Devine Memories

Homecoming, 2004

Bill Martin

One afternoon, about this time of the year in the late 1940s, waiting for my piano lesson with Miss Minnie Briscoe, in the little room she used at the back of the school auditorium, I stepped into the auditorium and heard a man introduced as the homecoming reunion speaker. He had graduated 40 years earlier, so that means he must have been around 58 years old. I wondered if he had been able to climb the stairs to the entrance all by himself and thought about how brave it was for a man of such great age to try to make sense in public.

Today, I realize that a young man like that might actually have felt just fine, was probably quite happy to be there, and, like me, honored to have been asked to speak. I'll try to make sense.

Old people, or, as Garrison Keillor puts it more gently, those of us on the trailing edge of the prime of life, also like to reminisce about the good old days, when life was simpler and hamburgers cost a quarter and we knew all our neighbors and we spent our summer evenings catching fireflies in a bottle or lying on our backs in the grass and looking up at the stars and thinking about how little and puny they were and how big and strong we were, and suspecting that, if they could see us, they must feel pretty insignificant.

Yes, we do like to reminisce. As I have picked my way through my storehouse of memories in preparing for this occasion, I have found some memories neat and stacked in orderly rows. Others are faded and frayed and covered with dust, making it harder to be sure I have them just right. Some are too personal to bring out in company. Some are painful and best left on the shelf. But many are pleasant and well worth remembering. Many of the people I remember, of course, are now dead, but perhaps my mentioning them can attest to the fact that they live in memory.

A few weeks ago, I was here for the funeral of my uncle, Alton Martin. As I almost always do on the relatively rare occasions that I come to or through Devine, I took some time to drive around, touching many of the roots that, for good or ill, tap in close to the center of my being.

Though I had seen much of it before, some of it made me sad.

The empty and boarded-up buildings along streets that once bustled with traffic and commerce, especially on Saturday. The former Devine Mill and Elevator, which my father built and kept clean and attractive, is now shabby and rundown. The Lunch Basket, the Corral, the Spot, Schott's Red and White, the IGA, Frontier Foods, Pugh's Shoe Shop, Barnes Jewelry, Griffin's Variety Store, Clarence Wernet's Gulf station—gone. (Clarence Wernet was the first grown-up I ever saw who wore sandals.)

The building that used to be the drugstore, owned in sequence by Hartley Howard, Bill Peacock, and Ike Day and doubled as the Greyhound bus station. Two doors down was the post office, Sid Malone, Postmaster. And in between, the barber shop, where I got haircuts every week from Austin DuBose, who noted that my hair was so thick I would never have to worry about being bald.

Some of what I saw surprised me. All that is left of the old Majestic Theatre is the concrete pad on which it stood. I went to many a movie in that theater and I am quite certain that an

entertainment palace of such grandeur as I remember could not have fit on that tiny little space.

The Bank of Texas building next door looks as good or maybe better than it did when it was Loggins and Lilly, but it is not the same. I never had much of an interest in either a ratskin or a ranch, but I did enjoy strolling through that wonderful old store and having Jack Tilley speak to me just like I was a real person. But the thing I remember most were those money machines. I thought it would be a wonderful job to pull the cord that would send those little change buggies whizzing all over the store. The only thing to match it would be riding the lift used by attendants in the parking garage at the Nix Hospital in San Antonio, taking them through a hole in the roof to upper floors. I went in there on my 60th birthday and saw that lift. It still looks exciting.

Down the street, between Miss Jean's MiLady Shop and the Kozy Korner Koffee Shop, past the fire station and the dry cleaners, Aaron McMillan's constable's office, Dr. Woods' office, and Tony Petrie's insurance agency, was the Devine News. I liked to go in there and watch Sims Stribling work at the Linotype machine and say hello to Charlie Payne Dubose. I once mentioned to Mr. Tom Burgess that Mr. Dubose looked tired. Mr. Burgess said Charlie Payne had looked like that ever since he had known him. He said he remembered the day he started school in the first grade and Charlie Payne looked like he could barely make it up the stairs.

