Pieces: An Inquiry in Family Stories, Southern Identity and Creative Nonfiction Writing

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PIECES: AN INQUIRY IN FAMILY STORIES, SOUTHERN IDENTITY AND CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITING

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation with Honors from the South Carolina Honors College

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South Carolina Honors College Thesis Project Summary

*Pieces: An Inquiry into Family Stories, Southern Identity and Creative Nonfiction Writing*

This thesis project is, at heart, a creative nonfiction writing project—and one that evolved and changed over the course of its development. Ultimately it consists of two main parts: a 60 page oral history-based artist book, and an accompanying 14 page process paper which details my creative process as well as challenges, influences and insights. Drawing together smaller stylistic “pieces”—oral stories turned poems, pictures, documents, design elements, my own prose reflections through the repurposed mechanism of photo captions—the final text emerges as both a larger narrative and an embodiment of a culture of language greater than its smaller parts.

Logistically, my first step was to research and gather the content that would make up the bulk of the text—recording my family’s stories into audio files. I prompted, asked or sometimes just sat back and listened to the sudden emergence of memories as I heard stories I had heard a thousand times, new versions of familiar stories or new stories altogether. Left with hundreds of files I, like the true future librarian I am, set to cataloguing by rudimentary thematic divisions. Around this time I also collected and organized my own thoughts and memories of my family members and about my experience as a member of this generation, hearing stories from the past. I also began digging through old photo albums, drawers and recipe books, collecting different forms of media and memory.

Amassing this great collection of snapshots, I began the most arduous process of transcribing the oral tradition, then setting the prose into lines of poetry and cutting, mapping organizing and ordering the many, many pieces. Drawing from the influences of my favorite postmodern “artist books”—texts which incorporate text, design, spatiality and multimedia content to create complex pages—I sought to order my pieces meaningfully, recreating and
embodying the meaning and culture I experience. Setting the pieces to interact on each individual page—juxtaposing for contrast, further evidence, disruption, explanation or new meaning—I also sought to connect across pages in ways beyond chronology. Moving past basic thematic categories—food, animals, marriage—to more nuanced connections like perseverance, providing for family, regret, loss and smaller details, the narrative presented moves more smoothly and complexly between generations, years and aspects of daily Southern life.

Functionally, some key creative choices include the design: omnipresent family or time “lines” descending from the initial family tree throughout the rest of the text, drawing attention to the connections between generations or ideas, as well as the ongoing relentlessness of time and life. The choice to include the stories as poetry acts to better represent the natural cadence of speech, using the enjambment and end stops to better emulate each speaker’s specific mode of speech. The captions operate to allow for my own voice to clarify, expand or complicate the stories, without overpowering heavy-handedly. Using my own handwriting served to add a sense of immediacy, as well as connect me with the past generations strikingly similar scrawl.

Ultimately, I sought to create a text that is at once intimate and inviting—handwriting, a sense of “conversation” across pages and deeply personal photos and stories—while also resisting the reader in unexplained details and by playing with the conventions of “scrapbooking” and posing for family photos in disruptive ways. Manufacturing a narrative of pieces, while maintaining the independent nature of each story, opened doors for many more questions than I answers—how memory is formed, why some things are remembered, how we create a culture of fragmented memories—and emerged as a complicated and conflicting creative process of integrity, authenticity and an immense deal of detail of intentionality.
This project, like most creative works, was one of evolutions. In its earliest stages, I envisioned writing a series of vignettes, oscillating between my own short reflections of my own life and anecdotes I gathered from my immediate family. My primary goal was to explore my own complex and intersectional identity, as well as the larger themes and issues of modern Southern identity—and while this final text certainly touches on the production of identity, it took on a life of its own and blossomed in other ways throughout the process. Drawing on my research into examples of memoirs and creative nonfiction, as well as oral history, multiple-voiced poetry and artist books, I crafted this text through the juxtaposition of “pieces”—oral (turned poetry) stories, photos, documents, design choices and my own voice through the mechanism of repurposed photo “captions”—which together aim to emerge as a whole greater than its parts in the questions it raises and thematic ideas it explores.

My family had always encouraged me to unite my passion for writing with the larger-than-life stories of my extended family—an impressive blend of drama, adventures and tall tales—so I set out, listing the stories I knew had to be included, as well as the memories I found most valuable in characterizing my life experience. Left with this expansive list of half-thought ideas, I turned to texts I had seen before, as well as extensive recommendations from my advisors and friends. Most influentially for this project, I thumbed through the brutal honestly incredible rawness of Spiegelman’s Maus, as he recounts both his father’s horrific suffering in the Holocaust, and his own experience as the son of survivors in graphic novel form. While my family thankfully never had to face such atrocities, the handling of the duality and issues of
writing about the past, through the eyes of a more privileged, younger generation, became a valuable example.

Logistically, my method of research was largely centered on collecting oral history—for my purposes, the family stories I loved and had heard often—and storing them in the form of audio files. I collected these stories in different settings: one on one, or in larger groups where the stories developed in conversation from multiple viewpoints, as well as either by direct prompting, or from the momentary emergence of a memory. This was a kind of enjoyable challenge, facilitating the production of the language that would become my text, and keeping the conversation on any kind of track while also acting as a more passive observer to the larger world of a history of which I only knew fragments. I heard the stories I practically knew by heart, as well as stories I had never heard, stories with extended information, or different variations of the memories I expected to hear. Completely episodic, the stories covered decades, sides of the family and topics and situations from all imaginable aspects of life.

Over a hundred and twenty audio files later, true to the future-librarian I am, I began the process of cataloguing and grouping the files. Some continual aspects of the stories were expected: the emphasis on food, a staple of Southern culture and social life, the intense and unyielding love of animals, the pleasure of recounting “origin stories”—how I met your mother and so on. The emphasis on family and childhood, as well as marriage, was expected given the context, but emerged even more strongly than I expected. I was also surprised by the depth of emotion that emerged in the stories: while humorous and light hearted memories were more prevalent, and nostalgia at some parts rampant, my family also recounted hardship, suffering and loss. Regret rang poignantly in many memories, and a longing for a past—idealized or not—underscored many of the sweetest memories of loved ones. The stories became as much about
those who were voiceless, family members not present or no longer with us, as the stories were about the voices that brought the memories to life.

And the stories were a living text. While I had read classical literature in courses that were oral narratives re-embodied into still and unchanging print form, I had no experience actually going about the process. At this stage, transcribing the audio files directly to the page, the every-present issue of authenticity emerged. While I had experience writing creatively, even creative non-fiction, I had never written about family members directly. The issue of characterization was especially important to me, as these are real, living, breathing “characters,” and I wanted to capture them in a positive, but realistic way. To keep their language in particular authentic, I transposed their words directly, into a kind of strange colloquial prose. Upon conversation again with advisors, with great experience in poetry, I returned to these word-made-prose memories, with intent to refashion into poetry, with its benefits of added rhythm and better imitation of natural speech.

