

# Plantation reunion conjures memories of an earlier era

## Twins remember life in simpler times

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WALLACE, La. — The last time Lise and Edith Tassin visited their childhood home on Whitney Plantation was 1973. Their brother was retiring as overseer of the property, and the family was getting together for a reunion.

The sisters walked through the big house where years ago their grandmother had them fill kerosene lamps and dust mantles. Their grandmother owned the home and lived in the main house. The twins lived in a guest cabin with their parents.

Revisiting the foreman's cabin, where they grew up, they remembered helping their father roll cigarettes and their mother pour coffee into glass jars.

"When our cousins would come in from New Orleans, we had a chance to go to the main house," Edith said in a thick Creole accent. "We would play on the back porch, and I remember they had this 'armor' — how you call it, *armoire* — full of old clothes. We used to dress in the gowns and hats. We would make as if one was the bride, the others bridesmaids. I used to love to go there."

Now the sprawling sugar plantation the sisters called home sits locked behind a chain-link fence with no one but a caretaker allowed to roam the fields where their father watched over hundreds of farmhands in the early 1900s.

But things could be changing, and none too soon for the twins, who celebrated their 30th birthday Thanksgiving Day. New Orleans lawyer John Cummings has agreed to buy Whitney from Formosa Plastics Corp., which has owned the plantation since 1989, said Beverly Laudermill, a company spokesman. Cummings also has promised to restore the plantation and its 23 outbuildings if he is satisfied with the property after a 90-day inspection.

"I hope he does something good with the place," said Lise, who now lives in the nearby town of Garyville. "I have very fond memo-

and Sidney Tassin's 10 children.

Sidney Tassin's mother lived in Whitney's main house, while he worked as a foreman and occupied a house in the rear. The family was not rich, the women say, but had servants to do their cooking and wash. Their older sisters also helped out with daily chores, so the twins had a lot of leisure time.

"Me and my sister didn't do a damn thing," said Edith, who lives near New Orleans now. "We had a good time. I guess we were spoiled."

The two girls attended elementary school at neighboring Evergreen Plantation. When they weren't in school, the twins went swimming with their grandmother in an irrigation canal that funneled water from the Mississippi River to the rice fields.

"We would go every morning and every evening," Lise said. "The carpenter built a house over it and covered it with burlap sacks for privacy. That was so none of the workers or men could see us."

Despite endless free time, country life could get lonely for the girls. It wasn't until high school that they began venturing away from the plantation, mostly to play in basketball games or visit family in New Orleans.

"We both played basketball, baby," Edith said laughing. "I tell you that was the days. I was a forward, she was a guard, and we were good."

The girls eventually left the plantation to marry. Lise married Sidney Matherne when she was 22. Matherne drove a commodities truck, she said, dropping off groceries to the poor.

Edith met her husband, the late Alcee Guillot, when she was working as a welder at a New Orleans shipyard during World War II. They married when she was 27.

Both sisters have large families and lifestyles radically different from the simple farm life of their childhood. But sometimes sliding down the levee on cardboard boxes seems like just yesterday.