At the telephone company in the house across the street, Mrs. Duke or Mrs. Stribling could make the connections between 52W and 119 and, if you asked, could tell you where the fire was. Across the street, under the spreading Hackberry tree, the Village Smithy stood, where Sherrill Stroud could be counted on for an imaginative and colorful account of local happenings.

Tucked in behind the blacksmith shop was a tiny little restaurant were Bertie Boettcher sold 20-cent hamburgers (and sissyburgers) to a crowd of us who raced there every school day at noon.

And on the back street near the depot was the little store owned and operated by Silas Berman and widely known as "the Jew store."

Often as not, walking around downtown, I would see Old Man Bob Redus. I wondered if "Old Man" was his first name. My father once asked a real old Mexican man just how old Bob Redus was. He laughed and said, in Spanish, that he didn't know but that when he was a boy, they were already calling him "Old Man Bob Redus."

Closer to my home, I drove by St. Joseph's Church, where the mysteries of the Catholic church were interpreted to me by the prominent lay theologian and rooster fighter, Sandy Vance.

Across the street from St. Joseph's stood First Baptist, with a stained-glass window that I thought must surely be as glorious as any in those storied cathedrals in faraway Europe across the sea. And inside, Pastor Don Rose did magic tricks at Vacation Bible School and showed slides of his trip to the Holy Land.

And on the other corner was that still grand home were Miss Minnie and Ms. Jean and Ms. Mattie lived, together with a complement of single lady schoolteachers who found rooms there.

From the Brooks family across the street from my house, I learned something of Pentecostal religion and of speaking in tongues, an experience I discussed with my students within the last two weeks.

I remember Bill Bain, banker and mayor. I was impressed that the mayor was my neighbor. I was also impressed that he had a swimming pool, even if it was only a metal pool and even if the temperature tended to rise to 98.6 when it was filled with neighborhood children.

I drove by the softball field, just a block from our home. I remember lying awake on our screened-in porch and listening to Merlin Tilley and, later, Don Stroud announcing the games at night. Sometimes, when I went to the games, Don let me keep score in the booth.

I remember another scene at the park, less pleasant, when Joe Vance, who had once played for the New York Yankees, organized a baseball team and arranged for an afternoon game with a Mexican boys team. We played one inning, and then two ladies from town drove up and told us we would have to stop, since Mexicans were not allowed to play on that field. I remember the shame I felt for being part of a system of rules like that. I'm glad that doesn't happen as easily anymore. And I remember when my mother, who was one of those women, told me many years later that she knew she had been terribly wrong.

But we were ahead of the curve on some measures, perhaps without thinking about it. If we had been asked if Devine was tolerant of what we now call "trans-gendered" people, I suspect we might have said, "No! Of course not! That's unthinkable." But if someone had asked, "Well, what about that person there, the one who dresses and acts like a man?" we probably would have said, "But that's Lola Belle. We know her." We also had gays among our peers. We probably didn't recognize it at the time, but as we look back on most of those we know about, it is clear that their orientation was fixed early in life, not wickedly chosen as adults. There are lessons to be drawn from these examples.

When I compare my life as a small-town boy with that of my children and grandchildren, who have grown up in cities with populations in the millions, I recognize that I suffered some deprivations. There were many things I did not see or do or know as a consequence of living in a small town. But there were many things I did see and do and know about, for the same reason, that my children and grandchildren do not.

In a typical urban neighborhood, children experience a slice, often a rather thin slice. Most of the people they see are much alike in age, in background, in social class. In the Devine in which our class grew up, we experienced something of a microcosm—a world that was small, in some ways limited, but in some ways more complete, since we came into regular contact with the whole range—white and brown and black, old and young, affluent and poor, intellectually vital and dismally ignorant, emotionally healthy and insane, generous and loving, and spiteful and mean-spirited.

