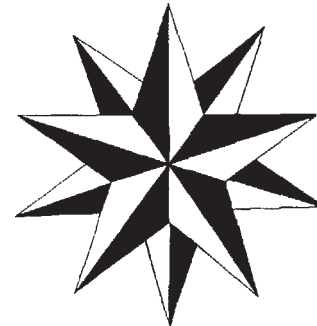


**A SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE LIFE
OF**

**Brother Bertrand Austin Bourgeois, F.S.C.
(John Luke)
1930 - 1997**



SIGNUM FIDEI

TOUR OF DUTY

1952 - New Iberia, Louisiana (St. Peter's)

1953 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (Scholasticate)

1954 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's)

1956 - Covington, Louisiana (St. Paul's)

1973 - New Orleans, LA (Christian Brothers School)

1994 - New Orleans, LA (Christian Brothers School - Director)

1997 - Died in New Orleans May 4

A quiet young man joined the Junior Novices at Magnolia on a beautiful May day in 1945. We welcomed this friendly, likeable Cajun named J. L. Bourgeois. A native of Church Point, Louisiana, he later became known as Austin with the added moniker "Hoss." J. L. quickly made himself at home in the Juniorate just as he would in every other community he'd grace with his presence. My first impression of J. L. was a good one which not only never wavered nor diminished, but increased in the ensuing years. He entered the life of the Juniors with zest -- that peppery pungency which he would add to all of the activities in which he participated to give them the similar rich taste of Tobasco-spiced Cajun food. To offset what he lacked in excellence as a student he made up with attention, serious work, and good study habits. He was well prepared for his classroom duties later on. He excelled in sports, especially baseball and football. I was always happy to be on the same teams with him. He was a winner even when his teams lost. He was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed hunting, fishing, and horseback riding.

In a special grading system devised by the Juniorate director, Brother Francis Beck, J. L. showed superior ratings in the various categories of responsibility, sociability, courtesy, neatness/order, good work and study habits, service. He ranked among the highest while this system was operational.

Brother Austin possessed a sense of humor which never left him and also endeared him to others. His joviality, friendliness, piety, kindness, and service are virtues which he cultivated and which made him loved by those who knew him.

Brother Philip Murphy gives what he calls his "secular appraisal" by stating:

Brother Austin was all man....an all-around-nice guy...and a delight to have in community.

Brother Amedy Esquibel agrees and adds:

Brother Austin devoted much time to private prayer. He was one of the most unselfish persons I've ever known. He seldom said anything derogatory about anyone. His service to the community was hard to match. Every community should have an Austin. I consider myself fortunate being in the community that had him.

One of the shining lights of his life was service. That word evokes in my memory an Albert Schweitzer quote which paints an accurate and all-encompassing picture of Brother. I quote: **"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."** The good qualities Brother Austin refined throughout his life; his flaws he worked hard to eradicate.

Following his years of formation, Brother Austin entered the classroom. He was well prepared, worked hard, followed advice from the master teachers (and even listened respectfully to advice from those who were not!) and what's so necessary - he loved his students.

(2)

Again, Brother Amedy Esquibel:

I recently met an alumnus of St. Paul's who remembers Brother Austin for his equanimity. The pranks and mischievousness of the junior boarders never seemed to ruffle him. He was the same in community.

Brother Philip Murphy concurs:

Brother Austin was endowed with the virtues of the Good Teacher and imbued with the Spirits of Faith and Zeal.

Brother Edward Scanlan, who considered Brother Austin the most unselfish person he's ever known, writes:

I admired Brother Austin as a teacher. He had to prepare thoroughly and he did that. His students admired him; he was strict and fair and wise. He spent much time in helping students who needed it.

Another significant point was brought out in Brother Edward's summary:

Brother Austin was well aware of the fact that the Institute and the District are facing critical times because of the lack of personnel. This awareness caused him to do extra in order to help the community and the school.

That attitude translated into action, is the expression of Brother's faith, love, and zeal. Brother spent his summers teaching school, tutoring, working in various summer camps, helping in renovations in communities, and even building churches in Alaska!

(3)

Susan Muto expressed lack of love this way:

Selfishness is an infectious disease. It is silent but deadly. It kills us individually and as a society.

Brother Austin was a man of prayer, of work, of service, of humor, and one who thoroughly enjoyed life. He was friendly, a keen observer of the human condition, and a compassionate caregiver. Brother Austin was an authentic Christian Brother.

Brother Philip concludes his testimonial by prophesying:

One day his students will rise up and call him blessed.

They will, when they truly understand what a blessing he was to them and us.

