

Then
and
Now
The Frankfort Avenue-Clifton Experience
from
1933 to 1994

by
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I can only speak for myself. But since I retired I am more conscious of time than when I was younger. Mainly, I suppose, because time is running out on me. As the old saying goes, I feel that I am living on borrowed time.

So I thought it might be a good idea to write something about my past life while I was still in pretty good physical condition and--I hope--as mentally alert as I have ever been. Of course, this might not be saying a great deal.

Also, I have a slight advantage in writing, I suppose, because I am a retired English teacher. However there is an old saying, "Those who can do. Those who can't teach." When I was much younger, I wanted to be a writer... sort of like John Steinbeck or Ernest Hemingway. And I tried writing short stories and a novel. But I had one main problem: a lack of talent.

At any rate, I ended up being an English teacher, which, I guess, was the second best thing. At least it was related to writing and literature. Moreover, it gave me an excuse for not writing an act that was very painful for me. I could always say, "If I didn't have to grade those damn compositions I could write a story."

But at last I no longer have compositions to grade, and I have ample time on my hands; I no longer have an excuse. So I thought I might try once more to write a "story." But about what?

During the early summer of 1994 an idea came to my mind that my life's experience was a bit unusual. I still live within easy walking distance of the same neighborhood in which I grew up. I thought it might be a good idea as a kind of mental exercise to try to remember what things were like when I was a boy. Then write a comparison of--mainly--what things look like today ... about sixty years later.

The neighborhood in which I grew up in Louisville is called Clifton. It was (and still is) an average working class vicinity in the east end of the city. This crudely drawn map will give you a general idea of the area it covers.

My "story" traverses a small part of that terrain, a stretch of Frankfort Avenue from Vernon to Ewing Avenue, the eastern boundary of Clifton.

From 1933 until 1961 I lived on the south side of Frankfort Avenue just a few steps east of Clifton Avenue. For many years, from 1933 to 1947, my mother ran a restaurant directly across the street from where we lived.

I remember most vividly the late summer of 1933 when we (my mother, sister, brother, and I) moved from our comfortable red brick home in the west end of the city. We moved into an older two-story wooden house badly in need of repairs (especially paint) on Frankfort Avenue. The fact that I didn't mention my father is relevant to our making the move. But it is too complicated--and painful--to explain at this time.

The year 1933 is important in the history of the United States. Besides being the year when I turned ten, it was a year when we were in the depths of an Economic Depression that lasted most of the decade. I suppose most people didn't realize just how poor they were -- since most other people were just as poor. But looking back, I would dare say that people today living on welfare are relatively better off than most people then.

Also, I might mention that it was the first year that Franklin D. Roosevelt took office. He was elected in November of 1932 but didn't take office until March of that year. And of no less importance -- for many people -- it was the year that Prohibition was repealed.

Unless you are of my generation you may have little or no idea of what I mean by Prohibition. It was a federal law that made illegal the selling of all types of alcoholic beverages, such as beer, gin, rum, whiskey, and wine. The law was the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It went into effect in January 1920. For a number of reasons, the 18th Amendment was repealed in December of 1933 by the 21st Amendment. After that date it was once again legal under certain conditions to make and sell alcoholic beverages.

This change in the law had an impact on many people in a number of ways. For instance, my mother was able to get a license to sell beer, which increased our business. Also, at the time, it may have made me at age ten the youngest bartender in the city of Louisville.

Moreover, the repeal of Prohibition -- as I look back on it now--had a special impact on the Clifton neighborhood. For National Distillers -- one of the largest distilling companies in the world -- had their main bottling plant at Payne Street and Lexington Road. This was only a block or so from what is now considered the western boundary of the Clifton locality.

Many people who lived in Clifton were employed at that facility. So they had a better income than many people who were unable to find a decent paying job.

As a matter of fact, when I graduated from high school in 1941 (another important year in the history of the U.S.) I went to work for National Distillers as a messenger. I worked out of the main office in the Shivley area of the city. My job required me to drive all over Louisville. And

each day I made at least two trips to the Payne Street bottling plant and became well acquainted with many of the people who worked there.

But in a more physical way, how has the stretch of Frankfort Avenue where I grew up changed during the past sixty years? Perhaps the best way to answer this question may be to start a couple blocks west of Clifton Avenue (around Vernon) and work my way up Frankfort Avenue to Ewing. This is the eastern boundary of the Clifton neighborhood. I will try to remember how things were when I was a boy and how they are in the early fall of 1994.

I wonder how things will look sixty years into the future? I imagine they will look a lot different than they do today.

When we first moved into the neighborhood, Gohmann's Drug Store was located at 2031 Frankfort Avenue, on the north side of the street several doors west of Vernon. Some years later it moved to the north west corner of Vernon where the Bobbie Soxers Restaurant is now located.

In the building that first housed Gohmann's Drug Store is now the sculpturing studio of Barney Bright. This came as a surprise to me. For there is no sign on the front of the building, and the front windows are covered, making it impossible to see inside. I assumed that the building was empty. However, just for the heck of it, I tried the door. And lo and behold -- it opened.