Here I began to take more liberties with the language: clarifying, editing and most dramatically putting the prose into lines. Listening again to the audio versions, I shifted the language to mirror pauses and the rhythms of speech unique to each of my five “voices”—my mother, father, uncle, grandmother and grandfather from opposite sides. I deleted unnecessary language, highlighted useful repetition, clarified pronouns and end stopped or enjambed lines to mimic the quickness or cadence of their speech. My goal was to craft their unique voices as well, preserving their manner of speech and unique expressions. I ran then into the issue of dialect, a historically sensitive topic both in literature, with stereotyped Southern voices, and my own personal history with negative reactions to Southern modes of speech and accents. While my family members’ natural speech, especially my grandparents’, fully embodies these Southern
cadences, when I transposed the speech directly with different spellings for words, I ended up with speech similar to *Huckleberry Finn*—and I found it distracting and almost offensive. Instead, I revised the spellings and direct regional language—“fixin’, o’”—to more typical spellings and shifted the emphasis to the wealth of Southern colloquialisms that appeared in the stories, often beginning with “Anyhow,” and punctuated with metaphors and non-traditional syntax. These narrative poems followed no strict structure, instead yielding free-formly to the language of the speaker.

Taking a step back, scrolling through the pages of poems, a culture of storytelling emerged. The language across the poems was in ways similar, each beginning with a, “Now I’ll tell you,” and often ending with a punchline like ending, with localized and intimate details. The content also held overarching themes, but also challenges. Many of the stories were deeply romanticized—none of the relationships featured in the text are as perfect as they seem, and the past was certainly viewed with deeply rose-colored glasses at times—and many stories also emerged problematic. An admittedly traditional and white as well as Southern worldview is presented, with a lack of other voices or viewpoints. In moving away from dealing with my own identity, which in some ways contradicts these worldviews, the text became more of a celebration of my family and an exploration of memory, but I held on to these issues of singular worldview in a few specific instances. It is important also that these perspectives change with generations, especially in gender as you see the shifts from my grandmother to my mother and myself, both in opportunities and outlook, and are not fixed.

The most sensitively approached issue for me was the issue of race, and even at this stage of revising the poems I considered taking it out entirely. Racism is a very real part of the history of the strong, independent and compassionate wider culture I grew up in, and it seemed
inauthentic to leave it out entirely. While none of the poems included describe any mal-intent, it would be difficult to read them without wondering about the opinions of the people they are describing. Most poignantly, my grandma repeatedly shared her love and devotion to Venus, her nanny as a child, of whom I had no picture or voice, so I opted to leave the open box in the final version of the page. I found it important to explore these issues in their understandable historical context—my grandparents lived through the Great Depression—and in this way my personal reflection did not seem to be operating in the way I wanted. This was not the only place—while the reflections and memories I had been writing offered me the chance to write more descriptively, they continually seemed heavy-handed, and overpowered the poem-stories. Over time, I cut more and more of these prose reflections in my voice, instead emphasizing playing with the existing stories’ language.

While I ventured out to family members’ homes in the pursuit of stories, I also began to dig into old photo albums. My collection of data expanded to include other forms of media as I combed through hundreds of photos, some captioned, others not and continually asked questions, leading to even more stories. I also began collecting documents—recipes, marriage licenses, letters, lists, hymns—accumulating a massive stack of information, evidence, memories and ever more questions. I now had multiple voices and hundreds of moveable parts. Splaying them out across my house, I began the most arduous step of my creative process—figuring out how to map all these fragments of history and memory into a cohesive narrative and literary text.

At first I was completely and utterly daunted. Returning again to my simplistic thematic divisions—“Food,” “Animals,” “Tobacco”—I began to look for more nuanced connections between the smaller texts. This final sixty page work incorporates only a fragment of the information collected: some audio files lost due to interference, pictures I could never
contextualize, and poems that just didn’t seem to “fit” in the narrative I was situating were left out. My cutting of pieces was swift and brutal, keeping only the stories that particularly illuminated aspects of family member’s characters, highlighted greater trends of Southern life or where indispensable in their entertainment value. Mapping the poems, pictures and documents, I worked to create fluidity between “topics,”—such as “gender,” “jobs,” “romance”—again looking at these nuanced details of particular stories. For example, issues of gender culminated in discussions of education, and the great variation in educational opportunities between generations of women, which flowed cohesively into the very different but thematically related issues of education in the integration of schools my uncle witnessed firsthand as a high school senior.

While moving between larger topics in this way, within these subcategories I worked to order stories in meaningful ways. Juxtaposing personal history and wider “History,” I intentionally ordered the poems to relate fluidly, but also critique or illuminate—an example being placing the discussion of the cultural and economic importance of tobacco alongside the localized memory of my grandmother and her cigarettes. I found that the stories each held multiple values or trends, so deciding which ways to situate the specific instances and descriptions of overarching cultural practices was a slow and thoughtful process. Overall, I incorporated a sense of time as cyclical, with radically different generations interplaying on the page and returning to similar trends over time and across the places in the narrative arc. Though the stories interlock and form a kind of narrative, the poems and pictures could still be read individually or in any order, preserving the singular and self-sustained nature of the stories as snapshots of life that exist on their own outside the context of the work.

While preserved as independent stories, the narrative does aim become something greater
than its parts, an idea introduced immediately in the story of the Beaufort Stew—a dish made up of parts that is much different when each is cooked separately, as the stories are different when each viewed independently. Together these stories do not paint a picture of any one person, or two distinct families or three different generations, but instead a kind of family and culture of language that surround me. Localized but also universal, these stories are all meaningful to me, and I attempted to make these meanings clearer and more cohesive by ordering them in logical ways for other eyes, but also in ways that highlight the values and characteristics I see in them.

The “topics” were literal—my parents really are accountants—but the process by which I edited the stories highlighted the deep appreciation they have for accounting for details, taking care of things and the ways their professions impact and highlight their characteristics as people. Likewise food is undoubtedly a fixture of Southern families and social groups, but it also opened up questions of consumption, comfort and taste as irretrievable memory. Animals are beloved in my family, but in the text operate to underline changes over time as care of animals for sustenance and survival shifts to the spoiling of house cats—similar values, very different situations. Specific details like jobs, cars, relationships and places likewise created space to explore how identity is localized, and question which details each family chose across the board as defining or important to their life narrative. These truthful events—like childhood antics—illuminated family love, as did the stories of painful loss and sacrifice. I struggled at first with how to situate these powerful stories in the space of lighthearted anecdotes, but found they fit cohesively with the stories of triumph, as these heart wrenching points in my family’s history where just as much a “part of life” and the narrative of the text.

I was actually surprised by two “parts of life” that were missing from the stories, so important that I still included them in the way of pictures—church, and the lake. Stories of the
beach featured heavily, yet the equal if not greater time spent on the lake remained unmentioned, opening up questions about how we define home and vacation. The lack of religion in the stories really astounded me, as Christianity absolutely shapes the lives, views and attitudes of my entire family. My mother and grandfather especially are incredibly active in the church, and the hymns I chose to feature in the text are irrevocably ingrained in my memory—creating spaces for questions of how religion may be so deeply ingrained that it requires no mentioning, or how spiritual life may still have a division from social and family lives.