These were not just types to me—people read about in books or seen in movies or on television. They were real people. I knew their names and where they lived and where they worked and where they went to church. I think my life and work have been richer for that information. The memories of them continue to shape what I am and do, as a sociologist, a teacher, and writer.

I remember when stores closed and school let out early for funerals because almost invariably, we knew the person who had died.

I remember playing baseball with Margaret Carter. And seeing Jimmy Adams sit on the bench of the women's softball team.

Of course, as I have thought about a class reunion, most of my memories have been about school and teachers.

I remember the first day I came to the second grade in Devine. A little blonde girl sat in front of me and I thought she was just beautiful. I liked the way her white socks peeked over the top of her brown hightop shoes. And over the years, I continue to think that Mary Williams was an

awfully pretty girl.

I remember standing in the hall for a week after putting my foot in Norma Kay Tilley's face as she climbed the ladder behind me on the slide. The teachers asked me why I did it. I didn't know then and I don't know till this day, but I did it. I remember the shoes I was wearing. I didn't want to wear them for a while.

I remember Ms. Zettie Briscoe, who taught us how to sing, "Oats, Peas, Beans, and Barley Grow" and had several of us sing something each morning. My most vivid memory of those sessions was the morning Melvin Ehlinger sang the jingle for Halo Shampoo. Second was when Thomasine Carter sang "Mr. Froggy Went A-courting," complete with a full range of expression.

And Miss Florence Thompson, who was not a silly woman. She emphasized arithmetic and spelling. Once, on the day before our fourth-grade class was to compete against the seventh grade in the spelling contest, I boasted to Larry Stroud, a seventh grader, that we would win. We did, but I missed the first word I was given. Larry Stroud noticed. The word was "pocket." To my surprise, it contains a "c."

Another event in Miss Thompson's fourth grade was more momentous. I wrote a story that she read aloud to the class—and they laughed. It was the first time I realized I could make people laugh with something I had written. It was a great moment.

I remember when June and Kathryn Martin moved to Devine at about that time, maybe a year later, and how impressed I was that they had lived in Peru and had llama-skin rugs and a shortwave radio. June said a poem, "The Touch of the Master's Hand," and Kathryn sang about "The Lady from 29 Palms" who had 29 Cadillacs.

I remember when Mrs. McMath let her class keep birds and rabbits and squirrels and mice and rats and ticks and fleas. I was never in her class, but I peeked in the door from the hall and was amazed.

I remember how, over the summer, the school ground would become completely covered in goatheads that would puncture a bicycle tire or a tennis shoe. And Johnny and Eddie Hutzler would walk across them barefooted, like Jesus walking on the water.

I remember coming to school early to play "flies and skinners" and marbles and tops and mumbly-peg, and wondering how people knew when marble season and top season and mumbley-peg season were supposed to begin and end, and why I wasn't much good at any of them, and being told by Louis Irwin (Pinky) Davis that it was because I was a town boy, and town boys weren't as good as country boys at things like that. I'm not sure why it didn't occur to me that Pinky had spent many of his early years in town, in the house right across the street from the "Can't Sag Gates" Driscoll Lumber Company, but I was happy to have an explanation.

I wasn't good at more conventional sports either, as you may remember. I was chosen last at recess and PE on virtually all of the Mondays of my young life, except for one year when we had a new boy who had rheumatic fever and could not run at all. I don't remember his name—I think it may have been Tommy—but I bless his memory and I thought rheumatic fever was a wonderful disease. For the record, I turned out to be a pretty good athlete, even winning some intramural tournaments in badminton and squash.

I remember entering junior high and not only turning left at the water fountain but going up a short flight of stairs to get to our classrooms.

And there we found Miss Rives Cox, a thin, hard, scary woman with blue gums. She terrified small children until we got into her class and found out that she was droll, a bit of a soft touch, and read stories to us on Friday. And we heard that she had a boyfriend who flew her around in an airplane. I like to think it was true.

