginny's not particularly a reader either, which is strange, because she heard all the stories, too. Maybe I didn't read as many when she got bigger. I don't know." This would be understandable given the four-year difference between Darryl and Ginny, yet Ginny is active in her church's youth ministry and teaches Sunday School.

It seems necessary to conclude that there may be many extraneous factors which account for the differences in present-day reading practices, not all of which can be made present in the scope of the current study. Peer groups, changing culture, and even genetic factors may have all played a role in determining the reading and writing practices of the participants' children. This is consistent with the findings which have shown very intricate
constellations of circumstances and influences contribute to a person's literacy experiences and practices (Cox & Zarillo, 1993; Lipson & Wixson, 1991; Mason & Au, 1990).

Margaret, who was a single parent, sole provider, and participant in both industry and academia would seem to have been an inspiring role model for her children. Jerry and Elaine, however, who had more traditional marriages and more traditional employment, brought up children who achieved comparable success and who are as active in literacy practices. It is possible that engendering involvement in lifelong learning is due to intangibles such as care and quality of communication—love—and not just due to modeling behaviors. This can be read as significant for all parents who wish to motivate their children to lifelong learning but who feel they lack the academic credentials to do so. Love and communication, as well as literacy modeling and direct instruction, can flourish in any home or community no matter what the educational attainment or the socioeconomic status (Grumet, 1989; Heath, 1989).
**Personal literacy practices.** There were two major factors here on which all three women could agree. One was the time constraints on personal literacy activities in general caused by the demands of the childcare years. The other was that the reading they did do was important escape or bibliotherapeutic.

The three participants noted how the intense demands of childcare made it difficult for women, as principal caregivers, to find the time to read for pleasure. Elaine noted that her mother was too busy to read much, and Margaret noted how for years she read mainly magazines because she would be more likely to be able to complete a section without being interrupted. Although Elaine had been a member of the Doubleday Book Club, after her children were born she "... had to drop the book club because I didn’t have the time as fast as the books were coming in." After her children came along, "...there just wasn’t much time to read." Jerry said, as well, that her own mother’s employment demanded too much time to have any left for reading aloud to her.
During this homemaker phase, however, all three women continued to engage in other pursuits related to literacy. These included the ubiquitous and ordinary demands that most homemakers must deal with, such as writing checks, writing special occasion cards and newsletters, reading and interpreting recipes and patterns, planning vacations, and making endless lists of things which needed to be done. Despite these demands, all the women continued to read for diverse reasons relating to information and pleasure.

Margaret felt that "a novel would have been out of the question, so I read mostly magazines and short stories. It was possible to pick a magazine like McCall's or Ladies Home Journal and get a bit of reading in between interruptions." Margaret was curious for information, but she also described the important escapist or therapeutic function of reading: "As a matter of fact, I used to read to make the morning sickness during pregnancy disappear. It worked!"

As Grumet (1992) has indicated, people often seek reading as diversion or a broadening of experience in order to romantically link themselves with other times.
and places. This can take on an escapist function; however, the ubiquitous day-to-day demands of childcare and homemaking may have made such escape into a joy.

Another instance of reading as bibliotherapeutic is when Elaine described her situation as an isolated housewife: "I was a lonesome housewife. I didn’t know a soul over there [in Point Coupee] other than his [her husband’s] family. I was in the midst of strangers but ... I loved to read my books." There is a potential for healing in the act of reading, as Sanford (1938) has described. Jalongo (1983) recommends that teachers and parents provide children with guidance to select appropriate books to provide insight into their personal circumstances and problems.

Despite the pressures and time constraints of childrearing and homemaking, all three women asserted that they had continued to read and write throughout this period. They maintained a thread of literacy which would blossom when the leisure time for its pursuit was made available. After the demands lessened, reading and writing took on greater
importance in the following years. Despite these ebbs and flows in the intensity of involvement, the continued commitment to literacy enabled such involvement to flourish in their retirement phase.

**Workplace literacy.** The employment lives of Jerry, Elaine, and Margaret kept the demands related to literacy on a rather tense but comparatively narrow track. As Mikulecky (1982) found, reading at work as part of the required job performance is an almost universal activity. It may not be universally remembered with pleasure, however. It is interesting to note that the memories of these women tended more to orbit more around physical memories—such as food eaten and activities done—and the places and people of their past than around the literacy necessities of employment.

Elaine, as a seamstress, was required to read detailed patterns and instructions on garment-making and act upon them. She noted with pride that she often combined three or four patterns to make original garments. Margaret, of course, practiced the more arcane skills of draftsmanship and technical writing, as well the mathematics required to calculate the
mechanical processes involved in her work. As a college professor, she was engaged in the traditional tasks of curriculum development, research, lecture, lab experiences, and grading of her students. Jerry worked as an editor and secretary, both of which involved an intensive use of the written word. The common factor, however, was that none of their literacy activities were totally self-chosen but were guided by the demands of the job.