Inside I found a fascinating sculpturing studio with several small and large works of art in progress. Moreover, I had the good fortune to meet the artist himself, Barney Bright. In case you don't know, he is a highly regarded member of the artistic community, in this country and abroad.

Mr. Bright has been at this same location since 1953. It was indeed an honor and a pleasure to meet such a distinguished yet down to earth gentleman.

On the first floor of the same building where Gohmann's Drug Store was located for so many years that is now the Bobbie Soxers Restaurant, Dr. Ray Moore had his medical office. He was our neighborhood family doctor.

I remember him as a kind, patient, soft-spoken man. He was very well liked. He even wrote me a letter when I was in the Navy during the Second World. He remained at that same place until 1983 when Dr. Frank Harrell took over his practice. Dr. Moore passed away a year or so later. He was in my mind the best and the greatest that the old neighborhood ever produced.

Dr. Harrell was there until 1990 when he moved to his present medical offices at 1170 E. Broadway. (His longtime assistant and nurse, Susan, furnished me with these facts.)

On the other side of Frankfort Avenue (the south side) directly across the street from Barney Bright's art studio is Henderson & Sons Antiques. Going back to 1933,, the Haeseley Novelty Company was in that same building. Shortly after Prohibition was repealed in that same year, it became Haeseley's Cafe, which for many years was one of the favorite "watering holes" in the east end of Louisville.

Next door to Haeseley's, moving east toward the railroad crossings was a two-story residence, the home of the Liebert family. It is now a place of business: Pottery Rowe --Stoneware and Fine Craft.

Nearby, we come to a one-story red brick building divided into three stores as it was in 1933. Then the first store was occupied by the Mary Rose Sweet Shop. The second I do not recall. But the third store was a branch of the Moon Cleaners that was there for many years as I was growing up in the neighborhood.

Now there are three places of business in the same building that I will list in the same order: Elizabeth's Timeless Attire; Margie's Place -- Beauty Shop, and By Design -- a graphic arts business specializing in Typesetting Layout/Design and Printing.

Still moving east toward the railroad crossing, when I was a boy and until recent years, a Gulf gasoline station occupied the narrow stretch of land on that side of the street almost to the railroad crossing. Now the Bayer and Dreisbach Body Shop is located there.

Crossing the street, on the north east corner of Frankfort and Vernon is a large, one-story structure that is now unoccupied. I first remember this building as an A. and P. grocery store, at that time the largest organization of such stores in the United States. However, in size and goods offered it could not be compared with the modern supermarket of today.

The next building we come to is now J. Keith Upholstery. When I was a boy, it was the Clifton Laundry. I do not remember when they went out of business, but for many years thereafter Carrithers Dairy was located in that same place.

I guess it is obvious that many things have changed over the years. One striking change is the fact that the "milk man" has all but disappeared from the scene. Carrithers Dairy had a fleet of trucks that delivered their products to people's homes and businesses. This is no longer a common practice.

Next to what is now J. Keith Upholstery, there are a number of houses that have not changed very much over the years except -- perhaps-for the people who live in them. The first one is a one-story brick dwelling that sits farther back from the sidewalk than the others. Then a large two-story brick house followed by three so-called "shotgun" houses in a row and a white two-story dwelling.

Nearby is Cunningham Overhead Door Service, Inc. Back when I was a boy and young man this was the Clifton Lumber and Coal Company. For many years it was one of the most visible landmarks in the Frankfort Avenue -- Clifton neighborhood.

At this point the railroad tracks cross Frankfort Avenue and continue behind the buildings on the other side of the street. Up to that crossing, the tracks run parallel to Frankfort Avenue a short distance behind the buildings on the north side of the street.

Returning to the south side of Frankfort Avenue, after you cross the railroad tracks heading east, you pass three single-dwelling houses until you come to Phil's Pawn Shop. This is a concrete block structure with a red brick facade that was built, I believe, in the early 1950's.

Then it was the Acme Saw Company. A man by the name of Gray was the owner and master artisan. He was also a cracker-barrel philosopher who imparted to me many words of wisdom. Unfortunately, they have long ago disappeared into the limbo of forgotten things.

When I was in grade school and for some years later, three large two-story houses occupied the land from Phil's Pawn Shop to the south west corner of Clifton and Frankfort Avenue. Now, next to Phil's, is a parking lot for St. Frances of Rome Church that can be seen in the distance.

Right on the corner, flush with the sidewalk, is now a first-rate antique shop. It is in a one-story concrete block building that runs from Frankfort Avenue all the way to the alley that parallels St. Frances of Rome Church. This antique shop is owned and managed by John Henry Sterry who is from northern England. He has had years of experience as an antique dealer and will be glad to assist you.

This building was constructed in the middle or late 1940's. The first business I remember at this corner location was an attractive restaurant, the Country Kitchen.

On the other side of Frankfort Avenue (the north side) starting at the railroad crossing and moving east, the sidewalk is just a few feet from the tracks. Then you come to the large sign board. This is directly across from South Clifton that comes to a dead end at this point.

