

ALINE'S STORY
Philomene Aline Durio Smith
By
Donna Horton Harper
Written circa 1978

Philomene Aline Durio, "Grandma," was born on June 10, 1889, to Angelas Durio and Euphronzine Clay Durio. She was the second of their twelve children. This large Catholic, Cajun family lived in the small town of Arnaudville, Louisiana. The children attended school at the convent in Arnaudville (St. Joseph Parochial School). They walked the mile from their home to school and back each day. School was held in English for half of the day, and in French for the other half. At home, French was the sole language. The nuns taught them "religion," as well as other subjects. Aline attended school for seven years and won a prize of a book in her last year. She thinks it was for Excellence in Recitation.

Aline vividly remembers her last spanking. She and her oldest sister, "Ita," were supposed to latch the gate after they came through on their way home from school. Ita always ran ahead in order to be first through the gate, leaving Aline to latch it so that the cows wouldn't get out. This time, Aline rebelled and darted through first. Ita refused to close the gate and the girls got in a hair-pulling, name-calling fight. Unfortunately, Papa was in the next field and heard the ruckus, saw the still open gate and gave them both a sound spanking.

Aline grew into a tall stately girl with long black hair worn on top of her head. That earned her the nickname "Tignon."

At fifteen, she went to work as Sunset's only telephone operator. "Hello, this is Central." Away from home, she boarded with a family in Sunset. Everyday at lunchtime, a young carpenter working at the cotton gin would come "to pass some time" with her. Within a year, on St. Valentine's Day in 1906, they were married.

Edwin Smith, the handsome groom, was 25, of a fairly well to do landowning family originally from Maryland. Aline stated: "Papa refused to come to the wedding." Edwin may have been on the right side by being Catholic, but he wasn't French. After a simple ceremony in church in Arnaudville, the young couple drove the buggy to his birthplace, his father's home, two miles outside of Grand Coteau. Aline wore a long white gown. There was no reception and no honeymoon trip.

Here, in an Acadian style four-room home, they lived for the next 6 months. The bride had trouble adjusting to "country" life. Every morning, Edwin left for the cotton gin and she had little to do until he returned in the evening. She also had a new set of relatives to become acquainted with. The house was occupied by Edwin's father Sylvester, his

father's mother Elizabeth Barry Smith (called the 'Grand Dame') his sister Lily, and Edwin and Aline.

Lily, who had been the housekeeper since her mother death many years before, did all of the cooking. Aline still complains of the horrible "fat biscuits" that her sister-in-law made every morning (leftovers were served at dinner or supper.) The laundry was done by a black woman who lived somewhere near in the woods. The cleaning chores were shared by all of the women. This left Grandma with time for spinning and Aline time for boredom.

One Sunday for entertainment, the newlyweds went walking in the woods along the bayou. They often met a black woman who called the young bride "the Belle of the Woods." Once, the pair returned home covered with seed ticks. The humiliating remedy was to strip outside and rub coal oil all over; then, wash by the well with strong homemade lye soap.

The couple had one of the front bedrooms with its own fireplace. An experienced carpenter, Edwin added a 10 x 8 foot kitchen of cypress planks to the rear of the house. This home is still standing near Grand Coteau. Aline still says "you couldn't pay me to live out there."

Edwin had been house hunting and purchased a large comfortable home on Main Street in Grand Coteau. The former owner had committed suicide in the barn and his body was carried into the front room and placed on the wooden floor. The large blood stain that still remains on the floor near the fireplace was the subject of much discussion and understandably affected the asking price. Aline's friends all wanted to know if she "wasn't scared to live in that house" and she replied practically "no, not me." However, she did try to scrub the stain away with no success.

Their first child, Myrtle, was born in the house on January 28, 1907, followed by another girl, Minnie, (Ed Roy's mother) on December 2, 1908. Edwin "didn't seem to mind that they weren't sons." About once a week, Aline would carefully starch and iron her white dress with the blue shirtwaist, dress up the babies, and hitch the buggy to make the long trip to Arnaudville to see Momma. How the young woman did love to drive the buggy with its spirited pair of horses. She found it elating. Seventy years later, her eyes still sparkle when she talks of it and regrets that she can't take one more run.

