

Alice Van Kerckhove

Alice Rose Van Kerckhove Persyn

Born: San Antonio, Texas - October 29, 1911

Died: San Antonio, Texas - August 13, 2002

Married: October 9, 1937 - Lokeren Belgium

Below are notes dictated by Alice in the late 1990's. Enjoy!

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1911 -

Daughter of Leo Persyn and Maria Podevyn. As my mama told me I was born on a Sunday at home in Collins Gardens. Papa had a small vegetable farm, they were just married a year and Papa was recovering from a double operation. Appendicitis and gallbladder. He had been near death and was slow in getting his strength back. Mama told me they had only one bed, so Papa had to be laid on a make up bed while I could be born.



1912 -

Papa could not do any farming after this, so he rented a store on the Frio road, the property belonged to John Epps, it was a very small store and a saloon, after papa made some money he added on a grocery store, and sold gasoline. His business went well, he ran it for 14 years, he built a home next to the store and rented some land from John Epps, we had a Belgian man that lived with us who ran the farm called Sareveen De Ghust, we kids loved him. We lived about 3 miles from St



Henry school and we walked it every day except on first Fridays, then mama would let us ride the streetcar which was only a block from the house. We usually went by the railroad tracks, that (way) was shorter. I went to St Henry's till the 8th grade.

1925 -

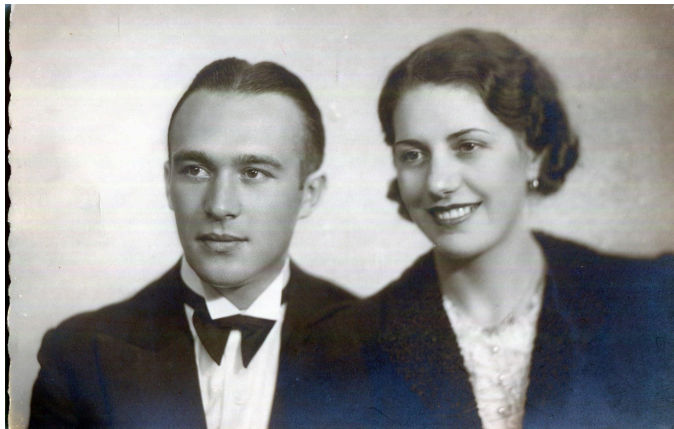
Then we went to Belgium. Papa sold the store and the house, I think John Epps bought it back since he owned the property.

We lived in Belgium for about 2 years, by that time there were 5 of us, Mary was about 4 years old, she went to kindergarten and we all went to school. I went to the Presentation school for girls, so did Mary. The boys went to a boy's school run by brothers??, it had a nickname the **Jansje's??**.



1927 -

We lived with Grandma Podevyn, mama and Papa had bought property in Lokeren, they planned to build a nice home on it, and Papa would just raise fruit. Well, after 2 years Papa changed his mind, I think he wanted to come back to San Antonio and he felt good and strong enough to farm, and he had 3 growing sons, so we came back in April 1927. Mama was already pregnant with Geraldine and we were all seasick on the boat back.



We rented a farm from Mr. Brady (Gerry was born there) on Brady street. Then the depression hit and Papa lost most of his money, but before it hit he had already bought a farm on Somerset Road. So he was lucky there. They built a house which cost only about 5 or 6 thousand dollars which was a lot then, and it was a fairly nice home.

We only lived on Brady Street for about a year and a half. Then we moved into the new house and farm. Rosie came along after a few months, but she did not want to be born at home, so Mama was taken to the hospital, she was scared to death, but all went well. Rosie turned before they got there. And Mama changed her mind about hospitals. I was 18 at that time, and Mama told me if you ever have children be sure to go to the hospital, they take such good care of you.

We all worked hard, I went to the market with loads of vegetables, sometimes Edmund would go with me, when the load was too much for me. Life was not easy being the oldest, helped out on the farm, and also in the house. We did not have electricity at that time, so washing was by hand.

1933 -

When I was 21 my aunt Alice asked Mama if she would let me come to Belgium once more, she was my Godmother and had no children of her own. So Mama let me go, and I stayed in Belgium for over a year, stayed with my Grandmother in Lokern, I got a bicycle and did all traveling by bike. Aunt Alice lived in Antwerp, so I would take my bike and ride to Antwerp to visit Aunt Alice and stay with her a while.

