



## Hospice chaplain tells story of faith, trauma and renewal

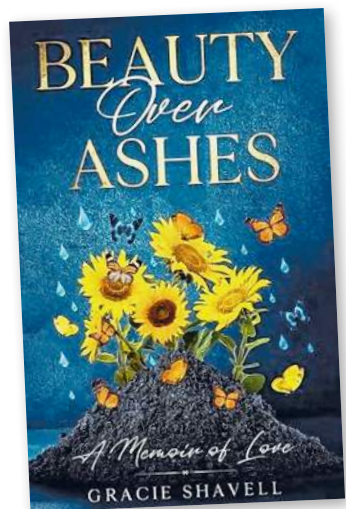
Don't expect a long read when you pick up Gracie Shavell's first book, "Beauty Over Ashes: A Memoir of Love."

But do expect a powerful one as the Baton Rouge hospice chaplain and Bethany Church member shares her deeply personal journey from child trauma to her strong faith.

Though concise at a mere 45 pages, "Beauty Over Ashes" packs a punch, beginning with the impactful opening chapter titled "El Nehekumah: The God Who Gives Comfort." Shavell quickly takes readers to that fateful day of March 1996, when her mother suffered what turned out to be a fatal seizure.

That was also the day that young Shavell showed the instincts that now guide her work with hospice patients.

"I vividly remember comforting my older cousins who were in my bedroom awaiting the final verdict of my mother's status," Shavell writes. "I went to them to comfort them. I remember hugging them and telling them that 'Everything is going to be okay.' It was at that moment that four-year-old me acted like a caregiver and the caregiving hasn't ended."



Shavell's road to caregiver wasn't without its challenges and pain.

It wasn't until her early teen years that growing up without a mother caused Shavell to have bitterness, anger and resentment toward God.

More family deaths only compounded her resentment.

"As life began to change for me, the older I became, I battled with how a loving God would allow me to go through such an early age," writes Shavell, a native of Starkville, Mississippi.

Her world grew dark. She became rebellious and suicidal. She explored demonic activities and engaged in "sexual sin." The trauma of losing her mother so young affected her until she was 30, Shavell writes.

However, through school and street ministry work in New Orleans, Shavell found purpose and a relationship with God — though she had grown up in the church — that has remained unwavering.

"My surrender to the Lord on December 31, 2009, was only the beginning of my transformation into being a 'new creation in Christ.' The more I surrendered to the Lord, the more my life began to reflect that surrender," Shavell wrote.

She devotes the remainder of the book to sharing her spiritual and professional journeys, including her entry into social work, her studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological

➤ See **CHAPLAIN**, page 2D



# BORN BY THE RIVER

Before the Christmas Eve bonfires, here's how Lutchter and Gramercy got their names

**BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA**  
Contributing writer

On Christmas Eve, thousands of people will enjoy the annual spectacle of bonfires on the levee in the St. James Parish towns of Lutchter and Gramercy.

These River Road communities exude a sense of history, one in which colonists from France and Germany, as well as enslaved West Africans and French Acadian refugees, settled over the course of the 1700s and created a plantation economy still discernible today.

But agriculture development and town formation are two different processes, and historically along the River Road, the latter was rather scarce. Only two sizable towns emerged between Baton Rouge and greater New Orleans before the Civil War: Plaquemine and Donaldsonville, both of which formed at bayous



The former Lyon Cypress Lumber Company headquarters in Garyville

(Plaquemine and Lafourche) forking off from the Mississippi River. Most other antebellum River Road communities were little more than hamlets or enclaves gathered around courthouses, churches or intersections.

This paucity of urbanism may be attributed to the plantations themselves, which, by forcing and coercing Black families to live on-site, usurped social forces

➤ See **BONFIRES**, page 3D

## BR Italian restaurant opens second, bigger location

Various dishes from Bistro Italia, a restaurant that recently opened a new location on George O'Neal Road

PROVIDED PHOTO



**BY MADDIE SCOTT**  
Staff writer

Bistro Italia opened its new location Dec. 2, and this spot is almost twice as large.

At 15255 George O'Neal Road, the new Bistro Italia location is fully open for business. The New Jersey-born owner, Jon Wilkinson, said they had grown out of the old spot at Coursey Boulevard a couple of years ago.

The Italian restaurant opened 12 years ago in 2014 and serves

pizzas, pastas, salads, wraps and sandwiches in a casual dining atmosphere.

Wilkinson wanted to create the same neighborhood restaurant, but aims to add a few new things. Some of those include expanded hours and some new menu items.