Once, with the little ones loaded in the buggy, the brake slipped as she stood beside the vehicle. The horses started off. She chased them trying to catch the reins, tripping over her long skirts. She caught the reins but was dragged into a ditch. She held on tightly and finally stopped the runaways. Crying with relief, she preceded with her trip, arriving at Mommas dirty and bedraggled; tear-stained but safe.

Two more daughters rounded out the family. Leona was born on January 25, 1912, and Edwina in 1915.

As mother, wife, housekeeper and cook, the young matron was very busy with the household affairs. Edwin had a vegetable plot and every morning, he would bring her the vegetables, sweet potatoes, cabbage, corn or eggplant that he wished to be prepared for lunch.

There was a middle-age black man named "Mose" who was Edwin's all-around helper. He would milk the cow and bring the milk and cream to the porch. It had to be separated and put to cool. On Sundays, Mose was given the job of turning the hand crank ice cream freezer for dinnertime dessert.

In the summertime, during these years, Edwin made money selling ice. He would get up at 2 or 3 a.m. and drive the wagon to Opelousas to the ice house, about 17 miles away, making the return trip before breakfast. The ice was cut into 25 to 50-pound blocks and covered with straw to await customers.

It was Mrs. Smith's job to attend to the customers that stopped by during the morning. There was a cotton scale hanging from the tree nearest the house. When the customers desired less than the 25-pound size, she had to cut and hoist it to the scale with tongs. Perspiration beaded her face as she attended to the line of people awaiting their turns. She gave Leona, a toddler at the time, Castoria to keep her quiet and strapped her to a chair on the porch so she wouldn't run off.

Edwin was able to add a new kitchen to the house. Every morning, he made the coffee as he liked to arise early. He ground the right amount of coffee beans and made a pot of drip coffee served with lots of cream and sugar. First, he brought a cup to his wife and when the girls were older, they also got coffee in bed. When he died, Aline had to learn to make coffee for the first time.

Small boys came in the late spring selling buckets of blackberries. Sometimes she bought some to make jam or jelly. She always made fig preserves with the figs from the trees in the yard. She added lemon slices to make them especially her own. Pecans were gathered and stored from the old trees in the yard.

Edwin opened a store on the corner, one lot away from the house, that was very successful. Occasionally, he would come to get his wife to speak to a customer who spoke only French, but most of the residents of the Grand Coteau area were not French.

The children were in and out of the store all day long, snitching candy from the jars and pickles from the big barrels; talking to Papa as he balanced back on two legs of his

cane-bottomed chair. Discipline was administered with a quick swat to the behind by Momma.

The girls were sent to school at the Academy of the Sacred Heart when they were six or seven. They spoke English at home, mainly because Papa did not speak French. They helped Momma clean. On Thursdays, they had to sweep under the house, a hated chore as the girls feared there might be spiders. Momma was a meticulous housekeeper. They dragged the mattresses out to air and to be turned once a week, weather permitting. Windows had to sparkle and ceilings were swept with a cloth-covered broom.

The whole family attended Mass at St. Charles, Sacred Heart, every Sunday. What a to-do to get ready with four girls to dress and comb their hair.

Sometime in the early 1920's, Aline cut her abundant knee-length hair for the first time in the popular bob style. Edwin wouldn't speak to her for a week. Every time he looked at her, "he snorted and turned away." Eventually, it grew back and she didn't cut it again.

Sometime in his diverse career, Edwin Smith became the town undertaker. He was assisted by Mose. (Some of his records were found in the attic recently by my husband, Bud Harper. He also bought a car which was used for ceremonial occasions. Aline never learned to drive. World War I didn't seem to have made much of an impact in the daily lives of the Smith family. Aline's nephew, her older sister Ita's son, was killed in France. Ita had died during childbirth and her young family, including this boy and the baby were raised by her mother.