That's where I met Daddy, I had met him once in Lokeren but did not talk to him, he was with a boy named Hugo, he spoke English because he had been in England to go to school for a year. I dated him for a while, but we finally drifted apart. Daddy meanwhile had finished college and had to do his military duty for two years. He was stationed near Antwerp, so he found out where I was staying and came to look me up, we got to be good friends and he would always look me up when I was in Antwerp. It was still depression and his father had lost his job, so Daddy did not have much to spend, the Belgian government surely did not pay much to its soldiers, so we went Dutch most of the time. Daddy was very sweet and a good dancer, always treated me nice, so we became good friends.



1934 -

Then when Mama wrote that it was time for me to come home, he asked me if I'd wait for him till he got a job. So I left for home, and waited 3 years till he had a job, then he asked Mama & Papa if he could marry me. They naturally did not like for me to leave, but I was 25 years old and they did not keep me from going back to Belgium.

1937 -

I left home about the end of July, it was hard leaving home. Rosie and Gerry cried so hard, I was like their second mama.



The plant's boss where Daddy worked offered to fix up an old home (which was located on plant property) for us, so we had free rent. So we lived with Daddy's parents for a few weeks, we were married on Oct 9, 1937. Just had a dinner party at

Daddy's parent's home, with a few members of my family, Aunt Alice and her husband, Uncle Edmund, and Aunt Aline and my cousin Simone and Rosa whom I stayed with before we got married. We had no honeymoon but we were happy. We stayed with Daddy's parents for about 3 weeks and moved to our house on my birthday, I was 26 years old.

The plant had fixed the house up real nice, we even had a bathroom upstairs, which very few people had in those days, we had two bedrooms, upstairs, a kitchen, dining room which we used as a den too and also a living room, we enjoyed living there for nearly 9 years, our address was Dendermondsesteenweg.

1938 -

I lost our first baby when I was 4 months pregnant, that was April, about a year later Jeanine was born May 10, 1939.

In the meantime I met the Van Audenhove's, daddy worked with Mr. Van Audenhove and had gone to the same college, but Mr. Van Audenhove was a year older and he had not been in military because he was an only child and his father had died in World War 1. We became very close friends, Mrs. Van Audenhove was my dearest friend, her name was Elise, we called her Lentze, they were all crazy about Jeanine and we would visit each other every week.



Mr. Van Audenhove had a car, so many times on Sundays we would go somewhere with them.

Then on May 10 (1940) - Jeanine's birthday the Germans attacked Belgium and Holland, we had walked to town the evening before to shop for wallpaper, daddy was going to paper our dining room and walked back home, so we were very tired; in the morning there was so much commotion on the street, daddy went outside to see what was

going on, the neighbors told him that the Germans had attacked and there had been air fights during the night, we had not heard a thing.

(Daddy was with the heavy artillery)

July 1939 -

I can't remember exactly, my mama and papa came to visit Belgium to see their first grandchild, they stayed until September, when the Germans invaded Poland, so Belgium started calling in

the young men, so daddy was called up for duty, they kept him for 3 months, mama and papa had left for the states.

Papa wanted to take me & Jeanine home with them, but I did not want to leave without daddy. Mama and papa got to England alright but had to wait about a week before they could get a boat back because the queen mary was kept in New York, so they had to take another boat. They said everything was camouflaged and guns had been put on the ship. Well they got home safely. So I was left alone for nearly 3 months and finally the plant got daddy off of military duty, anyway daddy was home for Christmas.



May 10, 1940 -

So now to continue about the 10th of May, Jeanine's first birthday. Daddy was called up for duty again, but this time it was war. So here I was left alone again, but after daddy left the Van Audenhove's came by and said "we promised Gene that we would take care of you", So I packed some clothes and moved in with them, after a few days they decided to evacuate to France. Our thoughts were as far as Portugal, but we never got that far. The first day we only got as far as the Belgian coast. We were with three cars, Mr. Van Audenhove, the mayor of Ghent Brugge's car and Mr. & Mrs. Jespers sons car. They were friends of the Van Audenhove's. All sat in the car that night, I did not sleep, booming went on all night, so early the next morning we set out for France. Mrs Van Audenhove (Lintze) Jackie & Jaqueline, Mr. Van Audenhove's mother and his grandmother, I drove Mr. VanAudenhove's car, and Mr. Van Audenhove(Julien) drove the mayor's car because they could not drive. His son who drove the car (the mayor's wife and daughter and dog in with Mr van Audenhove) he had been called up



to go to war too, Mr Van Audenhove's father drove along with Mr Jespers car. You only get to know all about people in times like these, but this comes later.