I remember Mrs. Ruth Allen, the first live Episcopalian I had ever seen. She taught me one of the most valuable lessons I ever learned in school: how to diagram sentences. Over the years at Rice, I have handed back many papers covered with red markings and reminders that nouns and verbs should agree in number with their antecedents, and that if you use the nominative case where the objective case is called for, as in such phrases as "between you and I" or "I visited with he and Lillian," you will go to hell. Students sometime ask where I learned all those rules. And I tell them, "from Mrs. Ruth Allen in the sixth grade in Devine, Texas." We sometimes called her "Old Lady Allen." I've done the math and figured she was probably about 35. 37 tops.

Mrs. Allen was not the only person whose age I misperceived. When television first came to town, Frank and Josephine Bain sometimes invited me up to watch the wrestling matches from the Wrestlethon in San Antonio. One night, a song came on at some point and Frank and Josephine started dancing to it. I was quietly amazed and wondered if I would still be as frisky and spry as they were when I was 35 or so, with one foot in the grave.

I remember being a member of W. K. Williams's scout troop, and also of being a member of Father Gerald Boehm's scout troop. Changing scout troops was a lot like changing religions, but my reasons were quite simple. Father Boehm had a motor boat with a surfboard and he let me drive his Studebaker with thirteen lights. I confess to being a shallow ecumenist.

I remember Miss Minnie Briscoe's teaching piano and how good Alta Faye Lilly and Patricia Busby and Charlene and Ora Lee Bippert were. I could read the notes and play the piano, but they were musicians. Ora Lee and Charlene used to wear a little black velvet ribbon around their necks and sometimes they hung a piano medal on it. I thought that looked really sharp.

Mrs. Stoddard taught us arithmetic and geography. I still know some arithmetic. About all I remember from geography is that most nations of the world exported hemp, copra, and jute. No one knew why.

Mrs. McAnnally taught us how our government is supposed to work. As innocent children, we believed her.

I remember that Chester Morris was the first boy in town to get a Toni home permanent, and that Bertha Pulido gave me one, and then my dad gave me $2.75 to cut it off, which in those days left me with considerable change.

I remember that Frank Killough got his growth before he got his coordination, and Santos Rodriguez got his coordination first and stopped with that.

I remember a Southern School Assembly program when David Schott let a trick-shot artist shoot a quarter out from between his fingers from halfway back in the auditorium. It might have been a nickel. I think about that every once in a while and try to figure out how much it would cut your typing speed to have a finger shot off. And I also recognize that the courage and nerves of steel that he showed on that particular occasion may have played a role in his becoming a general in the United States Army, surely the highest military rank ever earned by any citizen of this community.

I remember one night at a football game when Sam Ridgway could be heard saying, as he stood out a good deal larger than anyone else on the field, "I don't want to hurt anybody." Dr. Ridgeway, as many of you know, is often referred to as the Dolphin Doctor, because of his extensive and important scientific work with dolphins. There were not many dolphins out on the canal, but Sam and dolphins both have a friendly and gentle nature and they seem to have adapted to each other quite well.

I remember many nights when the football game was over and I wished I could walk across the field with a girl instead of a bass clarinet. It was hard to understand how someone who had started preaching at fourteen, could type 90 words a minute, did magic tricks, and played the bass clarinet was not hugely attractive to girls.

I remember John Harlan Dubose's fine automobiles. His was the first car I ever saw that had electric windows. I tricked my sister into putting her arm in it one day and rolled up the window. She didn't think it was much of a trick. Neither did my parents.

John Harlan wasn't the only one with an outstanding car. Leo Haass and Velda Alexander had cars whose windows were not only not electric, but nonexistent. They also lacked a roof and sides.

I remember Mrs. Roundtree, who would often ask what we found to be so "excruciatingly" funny. I loved practicing the word.