Tragedy struck Myrtle, the oldest daughter, around 1919 when she was about 12. She became very ill and then paralyzed. Doctors were called in but all were unable to help. Gradually, she regained strength but did not recover the use of her legs. A fancy wheelchair was purchased and the family did its best to keep her spirits up. Aline prayed a lot, as much for acceptance, as for a healing miracle. As years passed, the care of the invalid became an expected routine and did not seem so heavy a responsibility. Several boarders were taken in at different times. It was the overflow from the Academy. Most were young girls from wealthy South American and Mexican families and they became part of the Durio family.

As the girls became more grown up, the beaux started to come a-courting. Cars would drive up and blow their horns and Papa would cuss and forbid the girls to go out with such "riffraff." The three went to college at Sacred Heart and majored in education and were prepared to be teachers.

After graduation, Edwina taught for a year in Krotz Springs before returning home. The others taught locally. Minnie married Cyrus Roy of Cankton. Papa gave her the lot next

door and a house was moved from Cankton to the field. Leona married Pearly Breaux of Lafayette and they settled on a farm between Carencro and Lafayette. Edwina was married to Henry Harper the day before Pearl Harbor. Harper was an electrician from Shreveport. He was a widower, and a Protestant, with a 16-year-old son. Edwina was thirty and was considered an "old maid." But, she was Papa's "baby" and he wouldn't attend the wedding which was held in the Rectory.

The war brought rationing and took away eight young men of the town. Myrtle kept a scrapbook of the newspaper clippings on the World War I years. She crocheted a lot and loved to read.

Edwin's mother, Caroline deValcourt Smith, came to live with Aline and Edwin. She was quite elderly and no longer able to stay alone. They had "plenty of room" with the girls gone.

Leona's daughter, Collette, was the first grandchild. Her second Christmas, she was enthralled with the candles on the decorated Christmas tree at Grandma's house. Within a few years, around 1942, Edwina had a daughter named Debby. Debby loved to stay with her grandmother and grandfather and when it was time to go home, she would wrap her small arms around Mrs. Smith's legs and refuse to budge. With such persuasive powers, she spent a great deal of time with them! Four other grandchildren were born: Minnie had a son, Edwin; Leona had two boys, Ulyesse and Pat; and, Edwina had a boy, Charles. All of the children and grandchildren were frequent noisy visitors to the house in Grand Coteau.

In the late 1940's, Edwin had a stroke. He was unable to speak and paralyzed on one side of his body. Aline cared for him as well as Myrtle and Grandma Durio. She says she was "tired a lot in those years, but I was glad I was there. I wouldn't have wanted a stranger doing those things for my family." Gradually, Edwin regained most powers of speech and some mobility. He spent many hours in the rocking chair holding one of the grandkids, often the cherished 4-year-old Charles, "Bud." He would tell him to go to sleep or "red-eyed Pete'll get ya." Bud would say: "No, it is green-eyed Pete, Papa." Edwin suffered another stroke in 1950 and died. He was buried in the cemetery in Grand Coteau where his ancestors had been interred since 1806. By that time, Granny's opinion of doctors in general was well solidified. She considers them well-intentioned but mostly ineffectual and consults them as a last resort.

Aline Smith had to deal with the business world for the first time. As long as her husband was alive, she had handled money very little, had never written a check and had a scant idea of what income and assets she had. Because of necessity, she learned rapidly but never has been completely at ease in making business decisions. She has relied heavily on advice from her daughters and sons in law when making any transaction or major purchase. Her mother died in 1986 at the age of 96. Care of Myrtle continued to increase as her health started to decline. She was no longer able to

crochet and reading was more difficult as her vision was failing. She still loved for people to visit and talk with her. A television was purchased in the late 1950's, especially to entertain the invalid woman. Aline purchased an extra-large rosary in order that Myrtle could still "say her beads."