Next to the sign board is a one-story structure that was built around the turn of the century. In recent years it has been renovated and remodeled to accommodate two places of businesses. The first is an up-to-date beauty salon, Raindogs Salon, owned Billy Strobel, a very congenial young man They specialize in cutting and styling for both men and women.

When I was a boy, what is now Raindogs Salon, was two separate stores. The first was occupied by two places of business, Meyers Shoe Repair and Arthur Demling's Radio Shop. I became well acquainted with both of these friendly gentlemen.

The next store was also a shoe repair shop owned and run by Roger Hund. (Apparently, during the infamous depression years of the 1930's, people couldn't afford to buy a new pair of shoes, but they could scrape up enough money to have their old shoes repaired.)

In the same store with Roger Hund, Mr. Gilthouse had a clock and watch repair shop. His work area was up front on the right hand side of the door as you entered. From the sidewalk looking through the large plate glass window a ten-year old boy could see Mr. Gilthouse at his work. He was a tall, slender, elderly man with a scraggly handlebar mustache. He smoked an old corncob pipe as he bent over his workbench doing his thing. He was a very friendly gentleman and always talked to me as if I were a grownup.

The next store would be Fredrick's Bicycle Shop. It seems logical that as a fairly normal boy interested in bicycles I would have clear memories of that place. But I remember practically nothing about it.

However, I do have seemingly endless memories about the next and last store in that building, namely, our restaurant. We were there from the late summer of 1933 (when I was ten years old) until the summer of 1947. And except for the two years and some months that I spent in the Navy during the Second World War, I worked there either full-time or part-time almost every day that we were open. Now, looking back on my life many years later, I realize that a great influence that those years had in making me what I am today -- good and/or bad.

The two 'stores that were then Fredrick's Bicycle and Kinsella's Restaurant are now one place of business, the Grape Leaf Restaurant. As I write this they have been in business for less than six months, specializing in Mediterranean cuisine. But the Grape Leaf is gradually taking its place in popularity among the several excellent restaurants along the Frankfort Avenue "strip."

Next to our restaurant was a big advertising signboard. Behind it was an empty lot running all the way to the railroad tracks. The signboard is no longer there, but the lot is still empty except for a high fence at the back, blocking the view of the tracks.

Next to the empty lot, until 1947, was a parking garage for the ornate two-story residence that is still a prominent landmark on the Avenue. I remember that date because it was the year that we sold the restaurant and my mother retired to live in our house across the street. In that year a one-story building was erected where the garage had previously stood. Later a second story was added. That building is now where the H. and B. Brass Company is located.

Then it was the Stardust Lounge. It was a rather classy looking place for that blue-collar neighborhood. But it didn't take too long before it "evolved" into a raucous "beer joint" with an occasional shooting in which at least one person didn't live to tell the tale.

Next to the H and B Brass Company is the house that I previously mentioned. It has changed very little over the years. Next to that house when I was young was a two-family residence that is no longer standing. In its place is a small one-story building that was the original home of Genny's Diner, which is now located a few steps east in much larger quarters.

However, as I write, a new business is soon to open at that location -- K and T's Image Consultants, Inc. K stands for Kathy Probus and T stands for Terri Tackett. Recently, I had the pleasure of talking with these two attractive young women. I wish them great success with their new enterprise.

Next to K and T's is the restaurant I just referred to, Genny's Diner. It is owned and managed by my friend Frank Faris, a young man who started out on a shoestring and by good judgment and hard work has been quite successful. In addition to Genny's Diner, within the past year he has opened a tavern on the other side of the street that is doing well.

The building in which Genny's Diner is now located was a long time ago when we first moved into the neighborhood the Grocers Ice and Cold Storage Company. Part of the stone facade of that structure can still be seen.

I remember well the high platform against which the big and small ice trucks would back up and load huge blocks of steaming ice. And I remember when I was a kid buying a small hunk of ice (fifty pounds) and -- with a shiny metal ice tong -- carry or drag it along the sidewalk some distance down the street to our restaurant. There I would chop it into small pieces and spread them on top or between the bottles of soft drinks or beer in the cooler behind the bar.

At this point I will break off on the north side of the street (to return later) and backtrack to the south east corner of Clifton and Frankfort Avenue.

When we arrived on the scene in the late summer of 1933, on this corner was the residence of the Kleyer family. There was a well-kept front yard. And the back yard that could be seen from Clifton was also attractive with a fish pond and rock garden on one side of the red brick walk that led to the back porch.

Next door was another residence of comparable size and appearance, the home of an elderly couple by the name of Conroy. Those two houses were torn down around 1950 to make room for a Texaco Service Station. The same building -- more or less -- is still there. The front faces Clifton. Until recently (the late summer of 1994) Wilson Fleet Service was at that location. But after being closed for about a month, it has changed hands. Now it is Dillon's Total Car Service.

