

## **Eulogy for Verdie Bolner Haydel, Wife of Sitges P. Haydel**

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By Jim Bolner, Sr.

I was truly blessed in life to be from a large and loving family. I was blessed to have two sisters, Verdie and Zulie, and six brothers, Kelsie, Henry, Ollie, Daniel, Richard, and Dale. Throughout their lives, my brothers and sisters were all close to each other. We owe our closeness to our caring and loving parents, Albert and Almeda, whose lives gave us a model for living: be gentle, be generous, be open, whenever possible avoid conflict and confrontation, keep no grudges, praise the accomplishments of others, encourage each other, and—very importantly---always keep a sense of humor. For parents raising a large family during the depression, to instill such characteristics was truly an accomplishment.

My sisters, Verdie and Zulie, personified for me all those qualities which are at the core of our family's life—gentleness, generosity, openness, and a deep affection which guides all relationships. My sisters were both beautiful and wonderful. All of us remember Verdie as a happy and friendly person. She and Sitges, her devoted husband who was taken from this place last February, had four children: Paul Hardy, Penny Ann, Mary Lee, and Crandall, nine grandchildren, four great-grand children, and a number of step-great grandchildren. Many of us here know the family and can see in their lives how Verdie and Sitges succeeded as parents, grandparents, and as members of this community.

Verdie moved to Franklin in 1939 and immediately everyone in Franklin became her friend. These were difficult times economically, and Verdie was first employed as a waitress, then as a grocery clerk, then a grocery store manager. Later she clerked in Edsel Haydel's cleaners. Verdie and Sitges were married in 1943 while Sitges was in the service. After the children were born, she became a full-time mother and a part-time seamstress. She loved doing alterations, largely because she took great pride in her work, but also because as folks dropped off and picked up clothing items there was a heavy traffic in news about family and events around town. I don't believe I ever went to the Haydel house on Sanders street when there was not someone dropping in—either to bring alterations or just to visit.

Her Catholic faith figured prominently in her life. Besides faithful attendance at church and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, she belonged to a number of organizations—the Ladies' Altar Society, the King's Daughter's, and Come Lord Jesus. She and Sitges were strong supporters of St. John and Hanson schools. They cooked many a jambalaya and made many chicken salad sandwiches to raise money for the schools. There is a story circulating around Franklin that

once she and Sitges poisoned all of Franklin with bad chicken salad sandwiches.

And Verdie was fun-loving. After Sitges' retirement they took several bus tours to various sites outside Louisiana, trips which Verdie thoroughly enjoyed. For a long time Verdie and Sitges belonged to a poker club made up of four couples: themselves, Irma and Lionel Rodriguez, Happy and Rosine Anderson, and Martha and Pete Gardner. They met religiously on Friday nights. Irma recounts that at first they played cards and shared a meal, then as they got older and preparing a meal became more stressful, they downgraded to hors d'oeuvres with their poker and finally during the later years, they just ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and played cards. When she was able, however, Verdie was a wonderful cook—although she consistently claimed that she was Sitges' student in the kitchen.

Many of you here know that Verdie was always there when friends and family needed her. When our mother could no longer live alone in the country, Verdie, with our dear sister, Zulie, took her in and cared for her. I lived with Verdie during my senior year in High School, after she and Zulie decided that I should come to Hanson because it was more of a challenge than the school I had been attending in the country. When I became ill during my first year in college, I again stayed with Verdie and Sitges so she could help care for me.

But nothing exemplifies Verdie's character more than the deep love she had for her husband. When I said to Mary Lee and Penny that I admired the way they along with Paul and Crandall faithfully cared for their parents when they were ill, Mary Lee responded, "I loved my Mama and my Daddy. I just loved being with them. This gave me more than I ever gave to them." Verdie was proud of her family, especially her grandchildren—and they returned her attention with love and affection. For Missy and Al, Zulie's children, Verdie became a surrogate mother after Zulie passed away and surrogate grandmother for their children.

The telephone was invented for Verdie. She loved to call her family and friends. And she loved to send cards, sometimes just to say "I was thinking of you." I will miss the early morning phone calls from Verdie, and the way that she always made me feel proud of whatever I had done or was about to undertake.

As we look back on Verdie's life, it is human and normal that we grieve her leaving us, but let us be grateful for all that she has given to us. Let us reflect upon all the contributions she made to the community, to the church, and to her family. For me, personally, she has always challenged me—to work hard and to do good. For all of us who knew and loved her, let us give thanks that she also challenged us—and that her memory will continue to challenge us—to be more loving, more generous, more open, and more faithful.