Priests frequently dropped by the Smith household to visit with the two women and bring Communion to the homebound daughter. Aline still faithfully attended church every week, never ate meat on Fridays and observed all the Holy Days. She doesn't ever remember to have questioned that God had a plan for all of them. Other friends and relatives frequently dropped by for a cup of coffee or a glass of sweet wine. Aline made a syrup cake, which was a pecan spice cake made with cane syrup. She served this to her guests. She still cooked a full dinner every day for her and Myrtle. For supper, they had leftovers such as cornbread and milk or warmed-over chicken gumbo.

In the summertime, she made teacakes and lemonade for the grandchildren. Minnie, who still lived next door, was in and out constantly. Cyrus tended both yards and did the handyman chores. The three youngest daughters were all teaching and raising their families.

Minnie discovered that she had cancer in 1960. The family was shocked but quickly rallied around in support. The cancer was progressive and became a two-year illness. Aline was chief "nurse" during this time; and, also kept house for Minnie's 10-year-old son, Ed and Cyrus, her husband. The chief sentiment of the family is that this was a good time in which death became acceptable to the patient and to everyone else. After the young woman's death, Ed lived alternately with his grandmother and his father. Five years later, Cyrus remarried and moved to Cankton. Ed then stayed completely in the house next door to his grandmother.

Myrtle died the following year after having been totally unable to care for herself for a long period of time. With the abrupt cessation of all nursing duties and responsibilities, Aline began to feel depressed and old. Ed still needed and depended upon her; but he was gone a great deal. She spent a brief time in the hospital and was diagnosed as having a hiatal hernia. Television filled up her time along with large print books from the library. But, cataracts were starting.

Ed had been taking flying lessons and convinced her to take a plane ride with him. As dotting grandmother, she has total confidence in his abilities. Finally, she overcomes her fears. The daring octogenarian learned she liked flying as much as driving a buggy! A reporter took a picture of her in the airplane and interviewed her transition from "buggy days to rockets." She was tickled to death that anyone thought it newsworthy. Since that first exciting ride, she has flown on several occasions. The last time was this past Christmas when she came to Mississippi to her granddaughter's home. Flying home after dark made her very fretful. She "couldn't understand how Ed knew where he was going."



Grandmother Enjoys First Plane Trip

MRS. EDWIN S. SMITH, an 87-year-old grandmother from Grand Coteau, enjoyed her first airplane ride this past weekend. Upon landing, Mrs. Smith commented, "I don't see much in it but I don't mind it at all." Piloting the plane was her grandson Ed Roy,

an instructor at the Opelousas Flying School. Accompanying Mrs. Smith on her maiden voyage were Roy, Mrs. Roy and Courtney "CC" Roy and Mrs. Smith's great-grandson, seen sitting on her lap. — (Staff Photo by Savoie)

By this time, she was a great grandmother in good standing. Hereditary arthritis of the spine was beginning to stoop the once ramrod straight back and cataracts were dimming her vision; but her mind was still sharp and her hearing keen enough. At home, nursing care would be the solution most acceptable to all family members, especially the grandchildren. However, it does not seem to be attainable in Grand Coteau.

Several years ago, there was a flurry of excitement and decision making precipitated by a worrisome incident. Aline fell while walking on the driveway and while only bruised, she could not get up. She sat on the drive for almost 5 hours before a passing town

resident, sensing that something was wrong, stopped to help her. All other motorists had zipped on by.

Family opinion was unanimous: "You can no longer live alone!" Efforts were made in several directions to find a live-in companion. It seemed logical to us that there would be someone, a lonely widow, a nun from the Academy, a young college girl, etc., who would be delighted to have free room and board in exchange for minimum companionship. Surprise! No one was interested or available—not even for a sizable salary!! Perhaps, it would have worked in Lafayette; but, not in Grand Coteau.

The search was allowed to die and no further effort was expended. The situation went right back to "normal," the way it has been before. Perhaps at a different time, a live-in practical nurse could be found. This alternative has not been completely discarded.

