

# Remembering Evergreen - Memories Letters

## Louis Matthews, Jr. July 2, 2007

I was born on May 19, 1928, the sixth of ten children of Louis Matthews, Sr. and Ezida Francois. The oldest child, Wilson, died in 1918 during a big flu epidemic. In 1934, the girl of a set of twins was stillborn. My parents raised eight of their children and seven orphans. My father was also raised as an orphan; therefore, he was never able to refuse anyone in need.

We were raised on the Enterprise Plantation until it was sold in 1942. There were a great number of families living on a four mile stretch on both sides of the bayou. The neighborhood was racially mixed. Everyone was very poor, but we were happy. During the month of May, the Catholic neighbors gathered at a different family's home each evening to recite the rosary. On Christmas Eve, everyone would get into a wagon to attend midnight Mass in Evergreen. The oldest child was responsible for remaining home to keep the fireplace and the gumbo going, so that when the rest of the family returned at around 3:00 A.M., there was a warm house and food for them.

We worked very hard as sharecroppers for only half of the profit, which made our portion very minimal. Due to the necessity of my help on the farm, the extent of my formal education at the Evergreen School was only until the fourth grade. By the time I was 12 years old, I went to work with E. E. Rabalais & Son cleaning bricks to build an addition to St. Anthony's Catholic School. After a lot of hard work, Curtis Deaville and Joe Bordelon offered to work with them as their helper and eventually taught me how to lay bricks. I was making 30 cents per hour as opposed to 25 cents per day on the farm. I worked as a brick mason for 60 years.

For quite a while, I would see this young girl skating on the school yard, but I didn't know who she was. It wasn't until I was 19 years old that a friend, Odessa Roy, introduced us to one another. Her name was Verlie Galland and she was 12 years old. We remained friends for several years, but never dated during that time. In December, 1952, after serving two years in the army during the Korean War, we got married. We had four children: Ricky in July 1954, C.J. in August 1957, Stephen in June 1960, and Sheryl in October 1962. In 1957 we reluctantly moved to New Orleans out of necessity for job opportunities and remained there until 1962. We returned to Evergreen where I continue to live today. My wife recently passed away, in May 2007. She was the first child baptized in the Evergreen Catholic Church after the first resident priest came in 1934.

Additional memories of Louis Matthews Jr. May 19, 2008

Ed. I am writing about myself and my friends, Allan Marcotte, Walter Scallan, Merson Ducote, Elvin Ducote. Elvin was the oldest, so he ruled the bunch. We would take a shortcut through Mr. Alex St.Romain's field to go to Walter Scallan's place and in this field he had a nice watermelon patch, and every time we would go through the field, Elvin, would go thump the watermelon on the edge of the field to see if it was ripe, he would say no, it is not quite ripe, but it will be ripe soon. One day coming back from Walter's house, he thumped a watermelon and he said it was ripe so we pulled it out, then up popped Mr. St.Romain and he said, oh you picked my watermelon that i was saving for my family, he told us the melon was not ripe yet, so he got his his knife out and cut

the watermelon in two and sure enough it was green, he said sit down and eat that watermelon. Being the friends that we were, we all pitched in and help him eat it. We ate every bite of that green watermelon, it is funny we did not get sick. Mr. St.Romain, said this is not all your punishment, now i am gone tell your daddy what you did, and when Elvin got home his father was waiting for him with a razor strap and did he get a whipping.

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When you got a whipping with a razor strap you knew you had been whipped.

Some of my other friends were Lou, Dean, Johnny and Ervin Green. One day we were playing in the yard with my sisters, Ethel and Mattie, and my father had gone bird hunting with his b.b. gun. He was on his way home, so I ran to meet him to bring the b.b. gun home.

Maddie and Ethel each grabbed Dean and Lou and held them in front of them and yelled "Free Shot", so I raised the b.b. gun and shot. I missed Dean and Lou, but I hit Ethel in the side. Jack, one of the young boys who was living at home told Ethel pick up your blouse and let me see, he said it's not bad I see the bb's under the skin and I can take it out for you. He got out his pocket knife, opened it and stuck it under the bb and pushed and the bb popped out and it did not even bleed.