The three women in my study balanced their roles as wives, mothers, and workers, for many years. Margaret and Jerry had long-term careers outside of their family lives in which literacy played a central role. Elaine was primarily a homemaker but managed to develop a career within the home. Although Jerry and Margaret had the help of their children’s grandmothers, Elaine did not have this assistance and gave up a possible career due to her desire to be present when her children got home from school.

Gender issues. The fact of being a woman seemed to have been experienced as a mixed blessing for my participants: (a) It was a burden in literacy pursuits because of the demands of motherhood and one
of the women found it to be a social barrier in her career pursuit, (b) most found their own daughters were more active in expecting feminine equality, and (c) all, however, found that friendships with other women greatly aided their reading and writing lives.

If a woman's literacy life is challenged by the ubiquitous demands of childcare—especially the care of younger children for whom constant surveillance is often a matter of safety—it must be added that there are other factors that also jeopardize development of literacy patterns in women. Many obstacles have existed and continue to exist for women seeking post-secondary education (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). Among these constrictions are the pressures of trying to balance roles as mothers and wives with academic demands, allocation of domestic resources (such as in determining which spouse should have the academic opportunities), hiring practices which often are unfair to women, and sexual harassment on the job. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) note that for women trying to make a place for themselves in academia, too often family responsibilities put their own career goals at risk. In Margaret's words: "I never could
have got my education if it hadn't been for my mother being there to help care for the children."

This issue of gender is illuminated in the contrast between the experiences of Margaret who competed in a traditionally male field— that of engineering— and Elaine and Jerry who worked in fields which are more traditionally female. It was Margaret who spoke specifically about patronizing male attitudes on the job and in society. Elaine and Jerry evidenced a more conservative outlook in both their work experience and in society at large.

As Margaret said: "Entering the workforce had its own set of challenges. I think it would have been easier for me to get a job in the old bomber plant riveting or something rather than getting into engineering with the white-collar workers. The men there weren't used to having a woman around. Quite often I would get, 'Why aren't you home taking care of the kids?' And I'd come back and say, 'Why aren't you?' At lunchtime, I'd be walking down the street and they'd whistle, so I'd stop and whistle right back. Those men didn't know what to think of me!"
At one point, Margaret was asked to do some typing for a colleague in industry. She replied that she couldn't type, and noted that if she had been able to type, she probably "would never have made it to the drawing board." In other words, being able to type would have put her in the traditionally female secretarial position instead of pursuing her career in drafting which ultimately was more lucrative. According to Margaret, the workplace is the arena in which gender discrimination is most felt.

She related: "There's a personal price that's often paid when you're a woman in a traditionally male workplace." She discovered that opposing this hierarchy met with resistance and venerable justification: "Well, Dr. H. and I were talking about women and engineering, and I said, 'Well, women are just as good as men, aren't they?' And he said in all sincerity, 'No, the Bible says they're not.' I just got up and walked out."

Yet Margaret appeared to have handled various degrees of sexual harassment gracefully. At a later time, she rethought her position: "I wish I were
younger and going through it all again knowing what I know now. I would fight harder."

In contrast, Elaine and Jerry did not experience gender discrimination in the same way that Margaret did. While Jerry's employment as a clerk-steno and secretary and Elaine's as a cosmetologist, bank teller, and seamstress are traditionally considered to be "women's work," both Jerry and Elaine voiced contentment with their feminine roles and an absence of feminist struggle.

Jerry recalled her employer saying to her when she was in a secretarial position at 70 years old: "All these other bosses like these pretty little girls as their secretaries, but I want someone like you who will look out for me." Such statements have confirmed for Jerry that her effectiveness has overshadowed any demeaning attitudes men may have had toward her. In Jerry's words: "I feel very happy with the fact that I'm a woman, fulfilled in my role as a woman. I do not envy successful, politically inspired women. I feel the good they can do should be commended, but I've never wanted to be one." Jerry cited the same venerable source as Margaret's boss had as a
justification for the hierarchical structure of the home: "Judge was pretty much the boss around our home. The Bible said the man should be the head of the family, and that the man should call the shots. I believe that a successful marriage is certainly based on that." This is the attitude of Jerry's poems of this period which celebrate a happy homelife.