Relatives, friends, and students were at the wake. The following morning numerous friends, the faculty and students of Christian Brothers School, besides former students who now attend other schools, packed Holy Rosary Church in New Orleans. The funeral Mass was celebrated by the two chaplains of Christian Brothers School, Fathers Larry Mueller and David Rabe. That afternoon, following a prayer service in the chapel at Magnolia, Brother Austin was laid to rest in Christian Brothers Cemetery in Lafayette, Louisiana.

Brother Austin was the son of the late Morris Bourgois and Elve Bourgeois nee Leger, also deceased. He is survived by his sister, Laxsa Jean Prejean and by a number of nephews and nieces.

EULOGY IN HONOR OF BROTHER AUSTIN BOURGEOIS

By: Brother Raphael Bonin, FSC

J. L. Bourgeois was born on April 23, 1930, in Church Point, Louisiana. He developed into a truly free and happy individual whose feet were planted firmly on the ground. He possessed that "joie de vivre" so characteristic of the Cajuns. On several occasions J. L. spoke of the happy childhood he and his sister enjoyed with their loving and devoted parents.

I was fortunate to have lived with J. L. (who later took the name Austin), in the houses of formation, two communities, four summer camps, and numerous retreats. His tough exterior housed a kind and understanding heart. His nickname "Hoss" was quite appropriate because he was strong, had plenty of horsepower, and admired those beautiful equine animals.

After several years in the formation program, Brother began his apostolate of education. Long before, however, he had chosen Christ as his hero and model. Brother felt at home in each community where he lived because he truly understood what community meant and he lived to make the communal experience a loving and rich one. As confrere and director he was present to those who needed assistance; as teacher, he was always available to students to help them overcome their difficulties and to encourage them. He was in our midst as "one who served." His prayer life was the dynamo that kept his faith and zeal alive and well. C. S. Lewis wrote: "What you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are." Brother stood on the pedestal of faith and zeal. He saw things with the eyes of faith and acted with zeal throughout his life. If some saw the world upside down, Brother Austin saw it right side

FORWARD

**Brother Raphael Bonin, Editor
Lately of CBS
Presently of St. Paul's Community**

I am grateful to the Brothers who sent notes relating their reminiscences and observations of and appreciation for Brother Austin Bourgeois whether they were fortunate just to have known him or were even more fortunate to have lived with him. Those testimonials have helped me immensely in authoring this short work which acknowledges our deep affection and esteem for one who paradoxically is away yet still with us.

Any shortcomings in this account are mine; the life it portrays is still beautiful. Brother Austin's eulogy appears at the conclusion of this short history of a rich life of dedication and service.

Brother Austin Bourgeois spent the last hours of his life thinking of his family and his community. He indicated that he wished to have the community present in his hospital room for his final adieu. His wish was not realized. He did, however, get to see members of his family before entering the mystery of the new life he believed in, hoped, prayed, and lived for. His journey to the New Jerusalem had come to an end -- a valiant end to a beautiful rich life. He was buried in the hallowed grounds at Magnolia where he had begun his glorious quest for God fifty-four years earlier.

up. When the weak-hearted opted for pessimism, he spoke out strongly for optimism. When spirits were low, he lived to raise them from depression. Brother Austin was an outdoorsman and a fine athlete. He did everything with enthusiasm. Often, he treated the Brothers with simple but delicious meals. Like his hero, Christ, he could say, "I did not come to be served but to serve." Simply put, Brother Austin was an authentic Christian Brother. St. La Salle couldn't be prouder. Brother Austin's final weeks were filled with mental anguish and physical pain. His courage and faith, and the love and concern of his friends sustained him in those "dark nights of the soul." He was a witness of dignity and hope in the face of the mystery of suffering and death.

The great poet John Donne wrote: "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main ... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." If Brother Austin's death diminished us, then his life enriched us.

Just before Elijah was taken up to heaven in a golden chariot drawn by horses afire in glory, his friend and fellow prophet Elisha begged him for a double portion of his spirit. Elijah's cloak fell at Elisha's feet thus assuring him that his request was granted. We beg Brother Austin for a similar boon. May he spread his Christian Brothers' mantle over each of us. We thank him for affecting our lives so profoundly and simply. We rejoice that he is now another star shining in the Christian Brothers' galaxy. I composed the following poem in Brother Austin's honor. It is entitled "April Rushing Slowly" because April was Brother's Alpha and Omega.

APRIL RUSHING SLOWLY

April is rushing slowly through the land

with its refreshing breath,

Awakening life from winter slumbers.

Spring's holy month is composing stirring

psalms of green on barren boughs

To be chanted in woodland harmonies.

The month when fools can wake and celebrate

new hymns to joyous life,

And put away cold winter's darkened dreams.