While examining and exploring these issues, I worked to arrange the pieces on each page. Turning again to research, I sought out artist books for insights and influences into how to incorporate different kinds of media and design to create new meaning and questions through juxtaposition and spatiality. Generally, I looked to Tomasula’s VAS: An Opera in Flatland and Danielewski’s House of Leaves, and drew more specifically from them later in design. Using these approaches, I juxtaposed perspectives on each pages often contrasting opposite sides of the family or the different experiences between generations, from romances to involvement agricultural work. The stories are often in conversation with each other, directly when two voices create one story, or indirectly when comparing or contrasting experiences from jobs to a surprising number of dead animals.

The photographs and documents also sit in conversation with the stories—sometimes operating as expected as evidence of the claims, or a picture from the moment the story took place, but at other times acting to critique. Offering ironies—my family in Atlanta after my mother’s discussion of not wanting to move there—humor or critiques—my grandfather’s appearance in 6th grade after is defamation of my grandmother’s adolescent appearance—or simply adding depth to the stories by adding dissonance, like my sister and I with cows at the
State Fair in juxtaposition with my grandparents’ close relationship with farm animals. The photos also reinforce ideas of change over time, with the changes in photography’s technology and the contrast in color and quality of the photos on each page. I also had the challenge of having much more photographic evidence of my mother’s family than my father’s, balancing that difference in information without letting some stories overpower others.

Though I also found my lengthy reflections, again, to be overpowering the narrative arc I had now mapped out by page, it still felt lacking in the way of my voice and perspective. Drawing from Danielewski, with his subversion of footnotes’ usual use as they come to take over the narrative, with often fake sources in his text, I revisited my captions. Originally just listing the people, place and year, I increasingly allowed my voice and memories creep into the captions, creating another outlet for conversation on the page. Much like the pictures, my captions operated to clarify, especially names and places both in the photos and in the stories, as well as add depth from my own—sometimes paragraphs long—memories or contrast the stories with conflicting points, like drawing attention to my uncle’s affinity for tall tales. In terms of design, I made the stylistic, and as I found out, difficult to accomplish, choice of handwriting my captions. I found handwriting to have extreme significance in the ways I remember my family, with a deep emotional response to seeing their specific handwriting. It also plays with the idea of “scrapbook” and recalls a sense of immediacy—like the stories, unscripted and imperfect—and intimacy. My handwriting, brought on in the last wave of cursive being taught in school curriculum, also looks strikingly like my family’s handwriting and holds a sense of connection both for me and in the space of the text.

Like the deeply personal feel of handwriting in contrast to typed text, the entirety of the work exists in the space between intimacy and exclusion, or resistance to the reader. A tension
between self-fashioning—posed photographs—and intimacy in letters, personal stories and things of the home, like recipes exists, as well as how information is specific to the community, and often goes unexplained to outside readers. I wanted to highlight this sense of finding a photobook of people you’ve never met in the train station—the kind of distancing that is created when looking at something that is so intimate it is disarming, but also allow the text to push back and create space for reader’s to draw their own conclusions from the tensions between pieces, rather than stating family dynamics or details straight forwardly. In this way, I held back my own voice in explaining, allowing for this sense of exclusion to be fostered, even as the text is deeply intimate to create new meanings, unstated but present in how the pieces interplay on each page.

One specific stylistic choice that plagued me along these lines was whether or not to give each of my featured “voices” names, or rely more on the universals that emerge. As I grappled with the question, lineage and family relationships grew more important to the text—yet I still did not want to distract from the stories by putting the focus on who is speaking and figuring out who they are respectively. I chose to “sign” the poems with a single letter, similar to their respective handwriting, the first of the speaker’s name, to offer a sense of grounding as well as aid readers in deciphering each individual voice, which hopefully would become easier throughout the narrative. I also created a family tree to aid in confusing logistical points of relation, and it also became my key design choice.

Given that my design skills are elementary at best, I relied heavily on simplistic tools to craft what I hope is a clean and uncluttered visual experience that is also meaningful to the context of the text. Returning to Tomasula, and his use of “suture lines” on the exterior sides of each page to underscore the “scars” of the culture of body manipulation in his text, I developed my own central design idea of “family lines.” Descending from the lines used to connect names
on the family tree, the lines lay across each page, visually connecting pieces and the way in which the family continues in each generation, and how traits, experiences and values are passed down linearly. Also like “time lines” they connect pieces across generations and reinforce the unending cadence of time, continuing unbroken from page to page—the exception being the two pages in which a person is lost and the line descends from above, but ends mid-page. I hoped to subvert ideas of scrapbooking again with this simplistic design, and starting with pictures you would expect to find in a photobook—charming family photos at the beach—by taking a medium used to reinforce perceptions of perfection in families and juxtaposing it with undeniably real stories—opening of course with my mother’s story about being so sunburnt she often had to go to the hospital on these trips. This first page highlights changes in approaches to medicine over time, but also operates to challenge the perceived simplicity of a family history “scrapbook.”

Perhaps one of the most important stylistic choices I made, certainly in fostering a sense of cohesiveness in the narrative, was one of the last. Drawing from the 18th century “heroic crown of sonnets,” re-embodied in the striking A Wreath for Emmet Till by Marilyn Nelson, I revised my poems one last time to allow for the last line of each page to mirror, subtly alter or relate directly to the first line of the next page. In addition to making the transitions from story poem to story poem more fluid, it highlighted the way the language used was already similar—many of the lines already linked, with little effort on my part.

Including the preface was also a late choice, as I revisited the story that began the entire idea of the project—the first audio file I recorded. Cut because I could never find the right place for it, I returned the poem to the narrative because it opens the text with one of the values that draws through all the poems: perseverance. Despite the great changes of time—the many
addresses the text closes with—many aspects remained the same for my family, but also a willingness to change, adapt and move past hardships.

Beyond these heavier thematic ideas and values, the text in large part operates to entertain, and offer a look into the lives of those I love. Situated in snapshots and pieces, it’s episodic and humorous—playful in the descriptions that emerge, hopeful and in ways, celebratory of the everyday aspects of life: sips of Pepsi and Sunday dinners. I aimed to create this picture into a complicated and imperfect world, and it is very much that, but also and enjoyable experience in the ironies and intimacies of family dynamics and life. I chose to end with the page that connected the most for me: the idea of curlers. While the world outside sees the perfectly styled curls, the text allows readers access to the intimacy and laughter in the pictures from the “inside”—curlers still in— for all three generations explored.