As content as Elaine says she was in her role as wife and mother, she noted proudly that her own daughter Connie was an excellent markswoman who won a place on the LSU Riflery Team and went on to become an officer of the club despite prejudice concerning the acceptability of having woman members. It seems Connie felt more gender discrimination than did Elaine. Margaret, who said above she would have fought harder, noted that her daughter, the CPA, finds it challenging to deal with gender issues on the job. It may be that the daughters are taking on the battles the mothers did not. In Margaret's words: "There's a lot of confusion today as we make transitions from the old molds to new ways of doing things."

One the other hand, comments were made by each participant concerning the support and camaraderie of
other women in their lives. This sisterhood served as a source of encouragement and fellowship throughout their lives. For instance, Elaine spoke of the older friend who gave her a subscription to *American Girl* and encouraged her love of painting, the friend with whom she studied for the State Cosmetology Board, and her current friendships with women in her church and in writing groups.

Margaret mentioned the constant encouragement that she received from her mother and from the friend who gave her the courage to go into drafting. She gained confidence with another female professor with whom she shared good times as a mutual single and who supported her through the challenges of working in a male-dominated field. She spoke passionately of the fellowship experienced in an all-women whitewater rafting trip in the Grand Canyon during the summer of 1992.

Jerry noted the encouragement of several women as she developed as a writer and poet. As she recalled: "I had a dear friend who helped me so much in my writing. . . . She and I read Great Books together and we would talk about them. She encouraged me to enter
contests. She was a great encouragement and a wonderful poet...she helped me a lot." An accomplished poet herself, having won many prizes and having published profusely, Jerry has helped others in their growth as writers.

Though it may seem obvious that community support for one’s own projects increases one’s motivation and confidence, often women in the public sphere and in literacy pursuits find themselves flying solo. My participants emphasized the importance of female camaraderie in their reading and writing activities, as well as in academic pursuits. The dynamism of the community of women in providing the drive and support for individual ventures has been well-documented in various settings (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Benstock, 1988; Edgerton, 1992; Grumet, 1989; Munro, 1991; Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

**Retirement Phase**

Within this phase, four patterns emerged. These included: (a) the ongoing pleasure associated with reading and writing, (b) the self-affirmation of memoirs and life history, (c) the participants’ own awareness of the importance of memory and mental
acuity as related to literacy practices, and (d) the social dimensions in which the literacy practitioners found community.

Writing experiences and reading pleasures. It was clear that the persons who had gathered together for the initial workshop were not beginning writers at all, but persons who had been devoting much time and effort to their labors of chronicling family stories and histories. For most of them, though, their writing efforts had been done in isolation, as solitary pursuits.

While all three of the participants are able writers, Jerry has been cultivating her talents as a poet and writer the longest. Starting in high school she wrote poetry for pleasure, and over the years has created an extensive anthology of poetry and prose covering a wide variety of topics. However, it was not until the Retirement Phase that Elaine and Margaret found the time to begin their lives as writers. Only Jerry had the support of a community of writers through her associations with formal writing support groups such as the Penwomen and Louisiana Poetry Society. The other classmates impressed me
with their vivid memories, their mental acuity, their obvious passion for life, and their active reading and writing efforts. It was during this month of February, 1992, that the desire to understand this kind of vital, active lifelong learner and her literacy practices took shape and led me to the questions which formed the basis of the present study.

In interviewing my participants, I found that all were still avid readers of newspapers, magazines, and novels, which seems to be a common practice among retirees (O'Keefe, 1990). Although reading had been a lifelong pursuit of all participants, two of them discovered writing for pleasure for the first time during the retirement phase; for the third, it resurfaced.

The motivations that caused the women to take up writing in earnest at this time are worth noting and share a similar feature: Writing seemed to be the creative endeavor necessary to fill a void in their lives. For Elaine, this void was caused by the sudden death of her spouse. Jerry felt that the absence of her children was a primary motivator: "I really began a rebirth of my interest in writing in the mid-sixties
when my children were older and didn’t need me as much any more. They were all in school, and I needed an outside interest. Of course, I always wrote. I wrote before then, but it was then that I really had the time and the encouragement to do more of it."

Margaret had done a great deal of what she termed "technical writings" in her field of engineering in both the private sector and academia. She noted that to write narratives for her volumes of family history was a new and challenging experience. After her retirement from LSU, though, she found that she had the time to accumulate and document her family history and stories for her children. Unhappy with the university’s forced retirement intentions, she resigned and began this work—perhaps as a kind of healing process—to reclaim the stories of her family members and her ancestors. She kept abreast of the current technologies as is shown in the composition of her volumes. The first one was written in longhand. Volume II she had typed. Volume III she typed herself on her own computer.

Elaine began writing her family stories and poems after becoming widowed. She began to write her
character sketches of family members, poetry, and her own memoirs. She began to extensively research and document the family history and, like Margaret and Jerry, give a voice to the inner life of memories.