I remember Leo Bohl, who, when I was having difficulty learning to recognize leaves—I am still not exactly fraught with woodsy lore—spent an afternoon walking with me in fields and along the road, teaching me how to identify them. I have forgotten what I learned about leaves, but not what I learned about the importance of kindness and generosity in teaching. When last we met as a sizable class, thirteen years ago, David Schott talked about how Leo Bohl had literally changed his life by seeing to it that he was able to attend Texas A&I with the aid of an ROTC scholarship.

Henry Moss showed us how to perform a wide range of delicate surgical operations and told us about his experiences in the war. I remember the morning Sandy Vance asked, "Mr. Moss, did you ever kill anybody?" And Mr. Moss said, "Well, Sandy, I shot at some." I was impressed at the reality of war. I still am. I remember Ag field trips when I was terrorized by larger boys wielding Burdizzos. I also remember the Halloween when Johnny Roberson and I went to Mr. Moss's house, woke him up to Trick or Treat, and were given a pan of cold cornbread.

Chester Carter taught us humor and patience and faith in the future, since few occupations require more of all three than that of high-school band director.

I remember that Bill McCutcheon did some wonderful trick basketball shots, and I remember watching his lovely wife Mary Beth perform at various games as well. After we got a TV set, the Carters and the McCutcheons often came over on Wednesdays to watch wrestling. Sometimes afterward, Mary Beth would wrestle with me on the floor. On those nights, my dreams were troubled.

I suppose I learned some algebra from Barney Barnhart, though on the rare occasions I am called on to use it, I am inclined to round pi off to three; it makes calculations easier. But what I remember most about him is that he helped me stretch my thigh muscles until I could put my head on my knee in a hurdler's pattern, a feat I can still perform.

Of course, Lucille Day was important to me. She could be merciless if you were stupid, on either

a permanent or temporary basis, but she insisted that thinking and learning were intrinsically good, perhaps the highest of all values. And she added to our lives not only on knowledge of maps and history and current events, but also an extensive folklore about a whole cast of relatives most of us never met. One day she gave us long strips of paper and asked us to take crayons of any two colors and start in the middle by drawing two light vertical stripes, then move toward the ends with the two colors growing darker and darker. Then she had us turn the strips around so that the two dark ends meet. Her point was that extremism of either the left or the right look pretty much the same. I have dedicated much of my scholarly life to the study of extremists—political, moral, and religious—and on numerous times when my students have come to realize that extremists on the left and right have a great deal in common, I tell them about that simple little exercise Mrs. Day assigned us. It still makes sense.

Zulema Klingeman taught us about Silas Marner and Julius Caesar and provided encouragement and love when it was sorely needed. By the way, I listened to Silas Marner on a recorded book three or four years ago and it turns out to be quite a wonderful novel, something I did not discern in the 12th grade. If you are looking for a good book, you might give it another try.

I remember Mr. Jack Klingeman. I found him to be wise and balanced and kind, but most of all I was impressed by his ability to make a good speech impromptu—at a pep rally, an assembly program, at the death of Franklin Roosevelt. I thought he was probably the best who had ever been, wondered how he did it, and figured that if he could write some of those speeches down on the backs of envelopes, schoolchildren would be memorizing them generations later. Even today, when I'm asked to say a few words in public without having been notified beforehand, I sometimes think, "If I can just do it like Mr. Klingeman, I'll be fine." In fact, I admired him so much that I still feel bad about the time I drove his new Jaguar 109 mph. Jackie Klingeman was in the car and said it was all right.

I remember Principal Bill Howard, who had a gold Hudson that he drove at speeds greater than those allowed by law, which made me apprehensive when I learned he would be driving the bus on our senior trip.

That was a great trip, all the way through New Mexico and on to Colorado Springs. Every morning, Bill Howard would pass out money that we had been collecting since third grade. I remember going bowling in Amarillo on a Sunday night, which was at that time the most sinful thing I had ever done in a group. In Colorado Springs, we visited something called the Mystery Spot. It was one of those tilted houses, clearly an optical illusion, designed to make you think gravity had gone awry. But I had seen something similar on a television program called, "You Ask for It," and I insisted it was a real gravitational anomaly. Some of you pointed out at the time that I was mistaken. Over the years, and after finding it unlikely that similar gravitational anomalies would also occur at Six Flags and Astroworld, I have come to accept your judgment.