Overall, the text operates to mimic, and question, the fashioning of memory. Fragmented, single stories in a long line of history, these memories exist in pieces, and change over time—as we see in the reiterations of Dexter’s story—different from the cohesive narratives found in other texts. The project also drew questions about how we process memories and information: why do we save what we save? How do we fashion our own memories of the past? And more importantly for my project, how and why do we choose to share them? For my family, sharing these stories is bonding, reminiscing, pleasure in sharing, humor, love—but also sorrow, learning and appreciating the past, and hopes for the future. Stories in the context of this project are synonymous with connection—making my pursuit of fostering that connection between pieces in narrative form the central driving force in the creation of the text, both for my own and my family’s benefit, and for the enjoyment of others’ as an exploration into the intimacies of another’s world and experiences. I hope this text, as much literature does, opens more questions.
through the situation of the material, and creates space for new understanding—as the experience of exploring related texts and writing my own has created space for me to consider new ideas, and find my own insights through literature.
A family history in

Pieces

Morgan Lundy
South Carolina Honors College Senior Thesis
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The greatest of all thank you's to my family for their ever-enduring patience, support (always) and of course, for their stories.

This thesis would absolutely not have been possible if it weren't also for my (patient) and challenging advisors, Dr. Susan Vanderburg and Professor Samuel Aradon.

A thank you as well to the boyfriend, roommates and dog for letting me spread these "pieces" all over the house, and for encouraging me every step along the way.
I told you about them little frogs,
(That arithmetic teacher she told us about them three little frogs)
Stuck down in a milk jug.

And one of them said
well,
He can't get out he's gonna go ahead and just give up.
And went to the bottom.

Well, we went on and then the next little frog he kicked and he kicked and he says I can't go no longer.

Now the third frog says
Imma
keep on keeping. Imma keep on keeping, keep on kicking and he kicked up a—

BUTTERBALL.

And it saved that little frog's life.

That's what she said. To keep trying, keep kicking, keep going.
Every year we went to Folly Beach for two weeks and I would get burned to a crisp. And I would eventually get sick too, so pretty much every trip to the beach we would go to the emergency room.

So when I had kids, I slathered y'all to the hilt. I think about Mama Laney and I was laying out there cooking. If anything, it was like Coppertone 10. We didn't really have stuff like that when we were growing up.

We'd all go to the beach on the weekend now. Mr. Bryant had a big, big parcel of land down there at Murrie's Inlet. So when you crossed over to his property, it was school's out.

Nothing there but us, I mean the dogs ran loose and we learned to drive cars there and boats and it was a good time had by all, every weekend.
One weekend, we were having a good time
at the little Edisto park,
and we were gonna make Beaufort stew that night.
And
we got home later than we expected,

and Mama Lane had decided
she would go ahead and cook the Beaufort Stew.
So... instead of having Daddy's big pot
with all the seasoning and
everything cooked all together
—the corn, the shrimp the potatoes—
Mama Lane had a:

Pot on the stove with the potatoes,
A pot on the Stove with the corn
And a pot on the stove with the shrimp.

So we had boiled corn, boiled shrimp, boiled potatoes.

One of the funniest stories I had with Reed was,
for whatever reason, I had decided
that we needed to cook a Beaufort stew.

And he had never had it. And
he thought it was the best thing in the world,
and I left early, and they took all the shrimp shells
and put em in the trashcan.
(We would let the trashcan fill up.)
And we cooked a Beaufort stew and
left the shells in there for like a week. And it stank,
and it stank.

We had to go in and open all the windows up for
weeks.

We had some times, Reed and me.
Reed and I, neither of us had much money at all. But there was a Sam's in Columbia, and we would go and buy big of containers of stuff.

Back in those days, two of our favorite things you could buy in big cases was little stuffed crabs, and they used to have these veal patties, but they were basically little hamburger steaks.

Those were two of the best things we had. We'd buy up all kinds of stuff, and then we would eat it through the semester till all the food was gone.

—P

Cavlier, G 24 That was the black car I had—it had an electric dash that kept going out all the time, so you didn't know how fast you were going.

So me and Mama and Dady went to look for me a new car, and drove home a brand new car.

Hatch back, with a moon roof.
I was cool.

And my roommate in Capstone hated me, 'cause I had a new car.

—C
Taylor and I ended up following in our parents' footsteps to USC—living right next door in Columbia Hall. Thankfully to my sister, I left my job as a resident assistant freshman year. I'll save those stories for another time...

But they still haven't replaced those elevators!

We lived way up in Capstone; we were on the 13th floor.

One of our favorite things to do was throw things out the window.

Well, we made sure no one was down there. But we threw grapefruits and pencils and stuff like that.

It was fun living on the 13th floor. Only time we ever took the stairs was during fire drills—by the time you waited on the elevators you could walk up the stairs 8 times.

Columbia Hall was the only one that was co-ed. And it was co-ed by floor. I don't know what kind of people would let their children live in a co-ed dorm. That was awful.

That was a big deal then. - C
It was a big deal.

Somebody told me you need to be a member of Beta Alpha Psi, that's where you met all the accounting firms.

So I went to their first organizational meeting, and it was there at the Belk Auditorium in the basement of the Business school, and it was the first time I saw your mom. She had that blonde hair—that was when she colored her hair. She had on a blue suit, I remember, so I noticed her.

And we had the meeting, and she spoke a lot and at the end I did go and say hello to her.

But as far as really getting to know her, it was groups of us that started going out after the meetings every week. That's when I really got to know your mom. Eating nachos.

That blonde hair, 1989. (People say me too about that; I think that as a compliment.)

Your daddy was out in the audience—it was like the introductory meeting to join Beta Alpha Psi. And I was president. And he was there to get his certificate, and that's when I first laid eyes on him.
Yea,
I first laid eyes on your grandmamma
cut in the school yard.
She was in the sixth grade and
I was a senior.
She had that long straight hair, and I said
that's an ugly girl.

And so then some years later,
they had a fair out there,
in October you know,
the School did a thing like that.
You know Homer Jennings, Jennifer's Daddy,
Jennifer's Daddy's sister,
I was to take her home.

They lived over there in Lexington.

But anyhow,
Elaine came up,
and asked me
would I take her home.

And I did.

So,
whenever I took her home,
she came around and
kissed me on the cheek.

Oh, man.

I drove your grandmamma that night.
Well my Daddy drove the bus in the afternoon

from school, so had to go back from
Sellers to Latta to pick the bus up. So
I would drive the car—the daredevil—and
went and stayed and ran the store
until my Daddy got back.

And see Tillman Lumber Company Office
was right there beside it. And they all came
over for Cokes and stuff like that.

And that's how I saw him. He was one of the
overseers. The office see, was right by the store.
And he taken a liking to my beautiful blonde hair.
See I had this long blonde hair. I was a spoiled brat.

He had already been in the military
and out by then, and had a few other odd jobs.

He was in the Army in the in between years,
too young for the Second World War and before
Korea so he missed, fortunately missed, combat.

I lived in Sellers but I went to school in Latta. And he
lived over in Oak Grove.

We didn't decide 'til much later to get married.
So anyhow, then I got back and we decided we was gonna get married.

And we had to lie about her age now, and she even had a license with that different birthdate on it for a couple years.

But we got married, with my sister Barbara Anne and another girl from school;

we went over to Lexington to the preacher.