In 1954 Bill Riebel became manager of the Texaco station. And in time we became good friends. In 1961 he moved to a bigger station in another part of town. Those years, living next to Texaco, were in some ways the most carefree of my life. I always parked my car in his lot and never had to worry about car trouble. If something went wrong, Bill always took good care of me. Besides being a great guy, he was also the best mechanic I ever met. I used to call him the Doctors of Motors.

Just recently I ran into him and his charming wife on Frankfort Avenue coming out of one of the "famous" restaurants. He like so many other of the honest and reliable auto mechanics are now retired. So it is more difficult to keep the "old bucket of bolts" in good running shape than it was then.

Next to the gasoline station was our house similar to the one on the corner that I previously described. It is still there only you cannot see it from Frankfort Avenue. A two-story commercial building is now where the front yard used to be.

We lived in that wonderful old house from 1933 to 1961. Our restaurant was directly across the street where the Grape Leaf is today. My mother passed away in 1954, but my sister and aunt and I continued to live there until 1961 when we sold it to a man who added the two-story buildings in front. Now it is the home away from home of an inviting restaurant called A Little Bit of Seoul. They serve delicious Korean and American Cuisine.

Next to where we lived is a one-story bungalow type house that is still a residence. The house next door -- some years ago -- was converted into a place of business. It is the Once Again Gently Used Books store. It is a family-owned business. Recently I talked with the daughter, Ms. Jean McDonald, who told me they have been there since about 1989. Although they specialize in mysteries, they also have on their book shelves "a little bit of everything."

During our years on the Avenue, the Osborne family lived at that same address. They had nine children, and I was well acquainted with all of them. I recall that my Aunt Geneva, who used to live with us, and Mrs. Osborne were close friends. They used to go to bingo together.

I first remember Mr. Osborne when he was a motorman on interurban trolley cars that ran on Frankfort Avenue from Louisville to Shelbyville and Louisville to LaGrange. So the Osborne family must have been living there when we arrived. For recently, I read in the Courier-Journal that the interurban stopped running about 1935. After that time, Mr. Osborne was a motorman on the city street cars that ran on tracks in the middle of the street with a trolley overhead.

Right next door to the Book Store, in the house that was the - Sopher residence for as long as I can remember, is now the Modern Woodworking Company. I knew the Sopher family well, since they lived right up the street from us and used to come into our restaurant from time to time. Mr. Sopher was a paper hanger. Back those days it was an occupation that was in much greater demand than it is today. For then most people papered rather than painted their walls.

The Modern Woodworking Company has been at this same location for the past fourteen years. It is owned and manager by Hank Podgursky. It is mainly a service business, specializing in refinishing furniture. But they also make custom cabinets as an important part of their business.

Next door to the Modern Woodworking Company is a large white two-story frame house with beautifully tended front, side, and back yards. My journey back in time covers a stretch of Frankfort Avenue from Vernon Avenue to Ewing Avenue. Of all the places along that route this one is unique in the true sense of the word. For the house still looks the same and is occupied by the same family that lived there when we moved into the neighborhood.

Clarence Wettstein, the son of the man who built the house, and Frank Wibbles, his brother-in-law, live there. Several weeks ago, around sundown strolling along Frankfort Avenue, I ran into Frank who was cutting the grass of the front yard with an old-fashioned push lawnmower. Right away he recognized me, and we had a long chat about things. Although he did not move into the house until later Clarence has lived there since he was two years old. He had been living there a long time before we arrived. You can imagine the changes he has seen over the years.

Next to the Wettstein residence is a two-story, commercial building. When we first arrived on the Avenue it was the Hubbuch Plumbing Company. But I remember it best as Tom Below's shoe repair shop. That must have been in later years, perhaps after World War II when I was in my middle or late twenties. I remember Tom as a very friendly person who was proud of the fact that his wife was a school teacher.

Now where Tom had his shoe repair shop is the law office of Mr. Henry M. Reed, III. He specializes in municipal bonds. He is assisted in the office by his two attractive daughters, who were most helpful in giving me the information I requested.

Next to Mr. Reed's law office is Blackburn and Davis Plumbing Company. They have been there for quite a few years. However, my first memory of this site goes back to the early 1930's. Then it was a cleaning and pressing business run by Mr. and Mrs. Schweiss. I became well acquainted with them, for they often came into our restaurant. They were a very sincere, hard-working couple. And you could always be sure that if you took something to the cleaners, they would do a good Job and it would be ready on time.

Next door to the Blackburn and Davis Plumbing Company is a two-story commercial building that until recently was occupied by the Lewis Sound Company. They are still on Frankfort Avenue but a couple blocks west on the same side of the street.

When we arrived on the scene and for many years-afterwards the Von Bokern Bakery was located in this same buildings. If I had the talent I could probably write a book about the Von Bokern family and the delicious bakery goods they made for the neighborhood. For I was well acquainted with the mother and father as well as the seven children.