Self-affirmation and self-creation. It may be wondered why my participants felt the need to record their memories in this fashion. Memory in the retirement phase seems to have much greater weight than the dispersed rememberings of earlier years (Berman, 1991; Chinen, 1991; Kastenbaum, 1991). When life is preoccupied with the goals of the future, memories may seem unimportant. However, when a long life is reviewed from the position of advanced age, memories may come to take on the aspect of the life being reviewed. That is to say, the memories of one's life may actually come to be one's life (Merleau-Ponty, 1978; Nixon, 1992). If this is the case, it can be understood that there is a powerful imperative to put these memories in order, to discover in them a meaningful sequence so one may be assured that her life has had a purpose. The approach to writing life histories or memoirs may even creatively affect the tone of those memories and so simultaneously affect

As Langness and Frank (1981) have written:
"Writing one's own life story is a way of creating coherence or meaning. It can be a source of great satisfaction and can be used as a therapeutic technique for people of all ages, perhaps the elderly especially" (p. 103). Whether or not the participants saw their work as therapeutic or not is questionable. However, if therapy can be understood as curing the emptiness of enforced leisure time often found in old age, then the participants did indeed find their narratives therapeutic. They seem to have even experienced them as being in some way life-enhancing and necessary.

If the memories are allowed to fade or to remain unbound by narrative, it could be felt that life itself is being vaporized into a meaninglessness (Berman, 1991). The narration of one's family history and personal reminiscences serve as much to create a life as to give form to memories which may be imagined as pre-existing the writing of them (Kastenbaum, 1991; Nixon, 1992).
The oral narratives of my participants reflected structures normally associated with text. The continuity and richness of description which was revealed in the speech of these three women is more commonly found in writing to which a great deal of forethought has been given. Such careful reminiscences may be the direct result of lifelong preoccupation with reading which leads to a reflexive self-awareness. Such reflexivity and reflection allow the participant to become the producer of her own inner landscape which reveals itself orally or textually. Reading and, especially, writing were avenues for reflexivity and reflection.

The necessity of such writing, despite discomfort and even pain, is portrayed by Jerry as she reflected on the process: "Writing can be agony. It can be torment. But you do when you feel you have to . . . . I don't really like to write. I like to have written. To tell the truth, it's like having a baby. It's not any fun, but when it's over it's wonderful. You see this thing you have produced. You can hold it. You can touch it. You can feel it. It's some of you. But to really say 'I like to write'... well, I don't
like to write. I'm too lazy to write but I do. I have to be motivated by a certain amount of emotion."

It appears possible that the writing efforts of my participants during the retirement phase of their lives were undertaken to endow their lives with a kind of cohesion as they experienced retrospective awakenings through memories of events and people they had known (Chinen, 1991). In addition, the stories and information about ancestors were viewed by the participants as being a vital historical and personal legacy for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Interestingly, Elaine's and Margaret's work in the field of genealogy have taken on a rather completed form in that the bulk of the research has been completed and documented in forms which can be copied by and for family members. Nevertheless, Margaret noted that she still has gaps from the early 1800s concerning her ancestors who came to Michigan to start a Dutch Reformed Church there. She also felt there is more to be written in Volume IV which addresses the last two decades of her life. Elaine said that she would like to write more character
sketches of persons from her past to include in her Volume of family history.

Jerry's genealogical interests are shared with her husband, whom she acknowledged is doing a substantial amount of concrete research at the Louisiana State Archives concerning their family history. Her contribution includes the hundreds of poems and pieces of prose which give added dimensions to the genealogical information. It is Jerry's desire to organize and catalog her writings so that they can be passed on in a more organized fashion to her children.

The writing efforts of the participants are ongoing and, of course, can never be totally complete, as no work of autobiographical poetry or prose can possibly document the complexities and richness of life itself (Olney, 1972). Narrative, by its very nature, must pick and choose which particles of memory to include. A narrative of the past needs must ignore much more than it calls up into the form of the story. Narrative is selective, and in this way is always incomplete and even suggestive of fiction (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).
Mindfulness and literacy. Two of the participants in my study perceived the literacy practices of reading and writing as being associated with mental competence and awareness among their peers and those older than they are. Anecdotal references suggest that there is a correlation between mental acuity and literacy-related endeavors. In Margaret's words: "I do think that reading and writing do something to foster the imagination. Reading and writing encourage the imagination or help to perfect it. I believe that the imagination must work better through reading products of other people's imagination. Although I'm not around people of my age very often, I do notice that people who don't read very much tend to be interested in rather mundane things. Although, to be honest, the people that I choose to be around don't fit that category. All my life I've been with people who've been interested in books and learning, you see." The link between imagination and memory--mindfulness--hinted at here by Margaret is made explicit in the process of narrating the past.
Elaine made the observation: "I've noticed that when people don't read, their minds stop working. It's just not as active if you don't read. Now I've noticed this particularly in old people." Elaine speculated further on the mentally fortifying effects of continued literacy: "Now, I've noticed some people in their eighties that are pretty close in their ages, and it's practically the same thing. Now, I don't know if their minds would have gone anyway and they would have been in their own little worlds regardless of whether they read or not, listened to stories or not, but I can't help but think that keeping the mind active makes a difference."