We drove not too far from Dunkirk where Daddy had been sent to, at that time I did not know where he was. We were meeting French soldiers going towards Belgium all that day, and German planes

were always above us, sometimes shooting at whatever moved. Twice that day we got out of the car, I jumped in the ditches along the road and layed on top of Jeanine, thinking that at least I'd save her, but we were lucky, we finally got out of that dangerous road, and that evening we stayed at a farm. They did not give us a room, but we stayed in the barn, he (the farmer) gave us enough hay to lay on; and we went to rest without food.

We traveled about three days to the south of France, we finally came to a place called Cadarache a small town in the mountains, the mayor got in contact with a Duke who had a hunting lodge in the hills, and he let us stay there. It was dirty and down stairs they had fleas. Mr Van Audenhove only found out about that the second day, it took her three days to get rid of them, the children where terribly bitten, I was given a room on the third floor, (no fleas). But I felt very much alone. The mayor and his wife and daughter always made me feel as I was not wanted, they were afraid that they would have to take care of me, but Mrs Van Audenhove straightened them out. But after that I had as little to do with them as possible. So I always went upstairs early after supper and put Jeanine to bed and as long as it stayed light, I sewed or knitted. I made myself a dress by hand, and knitted a sweater for myself during the time we were there.

We were gone nearly three months before we could go back to Belgium. I wrote home and got letters from mama but all this time I didn't know where daddy was or if he was alive. Finally we were able to go back to Belgium, we got gas on the black market to get us as far as where the Germans were, because we had been staying in the part of France that was not occupied.

We found a home that let us stay during the night until the Germans gave us gas to get home, We were there about 2 days. There were young boys 16 + 18 who had fled Belgium wanting to get back too so anyone who had room in their car had to take one or two along. The mayor had room so they made him take 2 boys, about 5 miles on the road, he left the boys and from then on and I could not stand that man or his family. He was supposed to be a leader of his town, he only thought of himself. Well it took us about 2 more days to get home, on the way the Germans gave us food + gas, they wanted us to get out of their way and we were happy to get help and get back home.

To my surprise daddy was already home and working at the plant, he was so happy to see us he cried all the way home, he thought he would never see us again; he had been taken prisoner with the English soldiers at Dunkirk and marched to about two miles from where we lived. Some men that also worked at the plant saw him at this farm and told him they would help him get out at night, he and two other boys who daddy had made friends with got out that night and had to swim the river but they got to our house and they stayed indoors for two weeks until the Germans marched out the prisoners to Germany. Daddy's friends from the plant told the neighbors that daddy was in the house and needed food, so they took care of him every evening when it was dark they brought him food. Until they felt it was all right for him to come out They gave the two boys who were not from Ghent each a bicycle to get home and later daddy

got a letter telling him they got home alright, Daddy had given them clothes , Daddy and his friends buried all their soldier clothes, so the Germans would not know that they were soldiers.

The summer in 1940 was the best summer I remember in Belgium. My aunt Alice was living in Antwerp and while I was in the south of France she had come to Ghent to look for me, they moved to Lokren, so all during the war, whenever we came to visit daddy's mother and father I could go see Aunt Alice too, uncle Edmund was very good to us. He had a farm and he always offered us help with food if we needed it, so did Irene's dad and mother. They lived on a big place outside of Lokeren and he planted lots of vegetables and had fruit. I remember he let me have lots of strawberries. we could get sugar pretty easily because Belgium raises lots of sugar beets, we may not have had butter all the time, but jelly was a blessing.

XXXXXXX

Daddy had his job back, and the plant worked all through the war, we spent all our money on food, butter, eggs, meat and grain to make bread, wheat was too expensive so we made rye bread mostly, all on black market.

You got good exercise making bread from rye, its hard to knead, but it was a healthy food. There was not much going on during the war. We could see German movies or sometimes French, and we mostly walked to town, took us about an hour walking.