*Bistro Italia, 15255 George O'Neal Road, Baton Rouge. Open daily from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Sundays.*



# The case of the slippery, sliding salmon

Dear Miss Manners: I frequently attend luncheons at which the entree consists of bagels, lox (smoked salmon) and cream cheese.

Bagels have grown in size substantially since my childhood. Nowadays, a whole bagel is too much for me, so I carefully take one half with the tongs provided. I spread it with cream cheese, then lay a slice or two of lox on top.

But no matter how carefully or slowly or seemingly thoroughly I bite into this open-faced sandwich, it is inevitable that the slice of lox slides off the top with my teeth embedded in it — dangling there, despite the gluey nature of the cream cheese.

This is very unattractive. I came up with a solution that works for me: I hold the bagel in one hand and a fork in the other. I press down with the fork near where I take each bite, thus anchoring the slice of lox. Success! Am I horribly off base?

Gentle reader: Well, the lox is staying on base, so we are halfway there.

You could also use a discreet finger to hold it in place, as long as you find a place to wash off any lingering fish smell afterward.

A third option would be to take the lox off of the bagel and cut it on your plate — preferably with a fish knife — and then return it

to the bagel, matching bite sizes with lox pieces.

But really, the fork method is acceptable, as long as you do it discreetly — and, Miss Manners warns, as long as you promise not to turn your head too quickly, stabbing yourself in the cheek in the process.

Dear Miss Manners: I wonder if there is a proper way to greet people you never speak to, but see all the time, when you suddenly run into them in an entirely different setting.

I refer to them as the “SNOW” people: those you see regularly at work, school, the gym, church or around the neighborhood, with whom you always exchange a friendly Smile, Nod Or Wave.

Then one day, you see them

at the supermarket. Your initial reaction is surprise (as if they don’t exist outside the sphere you know them from), followed by joy and a desire to embrace them like a long-lost friend ... until you recover your senses and realize, with acute embarrassment, that you don’t even know their first name!

It seems silly to say, “What are you doing here?” since the answer is obvious, but to ignore them seems equally rude. Do you exchange another friendly SNOW greeting and move on? Or does etiquette require actually speaking to them — for perhaps the first time ever?

Gentle reader: Another friendly SNOW. This necessitates, however, a third reaction in your reper-

toire, which is a somewhat deflated, but still polite, realization that you are only acquaintances. The person will likely mirror your reaction and be similarly content to move along.

But if you are ready to transition to a full-on greeting and name exchange, Miss Manners assures you that that is an option — provided you are able to muster mutual consent from the other party.

Send questions to Miss Manners at her website, [www.missmanners.com](http://www.missmanners.com); to her email, [dearmissmanners@gmail.com](mailto:dearmissmanners@gmail.com); or through postal mail to Miss Manners, Universal Uclick, 1130 Walnut St., Kansas City, MO 64106.

## BONFIRES

Continued from page 1D

that otherwise would have spawned nucleated communities. Plantations effectively replaced villages and towns, “providing” everything from housing and food production to light industry and a landing on the river. This is why plantations had names — just like towns.

Which brings us to Lutch-er and Gramercy, the two communities most associat- ed with the bonfire tradition, as well as nearby Garyville. None of these incorporated towns existed in antebel- lum times; rather, they were products of northern indus- trialists of the Gilded Age who saw lucrative oppor- tunities along the bucolic River Road.

They speak to the fact that much of the blossoming of Louisiana’s villages, towns and small cities occurred after the Civil War, in what the historian Lawrence N. Powell has described as “post-emancipation micro- politanization.” That spurt of community formation came in part from the liberation of enslaved families, as they moved off former planta- tions, and in part from out-of- state industrialists, who saw new investment opportuni- ties in post-bellum Louisiana.

In 1877, Pennsylvania tim- ber tycoons Henry Jacob Lutch-er and G. Bedell Moore built a mill in Orange, Texas, to process cypress trees from the Sabine River basin. In the infamous tactic that would come to be known as “cut and run,” Lutch-er and Moore soon depleted this natural resource and sought a new supply elsewhere. They found one 200 miles to the east, in the Maurepas Basin, access to which could be gained by laying railroad tracks along the River Road and digging canal networks into the swamp.

