

A Tribute to My Friend

Suzanne Oliver Trefny entered first grade at the old Cradock High School in 1945. So did I. But what I knew, and Suzie didn't know, was that she would be my best friend. I picked her out because she had such a big smile and was always laughing, either with or at someone else in class. I needed that laughter, too. I wanted life in the first grade to be fun, just the way it seemed always to be for her.

Years later, I came to the realization that I was born without a sense of humor. Thanks to Suzie, I learned how to enjoy the humor in life and to look for it in little situations. And if the situation didn't exist, I learned how, with Suzie's help, to make it happen. No, we were not really mischievous, we didn't play tricks on other people, and we certainly didn't devise our fun at someone else's expense. We invented our own fun.

There was the time we climbed the steep steps to the attic at my home where we discovered some treasures inside a cedar chest—vintage clothes that somehow fit us: long skirts and silk blouses, broad-brimmed hats with feather trimmings, pointed toed shoes that laced halfway up the calf. Gloves, fans, and boas made the finishing touches to these most authentic outfits. When we looked in the mirror and then at each other, we could not contain our laughter. A reincarnation of two Civil War wives waiting for their soldiers to return?

This had to be shared, and Robert Copeland's family lived in the next block of Channing Avenue. We would pay a surprise visit to Mrs. Copeland, who had a reputation of being something of a prankster herself. Besides, it was Sunday evening and getting dark enough in our Cradock neighborhood that we wouldn't pose a spectacle or attract too much attention as we set off down the street in our disguises. Mrs. Copeland's uncontrollable laughter was all the reassurance we needed. And when she suggested to go to evening services at Cradock Baptist Church, we took on the challenge.

The service had already begun, and as the congregation was finishing the last verse of a hymn, Suzie and I slipped unseen into the back pew of the church. I recall a strange combination of feelings, that we didn't want to be discovered but we wanted to know what reaction we might elicit when someone saw us. The escapade was aborted, however, when we simultaneously turned to look at each other—we nearly exploded as we contained our laughter.

Rather than cause a spectacle, we slipped out of the sanctuary, sides aching from gales of laughter, and we continued to laugh all the way home! Thanks, Suzie, for being my partner in deception, for helping me learn to find or make humor part of my life. Whether were selling Girl Scout cookies door to door or daring each other to climb the front steps of the abandoned house on Prospect Parkway (It was haunted, of course!), or learning to make her favorite bean salad to quell our post-midnight hunger during a sleep-over at her house—we did have fun growing up in Cradock together.

She brought laughter to my life and sunshine to my heart. For that gift and the memories of good times, I am extremely grateful to Suzie.

Alma Brown Hall