Mom and Pop had come from the old country, Germany, around 1900 when they were in their late teens. They met on the boat coming over. And all the family worked together to make the business a success. Pop and the older boys did the baking, and Mom and the girls worked in the store. On Sunday one or more of the boys also worked in the store. For that was the day when the rush was on. St. Frances of Rome Church was less than two blocks away. Then there were four Masses on Sunday. And after Mass many people made a beeline to Von Bokern's for their favorite kuchen or sweet roll or pie or doughnut.

Joe, the second youngest son, and I were very good friends. We were in the same grade together at St. Frances. We are still close friends, and I see him frequently and often talk with him on the phone. One of my fond memories of my boyhood is in the late afternoon helping Joe carry large bundles of wood from the shed in the back yard to the big room behind the store where his father and older brothers did the baking. They used the wood to fire the huge furnace in which the pans of dough were placed.

For this "labor of love" was rewarded with whatever baked goods caught my eye. Back in the 1930's during those depression years people didn't have very much. But we did have Von Bokern's Bakery.

The next building east on the corner of Frankfort and Rastetter was another business that was there when I was a kid and for many years later. It was the Messmer Hardware Store. It, too, was sort of an "institution," for it was very important to the needs of those who lived in the Clifton neighborhood. They seemed to have everything in the hardware line needed for survival in that slower-paced less complicated world.

Now in this same building is the Clifton's Pizza Company that in a few short years has become one of the best liked restaurants in the entire city. It is owned and manager by two young men, Jason and Mark, whom I consider good friends. Their success in this business resembles a novel by Horatio Alger. And it couldn't have happened to anyone nicer or more deserving.

Clifton's Pizza is on the southwest corner of Frankfort and Rastetter. South Rastetter Avenue comes to a dead end at Frankfort because of the railroad tracks. At this point I will cross to the north side of the street. The last place I mentioned was Genny's Diner.

Now just east of Genny's Diner is a thriving business that has been at that location for a number of years, the River City Tire Company. The service area, office, and warehouse covers a long stretch of the block. In bygone years this was the site of several businesses. Also, a number of houses stood where the warehouse is today.

As I remember, in 1933 a gasoline station was right next to the Ice House where Genny's Diner is today. For some reason (I suppose there is an explanation) there were gas stations everywhere. As a matter of fact, a short distance east of the one I just mentioned was another gas station -- but on a smaller scale. It was owned and managed by Louis Bahr, a man whom I have known for many years. For years we went to the same church together, St. Frances of Rome. Also, I was friends with his children who were closer to my own age.

At any rate, Louie's gasoline station was quite unusual. It was a small wooden structure that sat close to the sidewalk. When I was a kid, I used to walk up Frankfort Avenue carrying a tin can to buy a gallon of coal oil ... as we called it in those days. It was to be used in the little stove that heated the toilet or "restroom" of our restaurant.

Behind Louis Bahr's gas station was a blacksmith shop where horses were shod and other heavy metal work was done. But by that time it had become unusual to see horse-drawn vehicles, such as milk wagons, on the street.

However, I remember a horse-drawn vegetable wagon that used to stop in front of our restaurant everyday during the warm weather. And my mother used to go outside to haggle with the vendor for produce. It was used as part of her delicious home cooked plate lunches. According to a menu hanging on the wall inside our restaurant (one of the few pictures I have of that era), a plate lunch sold for 20 cents -- not including drink.

In part of the space where the River City Tire Company is now located was the Walnut Grove Dairy. It was there from about 1940 to 1960. I remember well the delivery truck drivers and other employees who came into our restaurant at various times during the day and night. Also, Walnut Grove had a retail store in front of the plant that sold dairy, products, including ice cream that I bought now and then.

Next to the Dairy were several "shotgun" houses that were later torn down to make room for a large warehouse that is an extension of the River City Tire Company.

East of the warehouse is a large two-story commercial building in which a number of places have come and gone over the years. Now, and I hope for years to come, the Good Neighbor Food Co-op occupies the entire first floor.

My first recollection of that building goes back to when we first arrived on the Avenue. I remember two different places being there at the same time. I recall that Mr. and Mrs. Epinger had a grocery store at that location. For I made countless trips between there and our restaurant. I bought mostly meat that my mother cooked and served to her customers.

Also, I vaguely recall in the same building -- probably on the second floor -- a "social club" called the Daughters of America or something like that. Somebody told me that before Prohibition was repealed in 1933 the "social club" was a front for a "speak-easy" where they sold "home brewed" beer, "bathtub" gin,, and "white lightning" whiskey that was probably made illegally in the hill country of Kentucky.

However, the business I remember most at that location was the Stoker Poultry Company. I recall that the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Stoker were regular customers at our restaurant. They started out on a small scale and in time became the largest retail and wholesale poultry dealer in Louisville.

The space from what is now the Good Neighbor Food Co-op to the north west corner of Jane and Frankfort Avenue has changed a great deal from what I remember growing up the neighborhood.