This connection between mental acuity and literacy practices is substantiated by the work of Meyer, Young, and Bartlett (1989) who studied the relationship between memory and awareness of strategic text structures. This research reveals that there exists a subgroup of elderly adults that remember about as efficiently as young adults. Important characteristics of this subgroup include being frequent readers and attaining extremely high scores on vocabulary tests. Additionally, it was found that
total time spent reading in everyday life correlated with recall performance in the laboratory. It is likely that a commitment to time spent engaging in the literacy activities—reading, writing, and conversation—might be helpful in combatting the forgetfulness and decline in memory that are often reported by the elderly.

An important finding of this study may well be the substantiation of the symbiotic relationship between mindfulness—mental acuity plus imagination and sensory awareness—and literacy practices. This is probably true all through life but my participants felt strongly that the retention and even increase in mental awareness was a major benefit derived from the time they had put into active literacy practices. Writing groups such as the one in which my participants first encountered each other and me serve as a spur to such literacy endeavors and help brighten the consciousnesses of many retired persons.

If learning is a question of connecting the known to the new (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977), then language activities do more than represent our hidden mental world; they actually extend our capacity for such a
mental world. As Elaine straightforwardly stated: "I believe that the more you read and the more you find out, the more you want to know." It seems that literacy practices of the retired actually serve to sharpen the hunger to learn, as well as to inspire creativity, itself, as Kastenbaum (1991) has indicated. Such curiosity and creativity in turn impel the seeking retirees into further literacy practices. The ancient circle of awareness goes on.

**Social dimensions of literacy.** An important further point is that these literacy endeavors do not have to be done entirely in isolation. Aside from the natural gatherings of likeminded readers and writers, special programs and workshops have served over the years to bring such people together in communal writing groups where they can share their efforts and be mutually critiqued (Coberly, McCormick, & Updike, 1984).

The quality of life enhancement that is brought about by the sharing of artistic and literacy-oriented experiences is in sharp contrast to the non-communicative atmosphere of those "sharing" in a television program, as my participants noted time and
again. Altergoot (1988) suggests that the challenge of the future will no doubt center on how the aged will find time to devote their talents and abilities to more productive and meaningful activities than mere absorption in television viewing. To this challenge, literacy educators have much to contribute.

As Coberly, McCormick, and Updike (1984) describe, there are unique opportunities inherent in participating in literacy communities for older persons:

Older adults are potential writers possessed of rich lodes of experience to mine and the leisure and solitude for work. . . . they crave the experience of wrestling with something, making something emerge from their vigorous effort. Why not wrestle with themselves, as they confronted and continue to confront their own lives? Writing class is a place to be heard and enjoyed weekly, a class that capitalizes on a lifetime of fine work as a proper subject for art. Writing allows older adults to continue to enjoy a sense of power and control over their lives, to retain the sense of being the acting agent instead of the acted upon, the constrained, constricted object of other people’s attention or neglect. At a time when many seniors are relegated to the rocking chair, those fortunate enough to be involved in the arts can retain their sense of self. (p. 10)

It may well be this elusive sense of self which is the alpha and omega—both the prime motivator and chief benefit—of lifelong literacy. The self which
writes and which is written of can never become solidified or stagnant in such activities, but must always be alive, open, and in process. It must be social (Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

This openness, this evolution of the self in process, is not only important for the women experiencing these tides of awareness, but also has important social benefits. Open mindedness is also important to the mutual understanding and tolerance of others in the world. Despite varying views on issues, all three women evidenced a tolerance for difference, an embracing of the possibilities of varying viewpoints, a commitment to multiple ways of knowing, and acknowledgement that what might be right for one person is not right for another.

The women in my study were not afraid to take stands on controversial issues, but they showed they were open to discussion. For instance, Jerry was making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the pro-life faction at Operation Rescue’s altercation in Baton Rouge (1992), and Margaret was on the pro-choice picket line as a founding member of NOW, the National Organization for Women. Yet Jerry pointed out how it
would not be right to say it wrong to have an abortion if money, housing, medical assistance, and adoption or support services were not provided. With similar insight into an opposing viewpoint, Margaret made it clear to me that she felt abortion was a terribly sad and tragic thing.