In 1889, the Lutch-er-Moore Company bought the Chenet Plantation in St. James Par- ish, and in 1892, established



PROVIDED PHOTO BY RICHARD CAMPANELLA

Sugar mill in Gramercy

a depot in collaboration with the Mississippi Valley Rail- road. The company then constructed what a Picayune journalist in 1895 described as “the largest and most com- plete sawmill plant in the state ... furnishing the beau- tiful crimson-heart Pontchar- train cypress to every state in the union, up into Canada.”

In an adjacent parcel, the company laid out “wide, regular streets and shaded avenues lined with pretty and commodious houses,” all with “the air of a thriving vil- lage,” and named it after co- founder Henry Jacob Lutch-er. The quintessential com- pany town, Lutch-er became home to over 700 people em- ployed at the ever-growing complex of factories produc- ing lumber, shingles, sashes, doors and blinds.

While the workers and their families got by, the company and its investors prospered. “If we rich men of Louisiana did not show her wealth of products to the world,” asked Henry Jacob Lutch-er, “who would?”

As would happen else- where in Louisiana, how- ever, the old-growth timber eventually grew scarce and inaccessible. The company shuttered its mill in 1931, leaving residents to return to farming or fur-trapping, else find jobs in the emerg- ing oil-processing indus- try. Today, what remains of Lutch-er’s timber-town ori- gins is a number of old com- pany houses, many still oc- cupied, and a wood hatchet on the town logo.

As Lutch-er grew, compet- ing companies also eyed

Maurepas timber and sur- veyed the River Road for industrial perches. In 1903, the Illinois-based Lyon Lum- ber Company acquired the Glencoe, Emilie and Hope plantations in St. John the Baptist Parish, which to- gether extended deep into the Maurepas Basin.

Claiming it owned the fin- est cypress tract in the world, the Lyon Cypress Lumber Company built a sawmill equal to the task of harvest- ing it, located five miles downriver from Lutch-er.

Like its competitor, Lyon also built housing for its workers and their families and named the town after its director, John W. Gary. Featuring stores, a bank, theater, hotel, meeting hall, church and three train sta- tions, Garyville exemplified the planned company town and rather quickly sur- passed a thousand residents.

But as would happen in Lutch-er, the boom soon turned to bust. After Lyon’s cypress stands were all felled by 1915, the company switched to harvesting yel- low pine on the northern side of the Maurepas Basin, where it established another company town called Liv- ingtonston.

As the pine began to dwindle, a series of fires destroyed stacks of stored lumber, further undercut- ting profits. Operations ceased on both sides of the lake in 1931, same year as in Lutch-er, and today, all that remains of Garyville’s raison d’être is the old Lyon Lumber Company headquar- ters, recently a museum.

As Pennsylvania indus- trialists established Lutch-er and gave it a German name, and as Illinois magnates founded Garyville and gave it an Anglo name, New York tycoons established another industrial town in between and named it after, of all things, their tony Manhattan neighborhood.

Their firm, Colonial Sug- ars, specialized in building centralized rail-linked sugar plants to replace the small plantation-based mills from antebellum times. They teamed with the Illinois Cen- tral Railroad, which ran its trains on the Yazoo & Missis- sippi Valley tracks through the sugar parishes from Baton Rouge down to New Orleans.

In 1894, Illinois Central executives acquired the Golden Grove Plantation in St. James Parish and collab- orated with Colonial Sugars in building a modern sugar plant to process cane raised on regional plantations. Be- cause the president and vice president of Illinois Central — both of whom were ma- jor stockholders in Colonial Sugars — lived in Manhat- tan’s Gramercy Park, they named their Louisiana in- vestment after their far- away urban neighborhood.

In 1902, Colonial Sug- ars greatly expanded its Gramercy operation by opening a full-scale refin- ery to granulate sugar for national distribution, for which it built worker hous- ing, a school, church and recreational facilities. As Gramercy grew, the refin- ery changed hands, becom-

ing the Cuban-American Sugar Company, Savannah Foods and Industry and Im- perial Sugar.

Now jointly operated by Cargill and Louisiana Sugar Growers and Refiners, Inc., the Gramercy plant is now second in size to the Domino refinery in St. Bernard Par- ish — which, incidentally, played a similar role in cata- lyzing Arabi and Chalmette following its opening in 1912. Unlike the long-gone timber mills of its neighbors, Gramercy’s raison d’être still dominates the townscape and remains an important part of the local economy.

The stories of Lutch-er, Gramercy and Garyville, now home to over 8,000 peo- ple, serve to remind that River Road historical narratives often tend to elide the gritty circa-1900 industrial period, emphasizing instead the an- tebellum plantation era.