Anyhow, we weren't gonna tell nobody, and she was gonna go on back to school. They had a play out there in Irmo, so after the play I took her on home

and I went on home.
We went on and got married in the church right in front of our home in Sellers.

That church got torn down. 40 years ago.

Before that we liked going to the Chicken Basket, that used to be a lot of fun. There was a lot of us gathered up there on a Sunday night.

Of course, you had to be real careful about the boys you dated now, they had to be the upper upper class. You know. You had to be very particular about who you dated.

There was a place in Dillon, called the Chicken Basket. The church was in Latta, what seven miles away. On a Sunday night, that was a great thing to do. We had a piece of chicken, fried chicken.

You know. It was very particular about who you dated, and where you went.

That was a big date.
I'll tell you about a big time now.

Me and my brother Johnny,
the one that lived in Beaufort
and is dead now
(bone cancer ate his bones up)
we slept together,
shared a bed till I was 23 and he was 20.

Anyhow, he come home there,
(to that old house that's burn down now)
about 1:30 that night,
on Saturday night,

he said you can't believe what happened to me
tonight.

And I thought he had done
got a ticket or something.

I got married.

I says, Hell, you aint got nothing on me, I got married
last night!

And here we were laying in the bed.
Now that's the truth, now.
Now you aren't going to believe this, but it's true.

We would all go out to dinner after the meetings.
We were sitting next to each other
at the Villa in 5 points, but I thought
he was going to Atlanta.

I don't know, somebody had said,
you know everybody was getting
offers from all kind of places. And
I thought he was going to Atlanta,
so I hadn't really given him the time of day.
'Cause he wasn't going to be here anyway,
he was moving on,
and

I had no interest in living in Atlanta.

So in the course of dinner and the
conversation, I mentioned Atlanta and
he said oh no, I've accepted a job here in Columbia.
And I said, you DID?
And

I became much more interested in him.

And the rest is history.

-C
Dear Darlin,

[Image of a ship]  

Now if you want to hear some real history,

I got to sending love notes through my sister Barbara Anne, who was still in school.

But I had to go on a two week cruise in the Navy; that's when all those mushy letters got wrote.

[Image of a letter]  

Miss Elaine Allen
Route #2
Columbus, Nevada

Dear Darlin, 

[Handwritten text]  

[Postmark: Monterey, 2 Dec 1944]
Now the Navy,
on my cruise,
that's the easiest two years I've spent in my life.
Playing war out on the water.

After I enlisted, I traveled
broad and decided all the places
we had both visited, forty years
ago.
1999 He spent plenty of time out on the water back in SC on his pontoon. My sister and I also grew up on the lake - Lake Murray - boating, skiing, sometimes fishing or just fishing. I think it's one of the places my family is happiest at.
Grandmama sold cigarettes in her little bait shop. And so, we'd be over at Granny's and she'd say, "Cheryl, go get my cigarettes and a Tab." I thought that was my name for a while, "Cheryl go get my cigarettes and a tab."

"Mama, you ain't got no cigarettes."

"Run over to the bait shop and get me a pack of cigarettes."

When all the tobacco was still booming and all warehouses were in full operation, it was like a different world.

Before you ever got to Mullins, in like August, if you had the windows down you could smell the city. You could smell that tobacco. But it was a wonderful smell. And there would be people everywhere. The activity was just off the charts.

If you wanted fine clothes, I mean nice clothes, not no cheap stuff, you went to Mullins. It was a booming place here. Columbia and Charleston didn't have nothing on Mullins, I tell ya.

But then with the mails and all, those little stores couldn't compete.

But back then, it was the one place to go.
If there was one thing
I'd change in life,
I'd knock them damn cigarettes out of Elaine's hand.

Tobacco. The best job was to work in the warehouses.
There were a bunch of tobacco warehouses. In those days, you'd see the trucks lined up all over Mullins trying to get the tobacco on the warehouse floor.

Sleep on the back of the trucks to get it on the floor, to get it sold.

None of them are there anymore.
When I was little, my grandma, my daddy's Mama had a bait shop.

That had a little tiny convenience store. And she had one of the big Coca-Cola coolers for the bottled cokes, and they would lay them on their sides. So Kay and Gene would dig all the way to the bottom, to see if they could find one with ice in it.

And that was the greatest day ever. They loved that to death.

it was a whole quarter.

-M

Sometimes my Dad asks me if I know what Pepsi is, but then I rely on it.

Kay, Gene, and my Mama, 1973

Mama doesn't have any anymore,

but

she used to have this glass set, with these little itty bitty little fruit glasses that weren't much bigger than a shot glass.

And you'd be out there doing something with Daddy, and he'd never want much, but he always wanted it cold and he would tell you to go get him a sip of Pepsi.

And so you'd have to come all the way from out there on the creek somewhere, up to the house, and get one of them little fruit glasses and pour him hardly more than a shot of Pepsi and bring it back to him.

He wanted to have his and just drink it, and that was it.

He couldn't stand Coca-Cola.
Candy was less than a quarter when I was little. Sometimes when we left the doctor, a lot of the time we would stop at the dime store. And that was just the highlight of my life. Cause at the counter where you check out there was a little bowl where they had little miniature Reese’s peanut butter cups. And they were 2 cents. And mama would let me get one. I think she felt bad ’cause I had probably been to the doctor and probably got a shot. And on the way home, I would unwrap it like it was fine, just gold. I would nibble it bit by bit. Make that little miniature peanut butter cup last all the way from River Drive to our house in Irmo on Highway 60.

The sign on the bait shop said, "BLOW CAR HORN!" Grandma would make signs and it was just like country come to town. But it was just tacked on the door, "BLOW CAR HORN" and somebody would come fishing and blow the car horn, and Grandmama would call Daddy: "There’s somebody wants some minners." So Daddy would have to get up at 3 in the morning and come sell two dollars’ worth of minners.

Yea, mama didn’t like that a whole lot.
I didn't like cleaning a whole lot.

We always had to clean up on Saturday mornings so we could go to the movies later.

She was clean, she liked music, she liked to have parties. She loved making her d'oeuvres and Christmas goodies. And she was happiest when she was on a diet.

But she wouldn't turn left. If it wasn't on the right, we didn't go there. So if you wanted Burger King that's fine but don't be looking over there at McDonalds, don't be looking over there.

She had a lot of irrational fears, never liked driving on the interstate.

Well, it was because Daddy was such a bad driver.

Eugene, you can just pull this car over and let me and my youngins out right now.

Eugene, you've got more than your life in this car.

Damn, if you're going to drive like that, I'm getting out.

Just pull over.

-C

[Handwritten note]

Happy Anniversary

Love always,

Eugene

[Signature]

You can still feel her in my friend's drive, not just in the picture.
We was nervous when we pulled in there.
I went down there and
told her Daddy,
me and Elaine got married.

He said,
well aint nothing I can do about it now,
y'll make the best of it.

And the first night that we spent
down there at that house,
we went to go to bed,
and the damn bed fell down!

Forgot whether the screws come out
or the mattress box sprung,
but I said god damn;

I could have gone through a knot hole.