This detente may not be generalizable onto the entire body of lifelong literacy practitioners, but I am intrigued by the notion that wide reading causes people to be more tolerant, more capable of seeing diverse approaches to moral and ethical dilemmas, and has the potential to break down negative ethnocentrism. This dialogic attitude is akin to empathy. Langness and Frank (1981) have said that "it is through the work of writing about lives, our own and the lives of others, we can humanize ourselves" (p. 154).

Literacy may also empower the culturally disenfranchised (Richardson, 1989). Langness and Frank (1981) refer specifically to the medium of writing about the self:

Through this medium, people who exist somehow on the margins of mainstream America and its values have shaped self-images of their own design. Among these, blacks, pacifists, women,
expatriates, homosexuals, artists, political dissidents, and others have described their own feelings, actions, ideas, desires, relationships, aspirations, and efforts to survive—in their own words. . . . Autobiography, at its very core, is a process of self-creation. (p. 93)

These three women have evidenced a personal involvement with lifelong literacy and seem to have experienced the process of transformation of awareness and its accompanying invigoration. Their embracing love of life has been enhanced by their exposure to the multiple realities revealed through diverse texts. They experienced both the pleasures of literacy and its agonies as they strove to transform fleeting memories into narratives. Their self-affirmation has been strong, their self-creations ongoing, and their mental acuity remains clear as the dawn. Furthermore, they continue to develop as social human beings who are willing to speak and to hear the voices of our world.
CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this endeavor was to study the stories of three retired women who have shown a lifelong and continuing commitment to learning and literacy. This project addressed the participants' literacy practices across four major lifespan phases: preformal schooling, formal schooling, homemaking and/or workplace, and retirement, by creating literacy life histories of each participant. To capture their stories, I used a life history approach (Langness & Frank, 1981) as it allowed for addressing the nature and functions of literacy within individual life contexts (Fingeret, 1985; Reder & Green, 1983). Personal narratives which focused on the literacy experiences of the three participants were created.

Limitations

Possible limitations to this research include factors intrinsic to life history methodology, as well as factors relevant to the project itself. First, life history methodology is the result of a delicate and complicated collaborative venture between two
individuals—the researcher and the participant—with their own past experiences, biases, interests, needs, and motives. Stacey (1988) asserts that, although the ethnographic method appears to place informant and researcher in a reciprocal and collaborative journey towards understanding, the research product is ultimately that of the researcher.

The acknowledgement that all research, including ethnography, is an intersubjective process (Crapanzano, 1980; Langness & Frank, 1981; Powdermaker, 1966) makes it clear that bias will be present. Indeed, a kind of reflexivity wherein the researcher allows for this is viewed as being healthy, worthwhile, and ultimately beneficial in the research process (Myerhoff & Simic, 1978). In this study, a personal bias of the researcher might be identified as her own belief in the values of literacy as evidenced by her career choice as a literacy educator and ethnographer.

In addition, certain life phases can only be accessed through the memories and recollections of the participants themselves. Memory is fallible so it may be considered a limitation of life history.
methodology. For example, the preformal schooling phase, especially, was reliant upon the memories of the participants as there were no actual documents or artifacts. Formal schooling phase was similarly revealed only through recollections, with the exception of Jerry whose mother had saved some of her report cards which were made available to me. The workplace and/or homemaking phase, while closer in chronology, is similarly subject to the vicissitudes of memory. It must be acknowledged that the only literacy life phase to which the researcher had direct access was that of the retirement phase, and, thus, this phase is emphasized in greater detail than the other three. Due to the duration of the lifespan and the researcher’s direct access only within the past year and a half, other relevant past information may not have been available.

Given these limitations, the study nevertheless has significance for the field of literacy. First, it addressed lifelong readers, examining their practices across four different life phases within the context of the socio-cultural factors of individual lives. Second, it focused on women, a group functioning in
complex roles but a group long-said to be marginalized in terms of literacy (Benstock, 1988; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Third, the women expressed their own voices through their narratives. As a consequence, the findings revealed important social and historical patterns of women's literacy practices within the 20th century, as well as unique glimpses into individual lives.

Summary of Findings

During a series of extended interviews, both formal and informal, the researcher and the participants interacted in order to probe and reflect upon the participant's experiences with literacy over their lifetimes. As a result, several data sources were produced. These included participant-approved synopses of each interview and interview transcriptions, the researcher's fieldwork journal, and the researcher-generated literacy life histories. A research team including the researcher, a doctoral student whose background includes life history research and a minor in anthropology, and a literacy educator with experience in qualitative research then analyzed the data using constant comparative analysis
(Glaser & Strauss, 1967), triangulating across the data sources and the three researchers.