The communities of Avon- dale, Norco, Reserve and White Castle also trace their origins to industry (ship- building, oil processing, sugar processing and timber milling), while Plaquemine, established in 1819 as a transshipment point, rein- vented itself in the 1890s by also becoming a timber town.

The late-1800s period of “micropolitanization” (town formation) also demon- strates that industry along the River Road did not begin

with the modern petrochem- ical sector, but rather with prior investments in rail- roads, electrification, mass production and nationaliza- tion of consumer markets.

Like the petrochemical plants of today, these past in- dustries also had their share of environmental impacts. Next time you fly out of MSY, look westward toward Pass Manchac and the Maurepas Swamp. You can still see the hub-and-spoke patterns of the timber-extraction canals, amid a morass of second- grown vegetation and the oc- casional stump. Cut and run.

Industry-driven micro- politanization may not tell a particularly romantic story, nor is it as poignant as the antebellum plantations or as spectacular as the Christ- mas bonfires. But it is a ma- jor part of our history and geography, along the River Road and statewide.

Richard Campanella, a geographer with the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment, is the author of “Crossroads, Cutoffs, and Confluences: Origins of Louisiana Cities, Towns, and Villages”; “Draining New Orleans”; “Bourbon Street: A History”; and other books from LSU Press. He may be reached at [richcampanella.com](http://richcampanella.com), [rcampane@tulane.edu](mailto:rcampane@tulane.edu), or @nolacampanella on X.

UNIVERSITY CLUB PLANTATION | BATON ROUGE

3128 TRADITION AVENUE | \$1,100,000

OPEN SUNDAY 2:00-4:00



Luxury Home on the 18th hole and overlooking a lake. 5 bedrooms, 5.5 baths, over 5,000 living area. This custom home was built in 2005, features beautiful heart of pine floors, brick floors, cypress beam and fabulous views. So many beautiful details make this a must-see home.



LIBBY AMMON

CRS, ABR

225-938-3176 • SoldbyLibby.com



COLDWELL BANKER | ONE

225-925-2500

Each office independently owned and operated.



Charisse Hanchey

REALTOR® CRS, ABR



COLDWELL BANKER | ONE

225-925-2500

225.315.0512

www.charissehanchey.com



UNIVERSITY CROSSROADS • 3330 WILLARD ST #204

Updated 2BR/2BA condo near LSU: totally updated kitchen, new paint, floors, lighting, appliances incl. fridge, washer/dryer, AC & heater. Exterior updated roof, siding, doors, windows. Gated with pool. Won't last long! \$225,000

WESTDALE/OLD GOODWOOD



6038 JEFFERSON HWY

4 Bed - 4 Bath - 3,286 Sq. Ft.

Fabulous 1,500 Sq. Ft. Pool House

List Price - \$949,000.00



Barbara Anne Eaton, CRS, GRI, SRS

Associate Broker • 225-733-6874



COLDWELL BANKER | ONE

225-925-2500

Each Office is Independently Owned & Operated



3216 CREEKMERE LANE | WOODSTOCK PARK

JUST SOLD!



ROBIN HEBERT

REALTOR®

225.975.3434

www.robinheberthomes.com



COLDWELL BANKER | ONE

225-925-2500

Each Office is Independently Owned & Operated



OAKLAND CROSSING SUBDIVISION

Custom Building Packages available to build your "Dream Home"!



LOTS FOR SALE



• COMMUNITY POOL

• SIDEWALKS & WALKING TRAIL

• SPORTS PLEX/ BASKETBALL & PICKLEBALL COURTS

• SOCCER FIELD



Exclusively Marketed by

Dianne Adams

225.806.8979



RE/MAX PROFESSIONAL

225-615-7755

Find us on Instagram Facebook

@oaklandcrossing

Each office independently owned and operated

Licensed REALTORS in the State of Louisiana





Commercial or Residential Opportunity in Mid-City

5078 Capital Heights Avenue, Baton Rouge

Great location in Mid-City! This property consists of two 3-bedroom homes that were professionally renovated and joined for commercial use. Currently arranged for 3 separate businesses but could also be used as a residence or rental property. Call for more details! \$439,866

Lisa Busceme, REALTOR®

Coldwell Banker ONE

225-931-4112

lisab@coldwellbankerone.com

David Palmer, ASSOCIATE BROKER

Coldwell Banker Commercial ONE

225-317-3230

dpalmer@coldwellbankerone.com



COLDWELL BANKER | ONE

225-925-2500

Each Office is Independently Owned & Operated

