

Marylin Nease

“WE’RE SISTERS!” MAY 28-JUNE 1, 2021

“Okay, ladies, get ready to smile,” my nephew Houston directs, handing me his mom’s slice of cheesecake complete with birthday candle.

“I’m not holding the cake in front of Linda’s face, am I?” I ask.

I stand on my sister Linda’s left, and my sister Frances stands on Linda’s right. Linda sits on her electric scooter between us.

“No, you’re good. Okay, everybody, smile!”

Houston snaps photos of “the sisters.” First in birth order is Linda, next is Marylin (I), third is Frances, and fourth would be Luna Rose, who died two and a half years ago yet is with us still.

Frances and I have arrived from Texas to spend the weekend in Oklahoma with Linda. We sisters will celebrate her 78th birthday.

“Okay, what do you want to do today?” Frances asks Linda. “Want to go to the farm? You’ve been talking about it.”

“I don’t know if I can make that long trip. I’m not sure I can anymore.”

Frances tries again, “It’s up to you. It’s your birthday. We could take a short ride instead. Maybe drive our old school bus route? That’s close to home. It’d be fun to see what we remember from back then.”

“Y’all decide.”

I chime in. “Remember when we were kids and we sisters drew straws? Let’s draw straws to decide.”

Sixty-plus years later, we sisters draw straws.

Frances drives us north toward where we grew up, a mile from town, the first stop on the bus route.

Pointing to a house along the way, Linda asks, “Who lived there?”

“The Boatwrights. Or maybe the Redding family,” I answer.

We cross a modern bridge spanning the Washita River and recall our childhood’s simple wooden bridge.

We turn east, commenting on landmarks, then south and up higher land, now a golf course, and finally west, completing the four sides of our school bus rides.

Back in town, we spot a nursery. Gardeners all, we sisters shop. Frances debates a purchase.

I nudge, “Luna Rose would say, ‘Buy it!’”

Remembering our sister, we buy plants.

Back home, we head to Linda’s gardens. She sits on the ground. Frances and I carry plants. Working as a team, we all tuck flowers into the earth, adding color here and there.

Linda proclaims, “We’re sisters!”

We answer, “Yes, we’re sisters!”

For an hour or two on three days, we sisters learn history watching documentaries on a local channel, the History Channel, and PBS. All commemorate the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre’s 100th anniversary.

“Why didn’t we learn about this in school?” Linda asks.

I tell my sisters, “Years after we graduated, my mother-in-law asked our Oklahoma history

teacher. Her answer was, ‘I didn’t think they needed to know.’”

We sisters are shocked by history we didn’t learn in school.

Everyday events—taking birthday photos, drawing straws, remembering bus rides, planting flowers, and learning history—fill our companionable weekend. “We’re sisters!” as Linda says. For us, time together becomes treasured memories.