Certain commonalities and differences emerged among and between the participants' experiences which served to illuminate their literacy practices. Preformal schooling phase findings included the importance of a family oral tradition and a home setting which brought rich language development due to vital links with varied forms of print and significant others who modeled literacy practices. In addition, family members displayed modeling behaviors which were crucial factors in motivating these three women in their own literacy activities. Later, these same behaviors were displayed by these women as mothers and grandmothers as they recreated their own literacy-rich family lives for the next generations.

Formal schooling phase findings included the importance of memorable teachers, ordeals of round-robin reading, and drill and practice. Interestingly, the material with which they were taught and the educational institution, itself, were not viewed as being the major influences in their love of learning. Rather, the personal experiences in the home and
community fueled the participants' curiosity and desire to know more. Of great importance was their own time spent reading as school-aged children apart from assigned school readings. The participants related a particularly intense time of seeking out print and learning which almost became an obsession. The elementary school years seemed to be the actual beginnings of the lifelong avocation of reading. Successful high school experiences supported by the home environment provided a strong background which facilitated post-secondary training for all participants. One participant discovered the joys of creative writing during the high school years.

Homemaker and/or workplace phase findings documented the difficulties of balancing childcare responsibilities with life in the workplace. Parenting and family literacy development, however, seemed to go hand in hand. Nevertheless, there were many constraints on the participants' personal time which put the "life of the mind" in jeopardy (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 107). In the workplace setting, professional camaraderie was an enjoyable social aspect of work, and reading and
writing were integral parts of the jobs. One participant experienced sexual harrassment and discrimination in the traditionally men's field of engineering, while the other participants who held more traditional jobs did not. Employment provided wide circles of interest, stimulation, and social contact which were valued by the participants.

Retirement phase findings included a renewed interest in the family stories which were first heard during the preformal schooling phase as participants documented their genealogical stories. This flourishing of interest in writing for two of the women during this phase resulted from a void produced by the death of a spouse for one and increased time due to retirement for the other. For the third, her lifelong avocation of writing resurfaced in greater intensity. Writing efforts, whether poetry or prose, provided a creative outlet and even seemed to endow their lives with a kind of cohesion as they experienced retrospective awakenings through memories of events and people they had known (Berman, 1991; Chinen, 1991). In addition, the participants' writing efforts were viewed as being a vital historical and
personal legacy for future generations. Writing groups provided valuable social contacts and intellectual stimulation during this time and suggested the possible therapeutic value of literacy activities.

**Implications**

The study has many implications for literacy educators. Among them is the indication that homes are the child's first and most influential school. Efforts must continue to promote involvement of parents and significant others in children's literacy development before the formal schooling phase begins, as suggested by Heath (1991), Trelease (1989) and others. Schools must provide for all children the vital motivators of listening to literature being read aloud and participating in the functional aspects of literacy which my participants were fortunate enough to experience at home. Time should be allocated for personal reading during the school day in order to promote fluency and personal experiences with books as many children will not read at home.

The virtual experience of reading broadens one's mental horizons and plants the seeds of curiosity. To
this end, it is urged that school and public libraries seek to stock their shelves with a wide variety of books to which children and all seekers have immediate and unimpeded access. The greater diversity of human experience revealed through literature, the greater tolerance and compassion the reader may feel for those whose lives have exhibited diverse values and ways of knowing.

Women, themselves, may represent a less culturally sanctioned way of knowing than that exhibited by men, as has been indicated by Witherell and Noddings (1991), and Estes (1992). Throughout their lives, women may need special support services such as childcare and financial aid as they seek higher education and the right to pursue meaningful careers. Though my participants expressed great satisfaction with the majority of their family lives, they may have missed professional opportunities due to the time and energy demands of homemaking.

During retirement, there was a renewed interest in reading and writing for pleasure due to more time available. The quality of life enhancement that is brought about by sharing literacy-oriented experiences
suggests that the challenge of the future will no
doubt center on how the aged will find time to devote
their talents and abilities to benefit each other as a
community and, of course, the community at large. It
is worth repeating that a very important conclusion of
this study is the substantiation of the symbiotic
relationship between mental acuity—mindfulness—and
literacy practices.

Writing during the retirement years brought to
light the interior landscape of the participants,
providing a sense of power and control and a feeling
of being the acting agent instead of the acted upon.
It may be this elusive sense of self—of having one’s
memories intact and knowing who one is—which is both
the prime motivator and chief benefit of lifelong
literacy. Programs which support literacy activities
for the elderly should be encouraged, as the self
which writes and which is written of can never become
solidified or stagnant, but alive, open, and in
process. This state of active receptivity seems to be
related to creating a kind of open-mindedness. This
powerful emotional connection between self and world
may well be dependent on literacy awareness. As such,
it remains important to the mutual understanding and embracing of others in the world.