Today there would be a hospital stay and a 20,000.00 surgery fee, not to mention the medicine she would have to take for infection.

Louis Matthews, Jr.

### **Additional memories of Louis Matthews, Jr. June 9th 2008**

Ed, I never told you just how poor we really were, so this is what this letter is all about.

When I was growing up we didn't have a milk cow, so we never had milk to drink, my mother would make couche-couche. She would warm a little bit of water and put a little bit of sugar in the water and that is what we would use in our couche-couche instead of milk. We called it, "sweet water". Thank God for couche-couche and sweet water. That is what got me where I am today.

I did not eat vegetables, although we had plenty of vegetables. On Sunday's my mother would kill a big yard hen and make a fricasse. At that time the adults ate first and the children ate last. Being the youngest child I was always last to eat. So my turn at the chicken meat was a foot, leg and wing tip. I would suck the leg and wing tip bone dry until there was nothing left. I guess that is how the saying, "bone dry" got started.

In fact I did not know that a chicken had a breast, thigh or full wing until I got married.

I have to close for now Ed, there is more I would like to say about living on the plantation, but I dare not talk.

Louis Matthews, Jr.

### **Additional Memories of Louis Matthews, Jr. May 22, 2010**

#### **The Survival of the Church of the Little Flower in Evergreen**

The church was built in 1927. When the Depression started in 1928, the church was still being built. People were very poor, and nobody had any money. When you visited the church, you had to put one dime in the collection basket for each person. The people who could afford it paid for a whole pew. Only they could sit there, nobody else could sit in that pew but the people who had paid for it. Everyone else had to stand. In the early- to mid-thirties, our priest was Father Dube. He was a very good, hard-working priest. In the fall of the year when people were harvesting crops, he would go around to the farmers and beg for a sack of cotton from each farmer to make money for the church. One day Father Dube came to our farm when we had just picked our first sack for the afternoon. All of the kids were under the wagon trying to cool off in the shade because it was very hot. My mother was fanning my father because he had a disease and he

couldn't breathe. Father Dube asked for a sack of cotton, and my father said he could surely have a sack of cotton. Then Father Dube asked if he could have another sack of cotton, and my father told him that he would gladly give him another sack if he could, but he didn't have one. He said his children were resting and his wife was fanning him, and he couldn't ask them to pick cotton when they needed to rest. But he told Father Dube if he'd like to put a sack around his neck and go pick it himself, he was welcome to. And Father did. And that's how Father Dube got money. He built a pen in the back of his truck, and he would take whatever people could give him. If you could give a pig, a goat, a duck, sheep, chickens, eggs or anything, he'd take it. And that's how the church survived.

Written by Lucy Matthews

From Junior Matthews

# Remembering Evergreen - Memories Letters

## Debbie Riche Molan - November 20, 2006

Yes, Ed, life is good. Cotton always brings thoughts of Daddy to my mind. How well I remember being in his feet during cotton picking time because we loved to “jump” in the cotton in the trailers after the “machines” had dumped it. And, looking a little farther back, I can remember he and Uncle Ray leaving in the wee hours of the morning to go to Opelousas to pick up “cotton pickers”, men and women both, who would be transported back to the bayou to pick cotton all day long. I don’t know how much they were paid, but I’m sure it was only a pittance for the very hard work they did all day long.

I also remember the lint from the cotton all over our little pants and shirts that Mama made us brush off before we came into the house. Oh, what wonderful days those were and those memories surely tug at my heart strings and bring a tear to my eye for missing those who are no longer with us. I suppose today of all days, the eve of All Saints Day, is a proper day to remember a sweet time and the wonderful family God shared with us for a while before taking them home to be with Him.