On the corner where Dave's used car lot is now located was a gasoline station called Oakley Gas and Oil Company. Somewhere in between was a house with the front room converted into a fruit and vegetable store. This place I could never forget. It was the home and place of business of Mr. and Mrs. Villier. She was a rather unusual woman -- to say the least. Although her first name was Mary, for some reason or another everyone called her Aunt Maime. She had countless dogs and cats -- and God only knows what other kind of animals. And when she walked down the street she was always followed by one or more of her "children." She was without a doubt the St. Francis of Assisi of Frankfort Avenue.

Often she would come into our restaurant just to visit. She was very friendly and seemed to know everybody. When I was in the eighth grade I played the role of St. Joseph in the Christmas play. After that Aunt Maime always called me Dear St. Joseph.

I remember many years later when I was in the Navy during the Second World War, I had my 21st birthday. And to my great surprise I received a birthday card that I still have. On the front at the top it read: A miraculous medal on your Birthday. Below was a silver foil image of the Blessed Mother. Inside was a verse:

A Miraculous Medal
on your Birthday.
May the blessing
that it brings
Find your heart

in glad possession
of life's most
cherished things!

Happy Birthday
Dear St. Joseph
Mary B. Villier

I don't remember when Aunt Maime passed away. But I am sure she had a nice funeral Mass at St. Frances of Rome. And I am sure she went straight to Heaven without a stopover in Purgatory. And remembering her, I am more and more convinced that Heaven is populated with many cats and dogs -- and even a few people.

As I already mentioned, on the north west corner of Jane and Frankfort Avenue was a gasoline station. There was another one directly across the street. About a block down the street -- as I said before -- there were two other gas stations.

Considering the fact that the number of automobiles was far fewer then than now, it is a mystery to me why there were so many gas stations. Maybe someday -- if I live long enough -- I will write a doctor's dissertation on the subject.

At this point we will cross to the south side of the street and walk a block west until we return to Rastetter Avenue that dead ends into Frankfort at the River City Tire Company.

Now on the south east corner is an inviting bistro, the Longshot Tavern, that has added more class to the old neighborhood. When we arrived in 1933 Mr. and Mrs. Dean ran a dry goods store in this same building. I remember them well because they used to eat lunch and sometimes supper at our restaurant.

A couple months ago I had a long conversation with Louis Bahr, Sr. (the man I mentioned earlier as owning the gas station on the other side of the street). He told me that in 1937, the year of the Great Flood, he and his wife bought out Dean's and changed the name to the Crescent Dry Goods Store. How long they were there I do not recall.

In more recent times, prior to the Longshot Tavern, Leets Flower Shop was at that site before they moved to their lower Brownsboro Road location.

East of the Longshot Tavern, on that side of the street, when I was a boy there were mostly two-storied houses in which one or more families lived. Some of them have been torn down or converted to businesses.

The first converted residence you come to is Pete Koenig Company: Plumbing, Heating, and Air Conditioning.

Next to that business is a store built on the front of a house that has been there as long as I can remember. I recall it vaguely as an upholstery shop. Then -- perhaps in the late 1930's -- it became Gus's Meat Market. They also sold groceries, fruits, and vegetables. They were there for quite a few years.

Now in that same building is the Avalon 20th Century Antiques. It is another of the many shops and stores along the Avenue that has given it a distinctive character.

Next we come to a recently converted residence, now a place of business, that has brightened up the block from Rastetter to Jane Street. Its name: The Good Earth Store, which has for sale various kinds of interesting merchandise.

Right next door is another former residence that in the past year has become an attractive oasis where a weary traveler can stop and wet his whistle with a "creamy golden." It is called the Stonewall Tavern. It is owned and operated by the same "entrepreneur" who has made Genny's Diner such an outstanding success, Frank Faris.

Then we came to a store room built on the front of a house that in one form or another has been there as long as I can remember. It brings back fond memories. When I was a boy it was Ben Dress's Barber Shop where I got many a hair cut as I listened to some tall tales told by Ben or one of the old cronies who made the barber shop their second home.

Now in the same building is the office of the Import Auto Sales. They have a used car lot just east of the office in an area that was formerly a two-story residence in which the Watson family lived for many years.

When we moved into the neighborhood there was a Standard gasoline station next to the used car lot on the south west corner of Jane and Frankfort Avenue. Now at that same location is the East End Auto Service owned by the same company that runs the used car lot.

Crossing Frankfort Avenue to the north side of the street, I remember when I was a boy and until recent years a row of so-called "shotgun" houses from the north east corner of Jane to the building that is now occupied by the Sweet Surrender Dessert Kitchen.

Not too long ago, those houses were torn down to make room for a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise and a large parking lot next door. Now in that same building is an attractive restaurant that in a short time has become one of the most popular in Louisville, Allo Spiego.

Next to Allo Spiego is the Sweet Surrender that I previously mentioned. It is another of the excellent restaurants that has made this stretch of Frankfort Avenue "famous" not only in Clifton but also far and wide. The building in which this charming restaurant is located is one of the oldest in the entire city. It goes back to the early 1800's.