Decision making concerning older people seems to be crisis precipitated. As long as things are going smoothly, no advance planning is done. Decisions involve every member of the family in some way. Emotions, not logic, are the dominant forces involved. Conflicting opinions are the norm. One of the main problems is that alternatives for older people are few. When the elderly are no longer able to take care of themselves, what solutions are available? The older person can move in with someone or someone can move in with him/her. A nursing home may be the only available solution but, it brings a great load of guilt for the family.

As long as things are preceding normally, the situation seems to remain stable. In our situation, the grandmother lives alone in a large house in Grand Coteau. She has been in remarkably good health but at age 89, it doesn't seem likely that this will continue for long. Most problems arise from the fact that she has cataracts. This has limited the things that she can do to fill her time. She is no longer able to read or watch TV. Occasionally, she suffers from vertigo, especially if she gets up from a chair or bed too quickly. She does most of her daily housework, laundry and cooking. Once a week, a maid comes in to vacuum and do heavier work and to perform chores like changing light bulbs. Arthritis of the spine has stopped her from her once rapid gait. Until last year, a grandson lived next door and was able to keep a watch over her. He has since filed for divorce and moved away. His wife and child still reside in the home. Her daughter lives a mile away in Sunset and usually drops by in the late afternoon to make sure she is okay. During a period of widowhood, before remarriage, Granny frequently spent the night with her, returning to her home in the morning. She has a great deal of company for whom she fixes delicious French drip coffee or wine. Her mind is remarkably alert, although she sometimes becomes confused as to time. When names and places and events escape her memory, she becomes extremely frustrated. Remarks are prefaced with "I know you'll think I'm a crazy old lady but...." She has spent her life caring for others but doesn't want to become a burden for anyone else. However, her deep and abiding Catholic faith also makes her say: "The Lord must have something in mind for me that I don't know about." Resignation colors her attitude about her life these days.

In the last five years, she has come to feel more and more useless and frequently expresses a wish to die. "I don't know why I'm still living? I fear being a vegetable and I wish for a quick, merciful death. I wish I would die, I'm of no good to anyone." A constant source of joy has been living next door to her. Her great grandson who is now 5. They spend a great deal of time talking. A new fear is that he will soon leave, especially if his mother remarries.

At various times, nuns from the Academy or convent have lived with her; but, she has resisted their intrusion into her domain. They "mess" in her kitchen and watch TV at "all" hours, not to mention the real sacrilege—rearranging the furniture and cluttering up rooms with plants. Everyone knows plants are for outside. She does not want to leave her home to live with anyone else. Her home since she was 16, it seems an extension of her being—more than a building. It is the site of the births of her children, her married life, the death place of her daughter and husband of almost 75 years of marriage. Giving up her home to live with someone else seems too large a price to pay.

The last alternative is the nursing home or old folks home. She has never been to a nursing home but has heard many horror stories about them. Somehow no one dwells on the positive aspect of these places. Aline doesn't want to go to one of these institutions. She hopes to die before the need should arise. Her youngest and geographically closest daughter has threatened her with the prospect for years. The daughter says: "You'll never live with me. When you can't do for yourself, you'll go to a home." Somehow having spent most of her adult life caring for invalids has given her an understanding of this quite virulent reaction—even though she rejected the nursing home option not once but three times in favor of home care provided by her. Aline felt that this was her duty and has said many times that she is just glad that she was able to care for them.

The other daughter has her mother over to spend most weekends and does most of her grocery and clothing shopping but feels that is enough of a contribution. She would not be willing to care for her mother full time. Perhaps, because of Aline's involvement with invalid family members, the two remaining daughters know what is involved in caring for an incontinent person. Both daughters are well acquainted with nursing homes through visits to friends and relatives. They consider it a plausible solution even in the face of their mother's resistance.

Monetary considerations would play an important part in any decision that would be made. Mrs. Smith has an income based on mineral leases and farm rental of property, as well as principal (which is never touched, heaven forbid!) of her husband's estate. Would this be adequate for prolonged home nursing care or nursing home care. Probably so. But, with the rate of inflation, who could say. There is no given time limit. It would drain the estate that the girls have so looked forward to inheriting. Would they

begrudge the money spent? Or, would they consider it a worthwhile price to be free of the responsibility of care? Both, I think.