This time of the year also stirs up wonderful memories of waking up to the sound of a squealing hog as it was butchered on cold winter mornings and our pleading with Daddy to let us miss school to stay home for the enjoyment of being with family as they worked side by side to prepare the meat for the winter months. On rare occasions, he would let us miss school, but more often than not, he made us get on the bus and go on to school, only to come home that afternoon and find that he had cooked the tenderloin (stuck on a stick on the edge of the fire where the cracklins were cooking) and had carefully wrapped it in aluminum foil and kept it for us to eat after school. I want to always remember the smells and atmosphere of those days. God Bless You! Debbie

## Additional memories by Debbie May 9, 2007

I recall a more simple time in life, one in which I grew up – the 50s. Looking back, winters seem to have been harsher than today, but the warmth of immediate and extended family was nearer. I recall cold, rainy days when Daddy would get us all into his truck and park at the end of the driveway to wait for the school bus in the morning so that we would not get chilled or wet. Mama was left to clean up after a breakfast of bacon sandwiches that we all loved.

Springtime offered the aroma of freshly cut grass laden with lots of clover from which we made clover bracelets and necklaces. Not to be outdone in particular earthly fragrances was the pungent, newly plowed fields, just awaiting little bare feet to sink toes and heels into the finely ground soil, still cool from the winter.

Summer days seemed to just slowly pace themselves, sort of like watching a movie in slow motion. One of my favorite things to do on those lazy summer days was to carry an old quilt outside, lay on my back and look up for special clouds that formed shapes of a variety of animals and sometimes even people.

Autumn days brought the eagerness of harvesting crops nurtured for months by the capable hands of my farmer daddy and our backyard carpeted with pecans from the many pecan trees that provided not only their fruit, but cool shade. After the crops were in, boucheries were anticipated by the families in the neighborhood, when all could gather, celebrate the harvest’s end, and enjoy the bounty of the delicious meals provided by the not-so-willing swine.

The four seasons brought about different food groups, too, unlike the norm for the cooks

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of today. Winter food that comes to mind is another “aroma reminder”. I don’t think anything made me feel the warmth and security of home more than cold, rainy, wintry days when I jumped off the school bus as it arrived at my home, feeling chilled to the bone, and racing to the comfort of indoors, but not before inhaling the delightful molasses enhanced cloud that drifted from Mom’s kitchen – homemade gingerbread! In no time at all, my three younger siblings and I were warming up to the hot, fluffy pieces of gingerbread Mama had so thoughtfully taken time to prepare.

Springs bring to mind the rows of Irish potatoes growing and growing – soon to be dug up, washed, scraped, and cooked with a mess of fresh green beans and bacon.

Summer days, mostly Saturdays, yielded Mama’s crusty fried chicken, fried outdoors, of course. And, it wasn’t a “funeral home” chicken as Daddy described a store-bought chicken, but one he raised, killed, dressed and put on the table for his family. I also have such fond memories of sitting under an old mulberry tree in our backyard with Mama and MaMa (my maternal grandmother) and peeling and slicing fresh peaches to be canned for the winter days ahead.

The first north wind in Autumn was welcomed with a chicken and sausage gumbo, started of course with a homemade roux made by rendering the fat from the chicken. No Savoie’s in our house! The four of us loved to “doctor” up our bowls of steaming gumbo with hot pepper vinegar, which was a staple on our table, and many times used so much of it that the gumbo looked rather white. We also loved dill pickles and I really liked to chop mine up and add it to my gumbo. I remember to this day the first time my maternal grandmother told me at a boucherie that I was old enough now to help make the “blood” boudin. I thought it was a great idea and a rite of passage into adulthood that I would be included in this laborious task,. I quickly had a change of heart as the cold wind and the foul smells emitted from the pig’s intestines attacked my sensitive (and rather spoiled) 16 year old person. I also remember being teased and picked on quite a bit by the adult women, all in fun and in a spirit of family and unity.

**Debbie Riche' Molan**

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**PATSY ROY MORAS 2007**

## **MEMORIES OF EVERGREEN, LOUISIANA**

I have very fond memories of this quaint little town during my elementary school days. I remember riding Mr. Bud Dufour's bus. There was Mrs. Celestine Descant's house on the right and Mr. Clay Wright and Mrs. Margie's house on the left. Mrs. Descant and her whole family were close friends of my mother's. "Tant Chen", as we called Mrs. Descant, made the best homemade bread. She loved to treat us with her bread and fresh coffee in the afternoons. Riding the bus, I thought many times how I would like to live in this little town. There were so many fine people living here; the Descants which were a large family, the Wrights, the Heimans, the Carmouches, the Lenas, the Pearces, the Terrys, the Riche's, the Tassins, the Gallands, to name a few of the families I know.

