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Tribute to Hibernia Turbeville

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TRIBUTE TO HIBERNIA TURBEVILLE

JOHN H. McELHANEY*

Upon her retirement as head librarian of SMU's Underwood Law Library, Miss Turbeville immediately began a new career as the first full time librarian for the Dallas law firm, Locke, Purnell, Boren, Laney & Neely. The firm and its extensive and well-known collection¹ truly benefited from the eleven happy and productive years Miss Turbeville contributed, until her retirement in 1986.

Characteristically, Miss Turbeville brought organization, discipline, and a keen sense of humor to the task. She organized, catalogued, shelved, and re-shelved the collection. She carefully preserved rare, old books. She even initiated and devised a system to track and fine attorneys who were late in returning books to their shelves. But most of all, she brought to the task warmth, optimism, and vitality.

No bookish introvert, Miss Turbeville's keen interest in people, places, issues, and events spiced her interaction with all those around her. Subsequent confirmation of her positive spirit is contained within the pages of an autobiographical booklet she later compiled, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (1988), a collection of short essays written by Miss Turbeville for a creative writing course that she enjoyed after her retirement.

Here are some samples from this work of her own expressions about her childhood and adulthood experiences which well portray this remarkable woman:

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¹ For many years, the Locke Purnell firm library had been widely known as "the most nearly complete law library in private hands anywhere in the country." *A Texas Portrait of Maurice E. Locke*, 29 TEXAS B.J. 359 (May 1966).

First Hero

Miss Turbeville was born and raised in the East Texas town of Cooper in Delta County. Her father, Sam Turbeville, had been born on the fourth of July, and not surprisingly was known as "Uncle Sam." He served sixteen years as sheriff of Delta County and then served as a U.S. Marshall. To young Hibernia, he was certainly her first hero:

He was a tall, fine looking man who always had time to play with the children in the neighborhood. He pitched the ball for our hitting practice. He put up the rope for our tree swings. He settled scraps and arguments. He taught us songs and games. At night he let us have campouts and taught us names of the stars and how to build campfires and toast marshmallows. But best of all he taught us how to shoot a real gun! . . . our hero.

Cotton Picking

Hibernia and another ten-year-old girl longed to take the train to Dallas to visit the State Fair. To persuade their parents to allow the girls to make the trip, they proposed to earn the money to finance the trip by picking cotton:

When the first cotton popped out in the fields we took the little sacks our mothers had sewed for us to the closest field where we worked hard all day, picking about 25 or 50 pounds a day. That's when I discovered just how much a pound really was. Our parents told us for every penny we made they would match it.

A True Optimist

Hibernia recounts that early in her life her parents instilled in her the traits of optimism: "Hopefulness, cheerfulness, encouragement, enthusiasm, confidence and assurance." A living example was:

When I baked my first pie and the crust was so tough, Daddy bragged on it anyway and said he could swallow it even if he couldn't chew it. How could I help but turn into an optimist?

One of my favorite quotations is from Chaucer's *Ballade of Good Councel*:

What God doth send, receive in gladsomeness;
To wrestle for the world foretells a fall.
Forth, pilgrim for, up, thank God for all.
Hold the high way, they soul the pioneer.
And truth shall make thee free, there is no fear.'

Yes, being an optimist makes life so much easier and so much fun!

A Heart Which Was Young and Gay

Recalling “those carefree happy years between twenty and thirty,” Hibernia describes the purchase of:

[A] beautiful hand-beaded evening sweater, or overblouse, completely covered with pearls and light blue iridescent beads. It was bought for a special occasion—a dinner dance at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago on New Year’s Eve. I paid much too much for it, but it has proven worth every cent it cost—and much more! I wore it first with a light blue silk short skirt with shoes to match. It was an enchanting evening, that first time I wore it: however, there have been many more special occasions when it has been just right It has gone with me to New York, Miami, Nassau, San Francisco, Seattle and, of course, I’ve worn it several times in Dallas. . . . Just today, I got it down and examined it. If those beads could talk, how many exciting times they could tell. It is still beautiful, glimmering in the light, and believe it or not, it still fits me. Oh, if only those carefree, happy days could be repeated! Who knows, they just might be. It *does* still fit me. It is still beautiful and my heart is still young and gay!

Throughout her life, Miss Turbeville’s heart truly remained young and gay.