The grandchildren and their spouses tend to feel that this should be the last resort. All of them harbor a horror of the atmosphere of the nursing home. But, none of them want to move in with her and she refuses to leave her home to reside with them. When she becomes totally unable to care for herself, will their attitude change?

No formal decision has been made at this time, nor has any real practical discussions been held. What has been done is the turning over of alternatives in each family member's mind. How much of the burden of care or monetary responsibility would each be willing to shoulder? What if the situation exists for years? Long lived women have been the rule in this family.

Until a crisis comes, after which she is no longer able to care for herself, conditions will remain stable.

Aline's grandparents: Charles Clay, m 10-27-1859, Therese Johnson (Opel. Ct. Hse, Mar. # 1944).

Angelas Durio, Aline's father's mother, Euphrosine Clay

DeValcourt, Theodore & Zoe Guidry, parents of Caroline, Edwin Smith's mother.

Caroline DeValcourt, b 1-4-1852 (SM Ch. v 9 # 28) Caroline DeValcourt m. 12-23-1879, Sylvester Smith (Opel. Ct. Hse: Mar # 11161) m Sylvester Smith 12-30-1879, (GC Ch v 4, p 704

Edwin's father: Sylvester Smith,
Sylvester's mother: Elizabeth Barry Smith "Grand Dame,"

- Charles Silvestre (Edwin M & Ann Elizabeth Barry) b 5-6-1858 (GC Ch v 2 p 169)
- Edwin, town undertaker, d 1949
- Theo
- Esmond
- Lily (housekeeper, made fat biscuits)
- Anne Marie (Edwin & Ann Elizabeth Barry) b. 3-7-1860 (GC Ch V 2, P 193

Durio, Alexandre & Azelie David, Angelas Durio's parents

Angelas Durio, Aline's father, b 10-12-1858 (Arnaudville Ch. V 2, p 16)

Aline's father: Angelas Durio, m. 10-18-1886 Euphrosine Clay (Opel. Ct. Hse. Mar. # 14187)

Angelas Durio, (Alexandre Lucain & d. Azelie David) m 10-18-1886, Euphrosine Clay (Arnaudville Ch. V 2, p 246)

Aline's mother: Clay, Euphrosine (of Charles & Therese Johnson) b. 7-31-1870 (Opel. Ch. V. 6, p 307) m. 10-18-1886, Angelas Durio (Arnaudville Ch. V 2 P. 246)

Clay, Euphrosine, m. 10-18-1886, Angelas Durio (Opel. Ch. Hse. Mar # 14187)

Children of Angelas Durio and Euphrosine Clay Durio

- Marie Litta, "Ita" b 9-25-1887(Arnaudville Ch. V4, p. 213
 - Betty
 - Marian, son killed in France in WW I
- Philomene Aline Durio, "Belle of the Woods," (Angelas & Euphrosine Clay) b 6/10/1889 (Arnaudville Ch. V4, P 277), d 1986
 - Myrtle, b 1/28/1907, d 1963
 - Minnie, b 12/2/1908, m Cyrus Roy, 7/13/1930, d 1962

Cyrus Roy, b 7-31-1907, Arnaudville LA, d 8,_ 1991, Lafayette LA, buried St. Charles Cemetery, Grand Coteau LA. Worked for the Corp of Engineers

- Edwin "Ed" Roy, b 7-1-1949
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- Leona Ann, 1/25/1912, m, 2/26/1938 Pearly Breaux
 - Ulyesse
 - Pat
 - Collette
- Edwina, b 1915, m 12/6/1941 Edwina, b 1915, m 12/6/1941, Henry Harper
 - Debby
 - Charles
- Angele Durio (Angelas & Euphrosine Clay) b. 5-30,1891; b, 6-3- 1891, Arnaudville Ch. V. 5, p 20
- Lilly
- Louise
- Jeanne
- Simon
- Charles
- John
- Yves