

# ST. JOHN'S HISTORIC CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

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## "FLOATING INTO MATRIMONY"

Norbert de Gravelles was born in Morgan City on June 14, 1917, to Charles Camille de Gravelles, M. D., and Mary Nations, a nurse. Sadly, Mary died during the influenza epidemic of 1918, leaving two sons, 5-year-old Charles, Jr., and 17-month-old Norbert, or "Nobby." Nobby's mother and her sister, Elizabeth Nations Roth, had agreed that if one of them died, the other would raise their children. Thus, the two de Gravelles boys were sent to Waverly Farm near Thibodaux to be reared by their aunt and uncle, Elizabeth and E. N. Roth, Jr.

After Nobby finished LSU, he joined the U. S. Army Air Corps and became a pilot in WWII. At first, he flew B-17 bombers from the U. S. to England but during the last two years of the war was stationed in India and roomed with Barry Goldwater, of Arizona. The two remained loyal friends until Senator Goldwater's death in 1998. While stationed in India, Nobby regularly flew "The Hump," the dangerous air route across the Himalayas and Burma into China and back. Nobby often recalled how much of the world he was able to see while visiting five different continents during his service.

In the first years of the war, parachutes were made of silk. Nobby, a pilot, of course had a parachute, and his hope was that the woman with whom he would fall in love and marry would have her wedding dress made from his parachute. For this reason, he held onto his silk parachute even after the war ended.

Elva Nyada Dué was the daughter of Reverend Paul Harper and Elva Gertrude Nace Dué and was born on July 10, 1924, in Darlington, S. C., although her family was originally from Philadelphia. Because her father was an Episcopal priest, the family moved several times during her childhood. After working for two years, uncompensated, in various churches in northern Appalachia during the Great Depression, Rev. Dué received a paying position at Christ Church, Covington,



*Nobby and Nyada deGravelles after their "jump"*

LA. He began his duties two months before the rest of the family moved south after the Christmas Holidays. They arrived late in the evening, and upon awakening the next morning to a beautiful day surrounded by lush green trees, Nyada's mother swore that she never would move north again—and she didn't!

Within a few years, the Dués moved to Franklin, where Rev. Dué served as rector of St. Mary's. At the time, Nyada attended Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, experiencing the war a bit differently from many. While there, she and her dormitory friends and sorority sisters dated the military officers stationed in New Orleans. Nyada earned her bachelor's degree when she was only nineteen and applied to become a stewardess.

She was turned down because of her youth. After discussing her limited options with her parents, she entered and graduated from Soulé Business School, obtained a job, and remained in the city for another year.

One weekend in June 1946, Rev. Dué was hosting a dinner at his church in Franklin and asked Nyada to come home for the weekend. By this time, Nobby de Gravelles was living in Franklin and learning the farming business from his uncle and cousins. A lifelong Episcopalian, he attended the dinner and met Nyada. They became engaged on their third date and wed six months later on January 11, 1947. When Nyada requested the Bishop to marry her and Nobby, to her surprise, he declined and smiling, said, "That is your father's job; but I will be there to bless your marriage."

On her wedding day, Nyada walked down the aisle of St. Mary's wearing Nobby's silk parachute, transformed into a beautiful wedding dress. On the slip of the dress, still preserved, one can see Nobby's identification number stamped on the material. They spent their first night as husband and wife at Waverly Farm, only to have Nobby engaged half the night rounding up horses that escaped from the stables. Nobby and Nyada never knew whether this was an accident or a hoax, but on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, a friend gave them a handful of nails and a hammer to make sure that they did not experience the same problem again.

Ever after, Nobby and Nyada lived on Waverly raising all their children, the one born to them and all the beautiful ones they were given or otherwise accumulated over the years. Nobby died on September 27, 2004, and Nyada on May 23, 2013. Both are buried in the St. John's Historic Cemetery, behind the church they supported, loved, and worshipped in.

*[Story supplied by Trudy de Gravelles  
Bourgeois, Nobby and Nyada's daughter]*