Elaine's mama helped us.
She aint never said a bad word about
nobody that I know of.
Haven't ever heard her say nothing really.

Elaine's mama.
Anyhow, Granny, my mama’s mama,
always had a chocolate yellow layer cake every Sunday.
So she made them on Saturday. I would
always go over there on Saturday afternoon
when she was making her cakes.
That was the only time that
I ever, ever heard Granny cuss.

Granny used very few words anyway,
but when she was cake baking she would
pull those pans out of the oven and
put them on a wet towel and they would go
TCSHHHH, to cool em off, then
she would flip the cake over on to
the previous layer, and if it didn’t flop over
just right, if it was a quarter inch off,
she would go

darn.

And I could remember I’d think,
ohhhh Granny said a cuss word!

And after that when she was done
she would give me the bowl to lick.
That was the best treat in the whole wide world.

And I remember when my MAMA
would make a cake, she got out
the rubber spatula and she got out every BIT
of cake batter out of that bowl.

And I do remember as a teenager,
Granny would call over and say
I’m done making a cake if you want the bowl and
I would be a snoot nosed teenager watching TV, and
I’d say, Nah I’m alright Granny.

And how I would give anything
to go back get every one of them bowls back.

No one could cook like Mama and Granny.
Your grandmamma couldn't always cook like that.

There was five of us living in the house, and Elaine got to stay for free 'cause she made up our beds and everything. And Reuben used to be a cook in the army, so he cooked, but then as time went on, all we had to do was come home and sit down to a meal.

She had prepared everything.
Well we had finished preparing everything, so we were headed home for the weekend.

We were auditing Beaufort County and we had ended field work on Friday; I was coming home and I had to bring back some binders with me.

And when I put the binders on the floorboard of my car, these big black binders,

This GIGANTIC PALMETTO BUG CRAWLED OUT of the binder, onto the floorboard of my car. So I jumped and screamed and got my shoe off and tried to get it, but it went up into the dash of my car.

And then I didn't know what to do. So I stood there for a while going, Oh my gosh I'm not getting in the car with that creature.

But I had to get home. I was by myself, so I put my coat, my jacket, my suit jacket, back on and buttoned it up—long sleeves—and I rolled the windows down (so it could fly out.)

So I rode for 3 hours home from Beaufort to Columbia with the windows wide open.

And I turned the air conditioning wide open for a while (so it would freeze him), then turned it on heat for a while (so it would burn him up). And I cranked the radio wide open (so the noise would affect him.)

And that's how I drove home from Beaufort.

And I never saw the roach again.

She looked like the wicked witch of the west come to town. She had that big 80s hair, and her hair was even bigger;

her hair was everywhere.

My parents—_and what 80s hair she still had._ cockroaches—and my greatest fear in life is palmetto bugs.
We got to go everywhere.

Several summers.
I would actually travel with him. I could go with him to work. Every day he would be in a different part in the county and we ate in a different place. He was a health inspector.

As long as I didn't get into anything, I could walk around the construction sites, and other days we would visit businesses, and see what they were doing, and restaurants. Making sure they were up to codes. It was a lot of fun.

We went all over this county; I've been down every road in this county at some point in time.

I delivered newspapers, a newspaper route.
Started when I was somewhere between eleven and twelve. Kip Clements got me to deliver the Charlotte Observer.
I delivered and Sam delivered and Phil did for a little while. It wasn't just getting up early and delivering the paper, you had to collect.
It was 55 cents a week, and you had to go back to all these house, and collect.

They'd work you to death, but you did right well, being 10, 12 years of age.
He was sixteen. Junior worked for the Ocean Forest Hotel. Well Buddy grew up thinking oh, that’s a great thing to do. B.F. Carmicheal was superintendent of Latta Schools, where we all went and he had a nice home, right across from Ocean Forest Hotel. Now that was a great place for teenage boys to work. They looked after them, had house fathers and such that really looked after them, coming there to get a job. Buddy had grown up thinking that was the great thing to do. Cause Junior, my oldest brother, had worked himself way up with Ocean Forest Hotel.

Anyway, when school was out for the summer you know and B.F Carmicheal, who was the superintendent of Latta Schools, who lived right there across from Ocean Forest Hotel, the street right there, well boys in Latta that wanted jobs down there, he looked after them.

Buddy, it was late in the afternoon, and he was carrying cots up there. And boys were playing, you know how boys will play, and they could open up those elevator doors. Emergency doors and stop the elevators. Well the boys opened it, and y’all this was bad. But they opened the door to the elevator. Y’all this is sad now. The other elevator came down on top of him, it was a sad story. Of course it knocked him down and killed him, just like that.

I tell you what, I tell you about a sad time for many years. Buddy was sixteen years old. It was his second week there.

But see Mr. Carmicheal, was superintendent of Latta schools, and he sorta kinda looked after the boys going down to Myrtle Beach to work for the summer.

It was a good place for them to work, that’s all.
It was a good place to start out, working at the bank. I got a lot of experience, working through college. And I got to repossess all the cars.

A farmer that had a loan with the bank once, and we talked about it and I was the only one that knew how to operate it. So I went to go get it and I drove it alllll back down Main Street, that big old tractor.

And parked it back behind the bank.

I also got to drive a Firebird. It was the first time I flew by myself. There was a car that someone local had got the loan, then moved up to Washington but couldn't pay the payments. But since it was up in Washington, I got a ticket and flew out of Florence and got the car and drove it all the way back. I was cool.

We started the company in '72, I remember that was the same year my daddy died.

You go down St. Andrews Road, you know where you turn to Bush River Road and you go down that curve so hard where it used to flood out so bad, that's where we were working.

And I was over on 61, near where we went fishing that time at that deer place, on that same stretch of road, Inez called and told me Mama had died.

I was a spoiled brat. Daddy did not let me do nothing. My daddy sure didn't let me do nothing, I can tell you that for sure.
Ok, I'll tell you one thing about it,

Paul was a doll baby though. He was. He was a beautiful little boy.

But he was all boy. There was no sissy little girl about it. But I'd get him all dressed up.

And he used to dance to the washing machine. Anything that had a beat—

He'd love any kind of a beat to the washing machine. Oh, he'd—

When it went into the spin cycle, here he'd come.

He'd dance to the spin cycle.

He was one spoiled rotten little boy.

He'd come running anytime he heard it.

- S  

- H
Well she'd come running when she heard the trash guys.

She used to stand up on
the back of the couch and wave at the trash guys,
'cause that's what she wanted to be when she grew up.

Oh yes, she liked those trash guys.
She'd wave and wave.

Didn't she.
She heard that trash coming
and there she came, wide open.

We'd sit there, me you and her Uncle Sonny.

My parents, uncle, both grandmas
and an aunt... are all certified
public accountants or work keeping
books.

Somewhere I ended up an English major—
they may have preferred I mixed with trash
collecting — But they're coming to accept it

I also was born disgracefully with a shiny
chromosome for sweet tea, so there's always a
case for adoption.
Your granddaddy, Uncle Carey and me.
We were squirrel hunting, so we had 15 dead squirrels in the back of the pickup truck, and a whole bunch of spent shells, and a whole bunch of shells in an open box, and at least 3 shotguns in the front.