The Luckiest Generation

When the class of '54 walked across the stage half a century ago, our lives lay mostly ahead. Today, no matter how good we may feel, we know that our lives lie mostly behind. Tom Brokaw has written persuasively about what he called "The Greatest Generation," the generation that fought World War II and led America in its postwar economic recovery and rise to its status as the richest and most powerful nation in the world.

I think it possible that our generation might fairly be called the Luckiest Generation. We missed

the Depression, though not the stories from our parents. While we may have had our economic ups and downs, it was largely true that jobs were available and it was possible to support a family on what they paid. For many today, that is no longer true.

Not all, but most of us grew up in families with two parents who knew where we were most of the time and who expected us to be home when they said so. Sadly, only 35 percent of children have that situation today.

The first profanity we ever heard in the movie was when Clark Gable told Vivien Leigh, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." And the movie, "The Moon is Blue," was banned because the script contained the word, "virgin." Compare that to the language our grandchildren hear in contemporary movies and TV shows. It does appear to be true, however, that virgins are still not allowed.

If we saw any pornography at all, it was in the form of little eight-page comic books someone had brought back from Nuevo Laredo, and they lacked a certain realism. Now, each day when I pull down my e-mail, I am offered remarkable opportunities to enlarge and enhance my life, to meet women of varying ages and of great beauty and discretion, who profess to be impressively hospitable. And, if I decide to accept the offer of a gentleman from Africa who proposes to give me a share of $75 million for letting him keep that money in my bank account for just a few days, I should be able to show them quite a good time.

Most of us, perhaps all of us, missed the experience of war, even if we served in the military. We were too young for World War II and Korea, too old for Vietnam and the Gulf War. And most of our children and many of our grandchildren have also, by dint of the time of their birth, escaped war. Our country needs a strong military and I honor and deeply appreciate those who have served and those who serve today, but I have learned too much about war not to be grateful that we didn't have to fight one.

We have lived in an age when there seemed to be enough fossil fuel to last forever, and we behaved accordingly. Now, we know we were mistaken. Geologists disagree over just how much oil remains under the surface of the planet, but no one imagines it is infinite. And the world will never be the same.

And perhaps most significant of all, we have lived in unbelievably interesting times. It would be foolish to say that no generation will ever see as much change as we have seen. The stunning pace at which major changes are occurring today clearly belies that. It is not foolish to say that no other previous generation in history, at least when taken together with our parents' generation, has seen the kind of change we have seen and that it may be—*may be*, not certainly will be—that no generation will ever again sit astride such unimaginable changes, at least in part because at this point nothing anyone might tell us about the future any longer seems unimaginable. We have gotten far more than a taste.

Think of the changes we have witnessed. The first jets, almost always called "jet planes," were so unusual that Mrs. Stoddard would let us step to the back window to watch them fly over and to marvel at the vapor trails they left. And now, members of our class have ridden the silver wonders to destinations all around the world.

When television first appeared in our lives, there was nothing to watch but a test pattern until 5:00 or so in the evening. And then, all we were able to see was Cecil the Seasick Sea Serpent, Red River Dave, and, as mentioned, wrestling from the San Antonio and, on Saturday nights,

from St. Nicholas Arena in New York City, New York. Today, we have hundreds of choices, 24 hours a day, enabling us to see Martha Stewart go to prison, follow the Scott Peterson trial with expert commentary, and watch Shawshank Redemption every day of the week.