I had a lady that would come and help me with cleaning and the wash, after I lost my first baby, daddy did not want me to do hard work. She was poor and her husband was sickly, she had a boy and two daughters so one day she asked if I would let her youngest daughters work for me and stay all day just for food,she did not sleep with us but she came every day except ???Sundays???. She was not very bright but she was sweet and good to the children but I did pay her every week.

By that time we had Gene. And when he decided to be born, daddy and Mira Van Audenhove had left that Saturday morning for the country to get grain, no sooner were they gone did I start having pain, I called my neighbor and she went to get the doctor who was not home, out in the country with his bike, the doctor did get some tanks of gas a month. So finally the doctor's wife got the fire department to send out an ambulance.

It was a rough ride all the way to the hospital and Gene was born as soon as they put me on the table, he could not wait to get here. The doctor came in about 15 minutes later, the sisters had taken care of everything. The hospital was called Refugee Saint



Francis, and Jeanine was born at the hospital called heline??? Familiar (the holy family), Gene was born August 28, 1943. After I stayed in the hospital on the 7th day it was a sunday morning, I remember asking the sisters if I could go to the chapel to have mass. Butu sister said no, you better stay in bed, the chapel door will be open so you can hear everything, mass had just started when the ??? started to go on and no sooner were they going when we heard the planes and booming, it lasted for about 15 minutes. The English bombed?? Ghent, lots of people who were going to church were killed or who were sitting out at their door were hurt or killed, some homes were bombed too, they missed their target, which was supposed to be the train depot, this was our first bombing in ghent.

Well two days later I got to go home, before we went home Gene was baptized in the hospital chapel, they do this in Belgium, (Jeanine was also baptized in the chapel of the Helige Familiar?? Before she was taken home)

Uncle Edmund stood in for Papa as godfather. Uncle edmund was very good to us, he was grandma Persyn's oldest brother and was a farmer, he always told us we need not go hungry he would always offer food to us, and his wife aunt alice too, al very XXX??? Lady, I loved her very much. Aunt Alice came to live in Lokeren after the war started, she lived just a block away from uncle Edmund, so when we went to Lokeren, we always went to visit them, and I have always been close to the family, we still correspond and they have been good to me when I visit belgium. They are 3 boys, Andre who has the sport shop, Rene was the oldest, he passed away, he was a farmer but sold it and started a cafe, his wife Elvira still runs it, they have 3 boys, Andre has 3 girls one boy. George has 2 girls.

It seemed like after Gene was born, we had XXX??? Every day and night, we got so used to them, we paid little attention to them, especially during the day, as night was a different thing. Where Gene was 6 months old, Daddy and Mr Van Audinhove, his father and a friend on our street went to town to a bridge tournament, daddy hardly ever left home at night without us, I heard a lot of commotion outside and heard the sirens. I ran upstairs to get Jeanine and little Gene, no sooner did I get the children when the first bombs fell, daddy had built a shelter outside, we had no cellar or basement, I sat there at least half an hour, they dropped? one bomb after another, it was in another section of town but it felt like it was next door. After it stopped the neighbor friend came to see how I was, she found us still in the shelter, I was a wreck, but I'll always remember her how kind she was, she told me I needed a drink, we kept a small bottle of cognac, for when daddy's dad came over, my neighbor friend said I needed it more than dads father needed it then.

Well after that we used that shelter a lot. Took no chances, at night I was very frightened, always had blankets ready and could not sleep, when I heard the planes and they were there every night. Well things got worse and there was news that they would bomb the plants and as we lived next door to the plant, daddy decided to move to the country.

—(I am somewhat ahead), when I was pregnant with Gene about 7 months,two german soldiers came to the door, they wanted a room, I told them I had no room for them, although I

had an extra bedroom, I stood in front of the steps, they wanted to go up and look, (they were SS, one was very arrogant), but I did not let him go to look, I kept standing in front of the steps, he finally looked in our living room and told me if he came back in an hour I had to empty the living room, he would bring his own bed. But he must have found a place, because he did not come back, daddy came home and thought??? I really dared to tell them that lie, he always told me I was going to land in one of their jails. The next morning I was going to the grocery store and I met them, they whistled at me but I gave them the cold shoulder, I saw them a few times afterward but they did not bother me.