And granddaddy pulled into the entrance to Paris Island. And the MP walked up, and of course they're armed with rifles, and walks up and these three rednecks looking like hell, been in the woods all morning with dead squirrels in the back and 3 shotguns sitting right there, and I was just like Oh my Lord, we're going to get arrested right here.

And thankfully he must have been a country boy, he said it's alright, just turn around here.
We were looking for the place to get oysters.

And you remember Uncle Carey, he looked rough as could be, he looked rough on a normal day.

- P
You remember Uncle Reuben.

He raised cows, and he would give each family a cow, so we had a lot of beef. Yea, gosh, when me and your mom got married, it was like the first thing we had to do was go get us a freezer.

So here we were, a little young couple, just the two of us, and we had a big chest freezer and got a quarter of a cow once a year.

Never appreciate it till it's gone.

We didn't have hamburgers that year or something, so we bought some hamburger meat for a party I think.

And I was cooking, and put them on the grill, and I ran back up in the house to get something, and I came back down and that grill had flames flying every which a direction.

Cause the meat was so full of fat, not like Uncle Reuben's hamburgers had been.

It was the best meat.

---

Now my dad fells the trees and grinds the meat from hunting. I hardly like ground beef anywhere when I make it to Italy, while staying abroad I ordered myself some real Italian Spaghetti Bolognese. I tried because it wasn't nearly as good as my mom's deer Spaghetti.
I worked at the best meat locker plant, book keeping.

Howard did the management, and
I did the books.

We really had a neighborhood, at that time.
We were all through with supper by about 6 o'clock,
so it was a close neighborhood, everybody
really cared about each other.

Daddy'd be back in the shop, working on
different things, and mama would be with the ladies,
and all the kids around.

It was a wonderful place to work. You were their child
really, you didn't work for them.
It was the Bryant family.

When Paul was born now, Daddy went to work for the
Health department.

The supermarkets were starting, so people weren't
raising their own hogs anymore, and bringing them in
to keep them in those big freezers. They were buying
their meat at the supermarket.

Every farmer used to raise their tobacco and crops
and raised cattle and hogs on the place too, and
kept a locker there at the locker plant.
The freezer room was as big as this house.

All these farmers raised chickens and hogs and cows
as their family's meat. It wasn't like this meat you go
to the grocery store now and buy. It wasn't no grass
fed and stuff such as that, it was different tasting.
They started giving those cows syrup.

The meat tasted better.
Everything tasted better off the Western Sizzlin plates we had at the house.

Our family always went to the Western Sizzlin' on Broad River Road on Friday night, down on Broad River Road. We wondered how many times your mom and I were right there beside each other and didn't know it.

And Rush's too, down on Broad River Road. I loved Rush's.

We would go get it from Rush's, and sit in the car and eat it. Mama never liked to go inside. Daddy would go in and get it, bring it back out and pass the baskets out and we would sit and eat it and go home.
At home we had even better meals.

We had a big Sunday meal, macaroni and cheese and peas and butter beans and a huge spread of food.

She would call me on Saturday morning.

Is Paul coming with you tomorrow?

Well yes ma'am, I think so.

Ok, I'll get another chicken out.

She would have to fry two chickens if Paul was gone be there.

Her fried chicken was wonderful; she was a wonderful cook.

Paul's idea of dessert was half a pie and a half gallon of ice cream.

That was his idea of dessert.
I don't know whose idea it was.

But after one meeting, we went out with our friends, and we had been to a meeting. (I want to say it was a Institute of Internal Auditors meeting) and then we went out to the bar at Sheraton. And it was early and we didn't wanna go home, so somebody had the bright idea let's drive to Charleston.

So we said yea, ok, and went back and changed. We were piling back in my car, and it was like who's going to sit where, and Paul likes to tell the story of how he knocked Tracy down to get in the back seat with me.

So we drove to Charleston, and of course we took a bottle of beverages with us.

We went out to Isle of Palms.

And this is probably midnight by then, when we got down there. So we're like ok we're here, what are we gonna do, so we walk down on the beach. And we come back, and there is a police officer there by the car. And we thought, Oh, crap.

The guy was just looking for drugs, so he said y'all just best just get on about your way. So we sobered up very quickly and drove home. So don't y'all be doing that. Going wild at the beach.
Folly Beach, and then we moved back here and worked on the Charleston Highway.

Then we came back and worked on the Sumter Highway in '57. '58 we moved up there to Traveler's Rest, then we moved to Warner Robbins, GA and that's where Kay was born, and then let's see we moved back here. And that's when I borrowed the Dozer from Cherokee. Then we moved down to Jacksonville, NC, then Myrtle Beach (that's where Gene was hatched) then up to Greenville Spartanburg airport. We moved back and did some roads around here.

When it was time for them to go to school, we stayed right here. Charleston was about the furthest I went. Working on a road that went Charleston up to Summerville.

That's when Kay got sick, and we had to put her in the hospital. Burning up with a fever. And I had rode down there with somebody, so I got on a bus a 6 o'clock and got back to Columbia at 2:30.

That bus stopped at every damn pig path in the country. That's the last time I rode a bus.

I can remember that damn bus ride.
I can remember staying there in

the hospital, when I was six,

after one of my surgeries. And

Mama and Daddy went down to get

something to eat and

I scraped all that lime green jello out and

put it in the trash can while they were gone.

Your daddy was about a year and a half, a year old.

He was still in the walker. He

had this walker thing that he'd go all over the house

in,

but he couldn't really walk, yet, so

he would grab a hold of the back of the dog and

the dog would pull him right along.

And him and the dog would go

all over the house,
pulling the toilet paper and all that.

And one day, Mama had gotten this

giant industrial size, thing of baby powder.

Not the little one, the big one.

Oh, he loved powder.

So he decides that he is
going to powder his diapers. Now

this is back when they used real diapers;

and he used that whole can of baby powder on those

diapers.

So mother had this Electrolux vacuum
cleaner, and it may still be in the attic.

But you go in there to vacuum

the stuff up—that dang blasted powder

was so fine it just went right through it

and flew right back out of it. That

was your daddy, he could do things like that every

day.

I mean, there was baby powder every-where.
We couldn't take her any-where.
Taylor would scream every time she got in the car. I mean scream bloody murder. Top of her lungs.

We'd come in after two and a half hours of it, and Grandma would say, 
Oh let me have my sweet baby Taylor.

HERE, HAVE HER.

Time you cranked up the car, she'd start screaming. It was one continuous scream. Like a siren. I mean it was full volume.

-Morgan was a good little girl. That little girl that I always wanted.
I don't think Daddy ever wanted to kill him as much as that day.
I think the time
that he was out here breaking
the brick with the hammer—
I really thought Daddy was gonna kill him that time. I really did.

Oh, I'd never forget that day.
To Daddy's dying days, that would come up.
He was out there breaking brick, oh my God.