In the fall of 1953, I began first grade at Evergreen High School with Mr. A. J. Smith as principal. The school was a two story building with high ceilings and wooden floors. We had no air conditioners but there were large windows where the teacher could pull down the top windows and raise the bottom window up. We had good ventilation. We talk about this quite a bit now because children complain today and they have air conditioned rooms. Mr. Holston was the janitor. During the winter he went early in the morning to get the boiler system started so we could have steam to warm the rooms.

Mrs. Barbara Wright was my first grade teacher. Our class was the first class she taught. She was so energetic. I can see her smile and her sparkling eyes. Mrs. Barbara taught baton after school. We participated in the parish fair parades and the local Christmas parades. Our uniform consisted of a green vest and shorts with a white shirt and white majorette boots. In May, Mrs. Wright always gave an end of the school year party at her lovely home. The long drive would be decorated with balloons and we had plenty of food. Billie, Burns, and Virginia would invite all their friends and classmates.

Miss Lena Haydel was my second grade teacher. She was very helpful with making us pronounce our letters correctly.

Miss Sue Goudeau taught us the multiplication tables in the third grade.

During the fourth grade, Mrs. Oma Tassin had to put up with us bad girls. For some reason, the girls had two groups and we would get in trouble at recess. Many times we had to stay in and write lines.

Miss Betty Ducote, now Mrs. Betty Coco, was our fifth grade teacher. I remember having to memorize all the state capitols.

The class started misbehaving again in the sixth grade. Miss Beatrice Scarbrough was our teacher. The boys played jokes on Miss Scarbrough and the girls would notice the boys. We had boys on our minds.

Mr. John Johnson, in the seventh grade, made us memorize poems and write lines for punishment.

Mr. Nelson Tassin was my eighth grade teacher. He kept our minds on our work with his yardstick. When he was teaching or during a test, he would walk down the aisles pushing his yardstick ahead of him. If we were not paying attention, he would slap our desk with

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the yardstick. Before our 8 grade graduation, we took a trip to Baton Rouge to the Old State Capitol and the present one.

The above are really good memories of my teachers. These teachers were superb. They really cared for us and wanted us to succeed in life. It has always been a great feeling to see them after I finished eighth grade in Evergreen and then went on to Bunkie High.

I think I was in the fifth grade when the school burned. We, the students, were very upset. I remember taking a picture of the burned school. The only thing left standing was the front steps. The students were placed in the gym, the church education buildings and every place where classes could be held. Everyone in the community helped.

We completed our year in the Bayou Rouge Baptist Church education building. It was decided that Evergreen would have only an elementary school. The new school was built and I think Mr. Marvin Tanner became principal.

In 1980 - 1986, I worked as a Teachers Aide at Evergreen Elementary School. Mr. Keith Morrow was the principal. The school had changed, but it was still a good community school. The old high school gym is still being used by a local business.

My family has a long history with the Evergreen schools. My father, Elie Roy, my mother, Victoria Lacombe Roy, myself, Patsy Roy Moras, my sons, Ralph Moras, Jr., and Rodney Moras have all attended Evergreen High School or Evergreen Elementary School.

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## HOW I REMEMBER EVERGREEN BY OLLIE BORDELON REDMON 2007

I was five years old when I started school in Evergreen. My first grade teacher was Miss Ormsby, a very good teacher, but also very strict. After living in the country for five years, this small town was so new to me. We had several grocery stores and one fish market. Later on we had our church built. There were also a few churches. Evergreen was a small town, but so clean. As I grew up, I made many friends.

There were two cotton gins and my dad operated one. The railroad would pass by my house and many times there were some hobos sleeping in the empty cars. To me that was very scary.