Records indicate that from 1830 until 1901 it was a Toll House for the Louisville--Shelbyville Turnpike. This is now Frankfort Avenue. One of the older customers at our restaurant., Mr. Henry Wehrley, told me that a gate like you see at a railroad crossing prevented

horse-drawn wagons and stagecoaches from passing. To continue, the driver would have to pay a "toll" (a certain amount of money) to continue the journey east or west on the Turnpike.

Later, this historic building became the Clifton Police Station from 1908 until 1932. My friend, Clarence Wettstein, whom I mentioned previously, told me that he remembers the police from this station patrolling the neighborhood on bicycles.

Later, sometime during the late 1930's -- I guess -- Freddie Mueller and his wife Polly ran the Old Toll House Tavern in that same building. I have many fond memories of the Toll House, especially during and after the World War II years.

During the Second World most of the young men were in the armed forces. Many of them who lived in the neighborhood if they were lucky enough to get a furlough or leave would go to Toll House in the evening to have a good time. Also, the young (and not so young) ladies around and about would come there to help the boys enjoy themselves.

During the warm weather, especially, it was crowded with people. There was an outside beer 'garden behind the building with a large concrete slab used as a dance floor. It was surrounded by wooden tables -- the tops painted white -- and chairs. Overhead strings of colorful lights added to the glamour. And in one corner an over-sized juke box played all of the songs of the era. It was really a fun to go and live it up.

East of the Sweet Surrender is a driveway. Then we come to a well preserved two-story commercial building in which the Irish Rover Restaurant is now located. This structure dates back to 1858. It housed Widman's Saloon and Grocery for nearly 75 years before it became a statutory business and later Another Place Sandwich Shop.

Next to the Irish Rover Restaurant is their large parking lot before you come to a more modern commercial building that is the headquarters of the Windhorst Electric Company. They have a parking lot and outside storage area that goes all the way to the north west corner of Keats and Frankfort Avenue.

When I was a boy there were two stores on this vacant lot. The first one was Davis and White Poultry -- where we bought our chickens and eggs before another poultry store moved closer to our restaurant. On the corner next to Davis and White was a grocery store called Crum's that for some reason -- I can't remember -- we hardly ever did business with.

More than once in writing this retrospect I have wondered why there were so many grocery stores during that era. Two reasons come to mind. At that time most people did not have electric refrigerators. Rather, they had ice boxes. Meat, for instance, could not be preserved for any length of time. So people did not buy in larger quantities as they often do today. Also, fewer people had automobiles. So they had to walk to the grocery.

Crossing to the other side of Frankfort Avenue and backtracking to the south east corner of Jane Street, I remember the block when I was a kid as having a different look than it has today.

The main reason is that a number of two-story houses have been torn down to make room for commercial expansion.

However., the corner building where the B & P Brass Polishing Company is now located looks much the same as it did then. Then it was a car dealership. I believe it was called the Koster-Swope Buick. Freddie Koster, one of the owners, used to come into our restaurant now and then. I considered him to be a celebrity. At the University of Louisville he had been a superstar in football, track, and baseball. Later, he played professional baseball. I don't remember if he made it to the Big Leagues. But I saw him in the early 1930's at Parkway Field playing right field for the St. Paul Apostles against the Louisville Colonels.

Next to the car dealership was a house that had been converted into a business that I remember as Paul Bailey's Beer Joint or Saloon or whatever you wanted to call it. It was a man's bar, which today would be considered politically incorrect. But I can't imagine any woman in her right mind who would want to go into that place. If you liked a good fist fight or wrestling match all you had to do was stand across the street from Bailey's -- day or night -- and sooner or later you would see what you were looking for.

Next to Bailey's were four two-story houses that, along with the infamous beer joint, were eventually torn down. Now next to the B & P Brass Polishing Company is a warehouse and then a large paved open space that is part of and adjacent to the D & W Silks Inc. It is a large one-story, red brick building that goes all the way to the corner. It houses the manufacturing plant, home office, and retail sales outlet of this fast growing company.

They make and market silk trees and flower arrangements. And it is the largest business of its kind in the country. According to a recent article in the Business Section of the Courier-Journal they "not only sell to customers throughout the United States, but also to buyers abroad."

I first remember this red brick building with the big show windows facing Frankfort Avenue as a car dealership. But I best remember it as the Dr. Pepper Bottling Works.

The bottling operation was in plain view from the street. And I and many other people used to stand on the sidewalk and look in wonder as the empty bottles would pass on a conveyor belt. After being filled with the dark reddish liquid, one or more men would put them in wooden cases, then on another conveyor belt to be loaded on delivery trucks. At that time -- before television -- this was the greatest free show on earth.

Crossing to the other side of Frankfort Avenue, on the north east corner of Keats is a building that I remember well from the past. I recall when I was a boy it housed a Piggly Wiggly grocery store. This was not the usual Mom and Pop store but a so-called chain store.

Looking back, even at the ripe old age of ten, I must have been the designated purchasing agent for our restaurant. For it seems that I was always walking somewhere to buy some thing. I have vivid memories of walking three long blocks (one way) from our place to the Piggly Wiggly to buy something cheaper than from a regular grocery store.

