

Cajun Godparents – Parrain and Nanan

With the decline in religious organizational membership, 73% in 1950 vs 52% in 2018, in the last several decades, an equal decline in the proud ownership of Godparent title may also have occurred. If so, this



Cleveland Duplechain & Pauline "Do" Manuel. 1970s.

lost golden nugget in the Cajun Culture, and other close religious family units across our global nation, may result in second chance hope to many needy children in our two parent work-aholic, soccer mom and football dad, busy schedules.

Many remember how proud they were when the newly selected Parrain and/or Nanny or Nanan of a recent newborn was announced! Or perhaps telling everyone that they, your Godparents were joining your family for Sunday dinner. If your parents had a Living Will, and most people

did not, back in the 1940s, 50s and into the 1980s, your Godparents would be those chosen to care for you should your parents die unexpectedly. I wonder if we have lost these two people so very important to the family, and especially the children's success.

Cleveland Duplechain and his wife Pauline "Do" Manuel were my Parrain and Nanan. When asked in 1943, they never envisioned the role they would play in my life. If there were better Godparents, then mine were certainly near the top of list of the substitutionary parental role of Parrain and Nanan.



Pauline Manual & Cleveland Duplechain.
Duralde, LA. 1950

Cleveland Duplechain (1912-1995) is the son of Francois Duplechain and Corise Rozas. Corise Rozas' great grandmother is M. Victorie Miller, the granddaughter of Jacob Miller and Anne M. Thaison. Since Jacob Miller is my 3rd great grandfather, my Godfather Cleveland Duplechain are 2nd cousins twice removed. Our common ancestry however if Solastie Rozas (1812-1874) and Adelaide Reed (1817- ?) Our relationship was not known until the 21st Century.

My parents, [Murphy Miller, Sr.](#) and [Mary Lillian Naquin](#), married in 1938 and divorced in 1948, before I was age 5. There were probably problems long before the divorce. We moved from our Eunice rental home to my paternal grandmother's home in Basile, LA. Her name was [Evenia Sonnier Miller](#). We called her Me'me're' Miller.

While I do not recall visiting with my Godparents prior to living in Basile, I am sure they visited me in



MR. AND MRS. CLEVELAND DUPLECHAIN of Eunice were honored on their 50th wedding anniversary Saturday, December 12, with a party in their home, hosted by their children. Pictured from left to right are Mrs. Barbara Duplechain Reed of Basile, their daughter; Mr. and Mrs. Cleveland Duplechain, the honorees; and their sons, Herbert James Duplechain of Mamou and Vernon Carl Duplechain of Eunice.

50th Wedding Anniversary. Eunice, LA. 1981

Duralde where I was born. My father was left with the responsibility of raising my two sisters and me after the 1948 divorce. He married several times, probably to find someone to care for his children while he earned a living as a carpenter.

In was in those years between 1948 and 1955 that my Godparents Cleveland and Pauline became the persons I looked to for love, warmth, and comfort that only great Godparents provide. On many Sunday afternoons they went visiting, or “visite” in Cajun.

They frequently came to my Me'me're' Miller Basile home in their Studebaker truck. While the visits were relatively short, they were adequate to fulfil my need for the comfort they provided. They never left without leaving me a gift or a “Cadeau”. It was generally money, probably \$0.25. A gift of this type was incredibly special and made a great impression on me. After all, I never recalled a visit from my sister’s Godparents apart from our first Cousin Lou Fontenot McCauley. Lou was my younger sister’s Godmother and we periodically saw her at her mother’s, my Aunt Myrza’s home for Sunday dinner.

Better yet were the weekend sleep overs at my Paran and Nanan’s Duralde home. One of my classmates was [Nelda Duplechain](#), my Paran’s niece. She too lived in Duralde but the school district for Basile and Mamou schools were near where my Godparent’s lived and where Nelda’s parents lived. So I would ride the Basile school bus with Nelda to her home and my Paran came to pick me up there.



Nelda Duplechain.
1963

Life on the Duplechain Duralde, LA farm was different from my Basile surroundings. Pauline or “Do” made fresh bread every night. We ate bread with our supper. Generally, we drank fresh milk from the cow milked early that morning. We never drank from glasses and always used cups. I think of

them as cornbread cups used to eat cornbread and milk. Electricity was available in rural Louisiana in the early 1950’s. Electric power resulted from President Roosevelt’s Rural Electrification Program implemented in 1935. With electricity, milk moved from a gallon jar in the cistern cool water below ground to keep it cool to the electric refrigerator. When stored



Cornbread & milk in a cornbread cup.

in the cistern, the milk jar was tied with a string at the top around the jar rim. When needed it was pulled up to serve cool after milking the cow in the morning or the previous day. With electric power and a new refrigerator, milk could be kept longer than a day.

Unlike my grandmother's Basile home, my Godparents had indoor plumbing. That was a real treat since I was the one who had to clean the chamber pots each morning at Me'me're Miller's house. This chore was not necessary at my Paran and Nanan's home.

Living on the farm was not a vacation, however. Sometimes when I arrived shortly after the bus ride from



Pauline, Murphy & Cleveland. 1963

the Basile Elementary School, my Paran plowed his field with a mule and the plow pulled behind. It was a special treat for me when he allowed me to ride on mule's back while he plowed the ground that would provide food for the table and sales at the farmer's market. While this was fun, the next day was less fun. We worked in the fields picking cucumbers, peppers, and other vegetables for sale in the local market. I

tired of that chore very quickly. I am not sure if I was much help. It seems odd today to remember how unpleasant the hard work seemed since my sisters and I were required each summer to pick cotton in the summer heat so we could afford to purchase the necessary school clothes to return to September fall semester later in the year. Our cotton-

picking earned income also allowed us several seatings at the Basile movie theatre, "the show" at \$0.09 per ticket.



Cleveland Duplechain & his fillole, Murphy Miller, Jr. (godson). 1994

Unlike the 2020 daily lives of rapid news on events around the world, not knowing the world's problems has self-contained tranquility. Listening to the TV, radio and the internet news feeds can be depressing where one loses hope. My Godparents visits enabled me to have hope for happier times. Paran and Nanan were cheerful, caring, and provided needed encouragement. As I look back, I realize that just a simple warm touch, a hug and caring words went a long way when the mother and father is absent from the home in a loving relationship.

My Godparents, [Cleveland Duplechain](#) and [Pauline Manual](#) had four children:

[Herbert J. "Black" Duplechain](#) (1932-2019) married to Madine Berzas (1933-1995)

[Vernon C. Duplechain](#) (1936-2018) married Debra Duplechain

Barbara H. Duplechain (1942) married [Willius G. Reed](#) in 1959

[Andrus F. Duplechain](#) (1949-1970). Killed in action in Viet Nam.