There was one Catholic priest and a few protestant ministers. I don't want to forget our doctors, Dr. Henry Buck, who was my doctor. Then there was Dr. W. A. Quirk. I remember when I was three years old I suffered pneumonia and Dr. Buck saved my life.

There is so much I could talk about, but I will have to cut it short.

I still love my old town of Evergreen, and I still remember every thing about it.

Ollie Bordelon Redmon

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## CRAIG RICHE' JULY 2007

During my 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade years at Evergreen Elementary, we really experienced some wild things. along with clean fun and pranks. One of my memories was when I stuck some bubblegum in Mr. Hatley's trumpet. I removed the mouthpiece then stuck the gum in the horn and put the mouthpiece back. When he got up in front of the class, he blew and when he did his cheeks swole up like a chipmunk and he got really red. I later confessed and he naturally told our principal, Mr. Tanner, and then you all know the rest of the story.

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Memories of the Elmer James "Boulet" or "Bullet" Riche' Grocery Stores by Larry Jude "Pete" Riche'

The first store that we owned was purchased from Mr. Walter Dugas in October, 1948 and was located facing main street and on the left side of the bridge/road going to Rabbit Lane. Mr. Ford Robert's store was on the right side of the bridge/road. Across main street was the Post Office and Robert Tanner's store.

Other than regular groceries, sales consisted of 50# sacks of potatoes, rice, flour, and corn, 25# cans of lard was also a big seller. Some of our customers had credit which was paid once a year after their crops were harvested.

Some of the tobacco products were the roll-your-own named Bugler, Bull Durham, Prince Albert in the can (let me out, please), Target and Kite. You needed a book of papers to roll the cigarettes. The package cigarettes were Camels, Viceroy, Lucky Strikes, Kools, Winston's - to name a few. You could buy 2 cigarettes for 5 cents or a pack for 25 cents.

In the meat department, round steak and ground meat were the most popular cuts. You could get hand sliced lunch meat, bologna, ham, and hoop cheese. Smoked sausage was sold in bulk. Don't forget the salt meat and the slab bacon.

The POP'S of the day were the Nehi BELLY-Washers (grape, strawberry, orange) RC Cola, Nesbitt Orange, Squirt, and Coca-Cola which came in returnable bottles (1cent a bottle). A contest was held to see which coke bottle was distributed the farthest distance by city and state (ex. Seattle, Washington) from Evergreen. I remember the bottles of pop were cooled in a water circulating enclosed pop box which would smell of rust and well water.

On the counter sat clear Jack's cookies tubs which you reached into to get moon cakes and red coconut balls. Remember the taste of moon pies, stage blanks, ginger *bread snaps*, *Ms. Tuckers pecan pies*, *honey buns* and *lemon squares*? *All types of candies were available, Milky Ways, Mounds, Snickers, jaw breakers, and kits.*

*Loaves of bread were left in bread boxes in the front of the store before the store opened. You did not have to worry about any one stealing in those days!*

I remember the coal oil tank in the front of the store. If a customer needed coal oil you would go out and pump the fuel into a container which would always spay out on to your clothes and the smell would last all day.

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Remember the years of the slot machines, aka, one-armed bandits? Every store had one or two machines. We had an older player who was a little shaky and I would put his coins in the slot machines and he would pull the handle. What a team! I was 7 years old and he was 70. Graven berg, with the Louisiana State Police broke up the Louisiana slot machine industry around 1954.

Another fond memory was when a politician came into town doing a stump speech. When Earl K Long chose our store, he gave daddy \$5 for the cost of electricity and passed out nickels to the kids to buy pops. I remember when Dudley Le Blanc came into town and sold us ten cases (240 bottles of HADACOL) which would have lasted us for ten years!

Do you remember the contracted field hands (picking or hoeing cotton) coming out of the fields to buy their lunches which consisted of bread, lunch meat, bologna, potted meat, sardines, moon cakes, crackers and a big belly washer?

Some of the school children would leave school at recess or at lunch time, walking on the well-worn path and head to the stores to buy treats. The older ones might sneak in a quick cigarette!