**Future Research Recommendations**

Future research might include using life history methodology in order to address populations different from that in this project. I chose my participants from a particular pool based on several specific criteria, one of which was their availability and interest in lifelong literacy. Furthermore, they were picked from my class of senior lifewriters and voluntarily took part in this project. It can be seen that with such criteria to meet, my participants were from a relatively narrow cross-section of the broader culture. Some grew up with greater family affluence and education than others, but all the participants had the definite opportunity for education, careers, and lifelong literacy.

It must be acknowledged that these women are not representative of the population at large nor are they purported to be. They represent a specifically chosen sample of retirees who actively pursue literacy to the extent that they join Lifewriting for Seniors classes.
Working with such accomplished persons was one of the thrusts of this study.

Other population samples to be studied could include so-called illiterates and aliterates. Such narratives could provide vital insights for literacy educators as to the circumstances and environments which contributed to their disenfranchisement from the joys of reading and writing. At what point can we say an aliterate developed his or her dislike for reading? Why do some people break into a cold sweat at the mere thought of having to inscribe any written message?

For instance, there are persons who might have to wait for hours in, say, a doctor’s or dentist’s office, but would not pick up a magazine to read despite a colorful and wide selection to choose from. Why? Or, for instance, what motivates a person who had never enjoyed reading for pleasure suddenly at the age of 40 get a GED and begin an academic career culminating in a PhD in English? The conundrums for literacy ethnographers invite exploration.

Other populations which have valuable information to share with literacy educators and ethnographic
researchers include ethnic, religious, or economic minorities, and non-traditional family systems. Some of the above provide literacy-rich environments despite the pressures of uniqueness or isolation from the mainstream and others do not. Both sides of this literacy coin are worthy of further study by literacy ethnographers.

Additionally, more studies are needed into what people choose to read and write and why, thus addressing the therapeutic potentials of literacy education in people's lives. As persons experience challenges and crises, how can reading and writing offer support, encouragement, and even hope? As vital links with other minds, other hearts, how can literacy practices alleviate the aloneness that sometimes characterizes the human condition? We have only begun to explore the potential of bibliotherapy to inspire and perhaps even to heal the wounded soul.

The stories individual lives tell have many implications. Of utmost importance to educators is their ability to aid in determining those practices within the school systems and individual classrooms which I term pediagenic, that is, those pedagogical
practices which serve to damage the desire to learn within the classroom setting. This term is the educational parallel of its medical equivalent, *iatrogenic*, as in those maladies which are created by or confounded by the medical treatment itself. When such pediagenic practices are isolated through a comparison of several literacy ethnographies, action may be taken to transform them into pedagogic activities. Such transformation may result in both in a greater degree of self-knowledge for the students and in a more humane classroom which is respectful of the unique life narratives of each person.

Finally, it is important that we not lose sight of the big picture in literacy research. Several questions present themselves which, though important, are outside the scope of this study. Has humankind changed as a result of its contact with an expanded print media and is changing even more as it finds itself absorbed into the electronic media? Can virtual experience through literacy and its right applications serve to humanize a world in great need of moral and spiritual succor? Have some practices and processes indicated their value in counteracting
the malaise and anomie which some say characterize the age we live in? What aspects of lifestyle and communication networks serve to break down isolation and develop meaningful patterns of living and learning? These are but a few of the questions that future literacy ethnographers could deal with as they chart the course of lives and the interaction of such lives with the causes, practices, and results of literacy.
REFERENCES


258


Mary Annette Duchemin grew up in the Heartland of America, in Iowa, where she fell in love with horses and books. She moved up into the Rockies to do a Bachelor of Arts in English (with a minor in secondary education) at Colorado University in Boulder, Colorado. After graduating in the Honor Society of Phi Beta Kappa, she came down from the mountains to the sea and taught middle and high school in Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas for seven years. She returned once again to the Rockies, and, after other adventures, found herself a Graduate Assistant at Louisiana State University from where she received a Master of Arts in reading education from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in 1990. She has been an Instructor in the College of Education since then and continues her interests in anthropology, spirituality, and literacy-related pursuits—such as bibliotherapy and creative writing workshops. Among her credos is the Cheyenne saying: "A nation is not destroyed until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is over, not matter how many warriors, or how many horses."
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate:  Mary Annette Duchein

Major Field:  Education

Title of Dissertation:  Women's Stories of Reading and Writing: Three Literacy Life Histories

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:  May 14, 1993