

Eloise Voorhies Gary – a brief biography

By Lynn Gary

Eloise had always loved drawing and filled notebooks with sketches of buildings, flowers, and young men and women in the garb of the Roaring Twenties. Miss Voorhies graduated from Sophie Newcomb College majoring in fine arts in New Orleans in 1933. She was the daughter of J.S. “Joe” Voorhies and Eloise “Lolo” Broussard of St. Martinville and Breaux Bridge. Her grandfather was the honorable Felix Voorhies – judge, attorney, author (best known for *Acadian Reminiscences*), playwright, and composer.

In one of her first jobs, she was a social worker in the field assigned to the New Iberia area. In carrying out her mission to find people in need, she met an older man who needed dentures so he could continue to play his trumpet. Miss Voorhies made sure that he got the teeth, and he resumed his music career. That man was Bunk Johnson, an influential force in jazz in Louisiana.

While in New Iberia, Eloise met Rudolph M. Gary. They enjoyed each other’s company and dancing together, and married in 1940. Their daughter, Lynn, was born, on Mardi Gras, in 1942. Eloise’s love of drawing and painting found expression in portraits of Lynn and her playmates, as well as the townscape along the Bayou Teche.

Once Lynn began school at Mt. Carmel Convent, Eloise began a career as a teacher – so that she could be home when her little girl was home. Having received her bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Sophie Newcomb, Mrs. Gary brought her love of painting and drawing and all things artistic into the classroom when she began teaching. She knew the value of art in reaching students who were not successful at other academic subjects.

During her career in education, Eloise taught in all class levels from 4th grade through high school. Early on, her artistic ability was tapped by her principals to help in classroom decorations (for more than her own room) and in scenic and costume design for school plays and pageants. She reveled in bringing classroom studies into the theatrical design; such as using black-light paint in a school play about the night sky and astronomy. She went from being a 4th grade teacher incorporating art in her classroom, to being the head of the art department at the (then) new Robert E. Lee High School in Baton Rouge.

The Gary’s had moved from New Iberia to Baton Rouge in the early 1950’s. And, as she had done in New Iberia, Eloise joined an informal artists’ painting group. These artists’ groups allowed her to continue practicing her art, and to follow her lifelong desire to learn more about the skills and tools of the artist. She continued to share this learning with her junior high and high school students.

Eloise’s paintings were purchased by admiring collectors in south Louisiana. She was well-known for her lyrical scenes of Acadiana, especially her magnolias, camellias, and day lilies, for the disappearing horse and buggy, and for her landscapes of sugar mills, swamps and marshes, the graceful

and powerful live oak trees, and for portraits of homes commissioned by collectors delighted to have her depict their family homesteads.

After her husband died in 1964, Eloise decided to return to Louisiana State University to earn her Masters degree in art education. Shortly after receiving that degree she became the Supervisor for Art in the St. Martin Parish School system.

During that time at St. Martin Parish schools, she produced a handbook for the classroom teacher in Acadiana for incorporating art into their classrooms. It was titled **Art: Involvement**.

The chapter titles are:

1. Development of Awareness and Self Expression
2. Organization of the Art Period
3. Art materials
4. Techniques
5. Motivation
6. Topics for Motivation
7. Seasonal Activities
8. Evaluation
9. Exhibiting
10. Bulletin Boards
11. Suggested Letter to Parents

The entire publication can be viewed at the Education Resources Information Center website:
www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED080430

Eloise Voorhies Gary's legacy is one of nurturing creativity and the artist's eye in all of us.