Another time when Jeanine was about a year old, we were outside talking to neighbors, a beautiful spring afternoon, dad was back from work after supper, Jeanine started crying so I went in the house to fix her a bath, I put on the light, it was just getting dark, forgot to black??? out, when I heard a motor bike stop at the gate and heard heavy footsteps come up our drive, it was a great big German officer, he spoke in German and told me I was going to be under arrest because I did not black out my door or windows. I just completely forgot, anyway I tried to tell him the best way I could that I forgot, and that I was fixing milk for the baby, I think he must have a wife & child too at home, he let me go, and told me don't ever do this again, he rode down the street and arrested a cafe owner for not having a complete blackout, they had to close up for a month, daddy accused me of flirting with the german, he said he would not have gotten away with it.

About 3 times, men came to my door and told me I was american, I lied of course, I did not show them my american passport, I received a belgium passport when I married daddy XXX??? You become a citizen if you marry a Belgian, but you do not lose your American citizenship, I do not know if these fellows knew that, Daddy was always afraid that one day he would come home and find me gone. They put two friends who were Americans in concentration camps, so I was lucky. I told them yes I was born in the states, but now I was a Belgian, and got away with it.



In 1944, when planes came over constantly, Daddy decided to move outside of town, so did the Van Andenoves. Daddy & Mr Van Andenhove went to the country to look for a place for us to stay, they found a large home owned by a XXX??? Man and his wife who was from England, they had met during the first world war, he was wounded and sent to England to recuperate???, that's when he met his wife, they had Three grown boys??? And two younger ones. Two of the oldest were in the underground movement, we naturally did not know this, until we were living there a while, those two boys??? Did not live at home, just came once in a while to get some food or money. They had

ammunition hidden in their garden, pistols in the house, the two youngest were always on the lookout for Germans, and their mother was always giving out leaflets in the neighborhood or tavern, her husband would take messages from the underground, XXX???! We were in the right place, one morning I was going to the outside privacy (toilet?) And when I came to the corner of the house, I saw a gun pointed at me from one of the sheds, I naturally did not have to go to the toilet any more and ran back inside, daddy told the lady what was going on, she apologized for her son, he had come home and did never sleep in the house, he probably was not taking any chances. He was on the wanted list; he had killed Germans and collaborators.

We were there for about 3 months, then the invasion started, it did not take long before Ghent was liberated, so we finally went back home. Ghent was liberated by Canadian and Polish troops, then the English came in and we had them for quite a while.

First we had a Canadian captain staying with us, it's been so long ago I have forgotten his name, but he fought in Holland, after that he came back to see me and brought a letter from my mama, the first one in 4 years, he had lost most of his men, he had been through a terrible time in Holland, they were coming back going towards Germans, so he only stayed a little while, daddy was at the plant he did not get to see him. So then the English came, Captain Hassell?? He was with us for 3 months or so, he was good to us, and we gave him and his lieutenant a room, he had a soldier that cleaned up his room and the bathroom, so I did not have to take care of him, the only thing he did was came for meals, but it was only fair, they brought us tea, meat, bread, coffee, XXX?????. So I did not mind having him with us. He had no children, his wife was Catholic, he was Episcopalian but he went to church with me on Sundays, he said he went with his wife to the Catholic church too. We enjoyed his



company, and after we came to the states we kept in touch with him. After daddy died I did not hear from him anymore.



We had XXX??? Chickens, they lay a lot the eggs are small. Captain hasell traded soap?? For eggs with me, he sent them to his old father in Lokeren, he would wrap each egg carefully and put them in a tin box, and he said his father received them in good condition. One of his lieutenants was an artist, he was not with us long he started to paint my portrait, I still have it, but it was not completed because he was sent on further.

We kept rabbits??? Too, it certainly helped, we fed them potato peelings and dry grass, and they got nice and fat. Our yard had a lot of fruit trees, so we had fruit apples and pears mostly

During the time of the battle of the bulge, when things were going badly for the Americans, Captain hostel??? And his men were ready to move back, I asked them if they could take us along, I knew they would not, but he said "we could try", anyway things got better, and they finally had to move on, captain hostel?? Sent a nice letter to mama and papa, telling them how much he enjoyed living with us.

After they left, the Americans came in, but were not stationed in Ghent for long, most of them moved on to Germany, some were stationed in antwerp.

It wasn't long before the war was over. XXX??? The first things we talked about was going home, as first I was going to come to America with the Children, but after I had visited the consulates and a couple of times, gene(daddy) made up hi mind that he wanted to come with

