



GARY HEBERT'S LIFE

Gary James Hebert was born June 15, 1929 to James Prosper and Pansy Percle Hebert in his parents' home at what is now 57809 Laville Street in North Plaquemine (formerly known as Turnerville), the area located just north of the Plaquemine Lock and Gary J. Hebert Memorial Lockhouse. He lived with his parents and seven siblings in Turnerville until he graduated from St. John High School in 1947. The family lived in several houses in the area until 1939 when they settled into the family home, built by James P. Hebert and Tracey Chapman, at what is now 57940 Government St. At the time the home was built the street was part of the Gay-Union Plantation and was known as Gay Street. Four employees of the U.S. Government Lock including James P. Hebert, Tracey Chapman, Bill Rivet and Clarence Langlois, built homes on Gay Street. At this time they petitioned the Iberville Parish Police Jury to have the name officially changed to Government Street.

Gary's father began working at the U.S. Government Lock complex at the age of 21, and worked as a Lockman and mechanic for 18 years, from approximately 1924 to 1942. The children would walk to St. Basil's from their home in North Plaquemine. They were brought across the Lock gates by their father each time they crossed. Gary's oldest sister, Ruth Hebert Gascon, remembers going to the mechanics' shop and meeting her father who would hold each child's hand as they crossed the gates one at a time. This precaution was always taken, especially following the drowning of seven-year-old Murphy Loupe who tripped and fell through the metal bars on the Lock gates and drowned in the late 1920's. A wire fence was placed along the walkway next to the metal bars following the tragic accident.

James P. Hebert left his position at the Lock in 1942 and went to work for the Kansas City Bridge Company, building marine equipment for the World War II effort. Following the war, he and Tracey Chapman went into the construction business, building houses in the Plaquemine area, and then into the service station business. Several years later, they also went into

the glass business, forming Plaquemine Glass Works, which they operated until they retired.

Gary and other children living in Turnerville often played on the Lock grounds during his childhood. These fond memories of the Lock complex had a lasting impression on him, and he was moved to fight long and hard to save the area from destruction in the 1970s. In addition, Gary had much foresight and was a preservationist at heart. He would have fought to save the Lock property even if he had not been so attached to it.

Gary's elementary school years were spent at St. Basil's Academy, where he seemed to excel in mischievous activity. He was expelled for being "too bad for the nuns to handle." On one occasion he exasperated the nuns so that they said prayers over his head for God to make him good. During his teen years, Gary had a newspaper route, and he delivered milk for Badeaux's Dairy, often rising as early as 3 a.m. for work. He also worked at Collura's Grocery Store on Saturdays, working in the store and delivering groceries until late in the evening. He held three jobs, in addition to attending school, at one time during his high school years.

Gary graduated from St. John High School with honors in 1947. He received numerous awards as school newspaper editor, outstanding senior and king of the Prom. He received a music award for writing the St. John Alma Mater, the same alma mater sung at the school today. And, he received the American Legion Award for outstanding service and leadership.

He studied to be a priest at St. Joseph's Seminary near Covington, Louisiana from 1947 to 1951, and then Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans in 1951 and 1952. He decided that the priesthood was not his calling and returned to his hometown. He worked at the U.S. Government Lock doing office work for a brief period, then worked for six months at Kaiser Aluminum in Baton Rouge, and for three years as an advertising representative at the Morning Advocate before starting the Plaquemine POST in 1957. We married in 1956, and six weeks after the birth of our first child, Gary James Jr., we established the Plaquemine POST. The first edition of the newspaper appeared May 9, 1957.

We started the newspaper with a \$2,500 loan co-signed by Gary's father and operated for several months out of our apartment. As the only staff members, we worked long hours to cover events, write government, society and sports articles, take photos, deliver the paper and handle all the other aspects of the business.

We moved the business to a larger building on Main Street, then to a building on Bayou Road, and finally built an office in 1966, complete with a two-color press. By that time we had three more children, Mary Eleanor (Ellie), Gerald David (Jerry), and John Jerome.

By 1973 we bought out the competing newspaper corporation, publishers of the *Iberville South* and *White Castle Times*. The name of the paper was changed to the POST/SOUTH.

A brand new four-color press was installed in 1973. Under Gary's leadership and with his creativity, the newspaper flourished, winning hundreds of awards for excellence in the Louisiana Press Association newspaper contests. The newspaper also received national recognition, three times being named top award-winning weekly newspaper in the nation in National Newspaper Association (NNA) contests. It also received the NNA's prestigious Community Service Award in 1973 for the three-year fight to save the U.S. Government Lock and Lockhouse from destruction.

Gary was active in community, state and professional organizations. He was a member of St. John Catholic Church, St. John School Alumni Association, St. John Fathers Club, Knights of Columbus Council 970, a charter member of the Msgr. Leonard Robin Assembly, Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus, the Louisiana Press Association and the National Newspaper Association.

As Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus, he founded the annual International Acadian Festival and served as its chairman for three years. He was appointed to the state Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, and served as state chairman of the National Newspaper Association for several years.

He conducted workshops on newspaper design throughout the South, served as a guest lecturer at LSU's School of Journalism, and judged

numerous state and national newspaper competitions. During his 38-year tenure as editor and publisher, the POST/SOUTH received over 600 awards for every aspect of weekly newspaper excellence. He also received numerous community service awards.

Gary retired from his position as editor of the POST/SOUTH in the spring of 1994 because of health problems due to heart disease. My daughter Ellie and I continued the operation of the newspaper until April 2000 when we sold the operation to Liberty Group Publishing of Chicago. Gary continued to write a column and assist at the newspaper until his death on August 29, 1994.

After his death, awards were established in his honor by community organizations and the Louisiana Press Association. The Gary J. Hebert Memorial Award is presented to the Grand Marshal of the International Acadian Festival each year, and the Louisiana Press Association presents the Gary Hebert Award for design excellence in the weekly newspaper competition each year. The historic lockhouse which he saved, was renamed the Gary James Hebert Memorial Lockhouse in November, 1995.