Now, many years later, this same storeroom is Artswatch. To give you an overview of this enterprise in case you don't know, I will quote a few lines from a brochure I was able to acquire:

"Artswatch is a nonprofit presenting and service organization dedicated to providing the opportunity and means for the development of innovations in the arts through educational activities, exhibits, and performance. Since its founding in 1985, Artswatch has enriched the arts landscape in Louisville with new, emerging, and challenging art with consistent support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kentucky Arts Council, area corporations, and individuals in the Community.

Next to Artswatch in the same building is a smaller store also related to the fine arts. This is a unique shop that you could easily overlook unless you knew it was there. It has a rather unusual name: Intisar. The sign on the front of the store will give you an idea of their specialty: African Asian South American Imports Oils-Roots-Candles-Incense. You would probably find this a most interesting shop to visit.

Next to Intisar is a business that has been there for many years, Bailey TV & Electronics, Inc. I have no idea what was at that location when I was a boy. Nor do I have any past recollection of the building next door, formerly a restaurant, that as I write is unoccupied.

But I do remember the place just a few steps east that is now Panther Motor Imports. This has been an auto repair garage for as long as I can remember. It was Sacra's Auto Repair Shop when we moved into the neighborhood in the early 1930's.

The rest of the block from what is now Panther Motor Imports to the corner of Ewing Avenue has changed over the years. Although I cannot be specific, I am pretty sure that several houses have been torn down. Now there is a parking lot before you come to the next place of business, More Services. A sign on the front of the building reads: Trophies-Plaques-Badges--Signs-Ribbons.

Then there is another parking lot before you come to the last building--on the corner of Ewing Avenue; Dowell's Shoe Repair Service. When I was a boy the same kind of business was at that location. It belonged to Tom Below, who later moved his shoe repair shop to the south side of Frankfort Avenue between Clifton and Rastetter.

The other side of Frankfort Avenue (the south side) from Keats to Ewing during the 1930's was almost entirely residential. As I recall, there was only one place of business in the block. Now this block is mainly commercial. About half of the houses have been torn down, and most of the others have been converted into places of business.

The two houses on the south east corner are no longer there. In their place is the Tom Raque Distributing Company, who are wholesale dealers in meat products.

Next comes several former residences that are now business establishments. First, the Dan Burch Associates, advertising consultants. Then two converted houses in which Hair by Bernie, a stylish beauty salon, is located. Their next door neighbor is Artfully Yours, a gift shop that

specializes in contemporary handmade arts and gifts. This shop is owned and managed by Andrea Cohen, a very friendly, person who can be of much help with your selections.

Next to Artfully Yours is the only building on the block that is still a residence. This points up the fact how Frankfort Avenue from Vernon to Ewing has changed over the years from residential to commercial.

Next we come to a two-story, red brick building that I remember vaguely as Wobbe's Drug Store. But I remember it more clearly as Schmidt's Drug Store that was there for many years as I was growing up. I understand that Bob Schmidt bought this building, forcing Wobbe to move farther up the street a few paces east of Ewing.

In the same building where Schmidt's Drug Store was once located is now the medical offices of Dr. J. E. Eckerle, M.D., who has been there for a number of years.

Next door to the Doctor's Office is a storeroom built on the front of a two-story house. The storeroom is now unoccupied while it is being remodeled. My earliest memory of this is Kyne's Liquor Store that was there for many years. What was there before (if anything) or after I do not know.

Next to this building is a large parking lot before you come to the Walgreen's Drug Store on the corner of Ewing and Frankfort Avenue. When I was a boy growing up in the neighborhood several two-story houses covered this ground until they were torn down to make room for a "supermarket." At the time it seemed huge but would be considered small if compared to an average Kroger Store today.

Eventually, Winn Dixie became Melton's Food Mart, which was an east end "institution" for a decade or more. Then to the surprise and dismay of many of their customers, they went out of business. A few months later it was announced that Walgreen's would be the new kid on the block. And after completely remodeling the building, in the fall of 1993 they had their grand opening.

So at the corner of Ewing and Frankfort Avenue our journey into the past and present comes to an end. For geographically this is where Clifton ends and Crescent Hill begins.

Today, the distinction between the two neighborhoods has all but vanished. But when I was a boy, the difference was quite real. For it was perceived that many people who lived in Crescent Hill looked down their noses at the Clifton rabble. And those who were proud of being Cliftonites disliked the Crescent Hillers because they were snobs, a bunch of ten cent millionaires.

But one last observation. Starting at Vernon Avenue and working my way up Frankfort Avenue to Ewing,, I have noted many changes that have taken place in the past sixty years. And it is impossible to predict what changes might take place in the next sixty years. But as I look back, the one thing in my, mind that has changed the least is people.

At any rate, in seeking the information I needed to write this brief "history, I did not talk to one person who was less than friendly and generous with their time in helping me. Perhaps this response is not typical of the world in which we live. But it is consistent with the Frankfort Avenue Clifton Experience that I have known over the years. And I would like to take this occasion to express my gratitude and extend my best wishes to all those nice people for much future success.