On a rainy September night in 1959, a speeding car hit the gas pumps, starting a fire which burned the front of the store. Mr. Willis Rachal (Town Marshal) purchased the store and operated it as Rachal's Grocery. We purchased an old dance hall in Plaucheville, which we moved to the front of the house on Hill Street (across from the park) and operated it until 1970. Later on T- Robson opened it as Robson's grocery and it is still in operation in the year 2009. It is the only grocery store operating in Evergreen today.

Thank you for allowing me to share my memories with the Evergreen Pelicans!

Submitted August 19, 2009

Pete Riche'

EES Class of 1959 and BHS Class of 1963

More of Pete's Memories - Submitted August 20, 2009

Momma's full name was Ollie Rabalais Riche'. The children would call her "Ms. Boulet" if she was with daddy on the school bus. In the store, everyone would call her "Ms. Ollie".

Daddy's name was Elmer James Riche', but was always called "Mr. Boulet or Bullet". It seem that if he was driving the bus (because he would drive a little fast) he would be called "Bullet." In the store he was called "Boulet" by children and adults.

Thank you for the hard work and time that you and the staff contribute to make this such a memorable web site. I want to help in anyway that I can.

Pete Riche'

EES Class of 1959 and BHS Class of 1963



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## **JULIENNE DUCOTE SPENCER** (daughter of Raymond & Amanda Ducote) **AUGUST 16, 2007**

I am the wife of Tracy Spencer, also of Evergreen, and we have two children; William Joseph Spencer, married to Rebecca Jeansonne, and Andre Spencer Spruill married to William Spruill. William and Rebecca have two children, Austin (age 3) and Caroline (age 2). Andre and William have one daughter, Breann (age 3).

We live in Evergreen. I am retired from the Postal Service and Tracy works in Operations for the Cottonport Bank. We are both 56 years old.

I remember the teachers at Evergreen Elementary as all being caring about us. Our parents knew them and they knew us more than a student, but as a child willing to learn. Miss Sue always was in charge of games outside and she joined in. I remember the last day of school and the party given by Mrs. Wright that was so much fun.

I remember the recesses we had playing jump rope where the buses would come in by the lunch room and playing jacks on the hall floor, going to singing classes weekly, going to PE with Mr. Johnson and Mr. Tassin, who both would get so excited to see who would win.

I remember Mr. Ivy Holston, the janitor. Even when you forgot something at school, he would gladly go open the door for you and let you get what you had forgotten without fussing. He was always joking and smiling.

I remember the Christmas plays in which we all took part. The poor teachers spent so much time on this. As my children got into elementary school, the plays were still going on, but I was to watch and not perform.

I remember the Magnolia Leaf. Mrs. Betty would type it and we would wonder whose essay, short story or poem would be in it.

Living in Evergreen was a great part of my life. We played outdoors with the neighbors and we were always at one of their houses.

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# Remembering Evergreen - Memories Letters

## Bert St. Romain Evergreen Memories - February 13, 2010

Ed, thank you for bringing up Ernest Galland's name. Here is a memory story for you.

Sometime between 1955 and 1960 I was with Raytheon Company. I was making a business call on Dow Chemical Co in Freeport, TX. I was staying at the Dow Inn, a beautiful hotel owned by Dow. I was in my room scanning the telephone directory and I just happened to open the page to Galland, Ernest. I called the number and, lo and behold, it was indeed my old friend from Evergreen.

Ernest came right over and we spent an hour or so talking. Since I received your letter, I searched my memory and tried to put together what I remember from almost 60 years in the past. Ernest told me about his family and about his job. One thing I do remember is that he told me that his job was involved with Ethylene Glycol.

Next time you see Ernest, ask him if he remembers our visit and if I am correct in my recollection of our short meeting of almost 60 years ago. Ernest and Dicken Bordelon, Jr. were close friends after both of them were discharged from the Navy after WWII. I knew them both very well.

Keep well, Ed, and thanks for making it possible for so many of us "old timers" to be able to reach out and grab a little piece of "days gone by", if only to make us feel special again.

Pax, Bert

**Pelican Footnote:** Bert St. Romain was a member of the EHS class of 1946.

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