In 1943, Thomas Watson, president of IBM, said, "I think there's a market for maybe five computers." Most of us own at least five computers. If not desktops and laptops, then cars, watches, microwave ovens, digital cameras and recorders, cable and satellite television, Palm Pilots, iPods, etc. I have almost come to believe that, if you have enough computers, you don't need friends. Not really. Bob Busby, whom I have seen only twice in well more than 40 years, sends many pieces of inspirational spam and dire political warning several times a week. And I am in touch with a range of people from various segments of my life and from whom I have been disconnected for decades. Perhaps nothing underscores the speed of change more than developments in computers. If I said to you, "This morning, I downloaded a 20 MB PDF file from a URL I googled from my home page," most of you would know what I meant. Ten years ago, just about the only thing in that sentence that would have made any sense was, "This morning."

Computers, of course, are a godsend to teachers. If I want to show my students a Navajo sand painting or check the date of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan or pull down pictures of millions of Muslims on the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, or get the latest count of political parties in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, or see how the Arab TV network Al Jazeera is describing an event in the war, I can do it in an instant, in my office, in the classroom, or at Starbucks.

I don't really mind growing older, especially since there's not an attractive alternative, but I do wish I had another 40 years to use this wonderful technology.

Think of how computers and related technology have revolutionized medicine. In 1993, when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I used an old search engine called Gopher to find one website that dealt with the disease. It was aimed at physicians and contained a typed manuscript of a medical conference. All the rest I had to learn in the library at the Texas Medical Center.

After successful surgery, I wrote a book that was published in the fall of 1994. I mounted a rudimentary website. By that time, there were nine sites dealing with that disease. Last week, I typed prostate cancer into Google and, in less than a second, it had located 1,760,000 URLs, listed in order of relevance. (Four years later, on November 1, 2008, the number was 13,300,000. Today, January 19, 2021, it found 133,000,000 in 0.86 seconds.)

I have counseled literally hundreds of men with prostate cancer over the Net, men from all over the world. And the surgery that only ten years ago involved quite a long scar and two weeks in the hospital has been simplified to five or six tiny incisions, and can be performed robotically on a person in another city or country.

And of course, it goes far beyond that. Instead of stopping at the gas station to pick up a road map, we click on MapQuest or, more and more, check the GPS device in a car that tells us exactly where we are. Not long ago, I attended a program that featured pictures taken through telescopes mounted on satellites in geosynchronous orbit 300 miles above the Earth. We saw ocean currents circle the planet and weather systems developing and running their course. And at one point, the professor in charge of the presentation homed in on the building in which we were sitting and, given a street address, could check the condition of the roof of any house in Houston.

In our remaining years, I hope we will do what we can do to improve our world. I think parties and administrations can make a considerable difference, but I want to be nonpartisan. I hope we will seek understanding among cultures, starting with the cultures immediately around us. We can help preserve the environment and work for a sustainable life for our children and grandchildren.

I hope we will care for the poor. I was pleased to learn that this community still cares for Eddie Hutzler. That is appropriate and really quite lovely. But Eddie Hutzler is not the only person in need. It is worth noting that the Bible contains 2000 scriptures dealing with poverty and the responsibility religious and moral people have for them. I am reliably told that the people of Devine still care for each other, still rally round when people are sick or in need. We experienced that as children. We should practice it as adults and tell our grandchildren it is important.

Finally, whether you live in Devine or somewhere else, if you want to pass on the blessings we have received to future generations, never forget the importance of education. Think carefully before you vote against a school bond issue. Honor those who teach your children and grandchildren and the other children of your communities. And pay them enough to keep them in the ranks and to attract other capable people to that vital profession.

I could go on. I have already gone on, perhaps too long. I have not run out of memories, but I have run out of time. I hope you will not think I have been too self-indulgent. I think memories are important. They can make us sad, make us happy, make us reflect. They can provide us with interpretive power over our lives, with the capacity to understand how we have come to this point, and to enhance the possibility of helping determine where the rest of our lives will lead. Memories are exceedingly significant. They are one of the key characteristics that make humans distinctive, of all God's creatures. I invite you to have some.