

## A Close Call with Nature

*By Sheila Johnson*

My mother was one of the most creative, talented, and ingenious women I'll ever know. Not only could she tailor the most beautiful custom-fit suits for men and women, make the best pot of red beans, grow the thickest grass on our block, but she was known in our neighborhood as the woman with a green thumb. My mother was not educated beyond the eighth grade, but her horticultural skills would have earned her a PhD at any respectable college or university. Every summer she added another joyous beauty to her exquisitely grown rose garden that bordered the parallel sides of our house enjoining the front porch. She took pride in producing hybrid rose bushes by cutting the stem off of one rose bush at an angle just above the node and attaching it with garden tape to the stem of a different color rose bush whose stem was cut at an opposite angle, creating a perfect fit. The following summer the rose garden would be adorned with several young bushes that would yield blended colored roses by the end of September.

But that's not all Mama Wylie could do with her green thumb. Our front lawn was separated down the middle by a sidewalk that led to the front porch. In the middle of each side of the lawn, there stood the most amazing shade-bearing mimosa trees. Their wide branches extended almost across the entire landscape, and the soft airy pink flowers that decorated the thin feather shaped green leaves produced a sweet nectar for groups of humming birds whose job it was to fill the atmosphere with hope, jubilation, inspiration and renewal (according to legend).

Along comes a shy little six-year old girl named Sheila who is learning to ride her bicycle without the training wheels for the first time. She started out on the sidewalk that was wide enough for a truck, but somehow she steered herself off the path and onto the grass. "Get back on the sidewalk," yelled my Daddy! "Turn the handles to the right Sheila," screamed my Mommy! "Pedal backwards Sis or stop pedaling and use the brakes," hollered my oldest brother! "Watch out for the treeee ....." they all shouted in unison!

None of the King's or the Queen's horses or men or women could put me back together again that day! The humming birds flitted away, the sweet nectar felt like vinegar on the bleeding flesh of my right eye, the hope, jubilation, and inspiration that those stupid humming birds were said to bring, became old wives tales, and there I lay wishing for the renewal that those pointed-beaked, noisy, weird birds were supposed to bring.

I wore that scar over my right eye for almost fifty years, until it eventually faded into my eyebrow. Mommy, Daddy, Brother—they're all gone now, but still watching me pedal through life trying to shed those training wheels.