How we loved him, but he was one little Devil.
He could think of things to get into.

She got caught on Jones Avenue, and Daddy drove up behind her.
I got pulled over, and who comes cruising now, Howard.

The cop had pulled her over, and she told him do you know who I am?
And he just backed away in fear.
And I thought what kind of family am I getting into.
I had the kind of family that liked to eat. My mom’s mama lived in a trailer next to us. My whole life. And every Sunday we had dinner in her trailer, and it would be all of my family, and Uncle Carey’s family, and sometimes Uncle Norris and his wife was there, and Aunt Barbara and Uncle David and Little David would spend every weekend with Granny.

So we’d have like 30 people eating in this little trailer kitchen.

And the table only sat 6 people so all the men got to eat first. And the women sat out in the dirt yard on the swing and the chairs. And we all sat out there and talked while we waited on the men to finish eating, then we could go inside and eat what was left. I hated waiting to eat.

Every Sunday after church, we’d all come eat.
Blessed are the poor
Their light is never est
Perfection, all is fit
In my Father's kingdom

I serve a Saviour He's in the world today
In all the world a round He's I see His love is near
Rejoice, O Christ then, lift up your voice and sing

I come to the garden alone, While the dew is still on the
He speaks, and the sound of His voice is
I'd stay in the garden with Him, Though the night a road was
On mornings when we were getting ready to eat, when I was first dating Paul, they had a really small kitchen and the table was pushed against the wall. Which wasn’t a problem when it was just the three of them, cause there were 3 seats there, but when I was there they needed a fourth seat. So they had to pull the table out for me. So it was always a big deal Sonny had to make, ahh lets pull the table out for Cheryl. And he’d purposely pull it out just a little so I had to say,

Sonny I need more room.

He loved to pick on me when me and Paul were first dating.

-C
Now when Elaine and I was first married,

she came out with this pink lipstick on. And I said, shoot, you need a redder lipstick than that. And I went on down to the drugstore and picked out the reddest lipstick I could find—and brought it on home.

That’s when I was the boss.

We went to go dancing up at Peak once a month. That’s where Aunt Kay met your Uncle Hal. He came over and asked me, Mr. Weed I wanted to know if I could take Kay home.

And I said, see that woman sitting right here, you ask her.

She was the boss. He took her home that night.

Your grandma was something else.
I'll tell you something else. Jack played under the house, he always loved little cars. And he had built little roads all up under the house.

Jack was older than you?

17 months older. But see I had an older brother Junior, and Buddy.

I was the only girl now, a spoiled brat.

Venus. The loveliest, sweetest person there ever was.

Little ladies weren't supposed to get their legs down in the dirt. So with that newspaper I could get down there with the little cars. And play with Jack. You mustn't get dirt on your legs, and your knees all messed up. That's about the main things I remember.

My colored nanny, yes sir, she kept those legs wrapped up. You know, hard places, black places there, little girls didn't do things like that. I was quite the spoiled brat. I was.

Yes sir, I was Venus's whole life. That was my colored mammy. Oh I did love Venus though. She was a wonderful woman. And she didn't live no further than from here to the next house. In the backyard, way back in the back yard.

She would put us to bed at night, she'd bathe us, read to us, and she'd be there the next morning before we woke up.

Jack and I was her whole world just about.

And I think Daddy paid her, the sum total as well I remember, was two one dollar bills a week.

Wasn't that something? She works all week long—of course she didn't have to pay no rent or buy any food or anything.

I can well remember that, two one dollar bills a week.

All the trouble she had with us for two dollars a week.
We had a little trouble when we integrated; I was a senior in high school.

We had some of the black guys, well some of the white guys too. The worst of the white guys, most of their parents had pulled them out of school and sent them to Pee Dee Academy.

But we still had a sampling of real rednecks. It all kind of manifested itself about a week, a week and a half into school, with a major fight out in the yard there.

Now we had a football coach name Bobby Ivy, and we had Mr. Blake. Bobby Ivy, the closest thing you could compare him to was a bull. I mean if he hit you, he'd hit you from here to the carport, I guarantee you. And they went out there, and they calmed it down.

One of them took a swing at Bobby and that was the worst mistake that boy ever made in his life. Cause Bobby hit him and it lifted him up off the ground about that far, and went he hit the ground, he was out colder than cold. And it scared the bejesus out of all of them. I remember him grabbing one this way, and one this way, and them two just hit the ground. Before it was over with, they had put about three black ones and three white ones out cold.

And that ended it; there was never another trouble at Marion High School.
She went a couple months back to school, and came home and said, "I don't have to go to school."

And I said, "You don't have to go to school."

That was a different time then.

She was so young, then she was a young girl.

And she said, "I don't have to go to school."

And I said, "You don't have to go to school."

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That was a different time then.
In Jacksonville, that was another time Kay got sick.

We took her to the doctor, and didn't have enough money to buy her medicine.

And I didn't know nobody to send me no money.

And I had to break her piggybank.

That was the biggest thing in my life, or I don't know what to say.

But anyhow, we survived.

People ask me why you carry so much money in your pocketbook, and say that was the reason.

I said if I ever get where I can have some money, I'mma put it in my pocketbook.

And I did.
Lord, did she

love us and we loved her.
We all had our little colored mamas, but
nobody had one like me.
The most wonderful person you'd ever want to meet.
She looked just like the mama in
_Gone with the Wind._

Now you would think we grew up filthy rich,
but we didn't. Daddy made plenty now,
and we had plenty, but we sure weren't rich.
But we had horses, and we had ponies, and
we had bicycles, and anything else.
He owned the store, there by the Tillman Lumber
Company. We were not rich, but we didn't go hungry.

_And spoiled brats._

Now she spoils all the animals
to death—leftovers, special treats, with Grammy—all the
care in the world.

She spoils her grandchildren
a little too.
Spoiled brats.

We had two ponies, and when we graduated from ponies, we had horses. One horse was beautiful, gorgeous, but he did not like Mother.

And after the garden had made you know, (we had a garden). All the corn and stuff, we brought the old corn out to the horses.

That horse did not like my mother. And she didn't have the dares to be messing with him, 'cause he would take out after her across the yard.

It bit her! But he was one beautiful house, with a star you know, here.

Daddy he bought us anything you wanted, but you better take care of it.

My daddy would give you anything in this world. Especially me.

His name was Prince.

Old horse, I'd plow him—didn't even need to use no plow line. Whenever we got to the end of the row, I'd say HAW or GEE, HAW was right and GEE was left.

We'd get to the end where we needed to turn and I'd tell him WOAH and we'd turn.

It used to be a bottom land over there where the Sheffield pond is, and we had pretty corn and whatever plant down there.

We was turning that land over, and it was hot and the horse got tired, and I'd lay down and he'd stand in the shade and rested.

We'd both be sweaty and stinkin.
I had a drawer full of cologne, probably 20 bottles.

Cause you were what, a freshman in high school? at that age?

He was about two, so I would’ve been about fifteen.
But he got into that drawer, and he poured one bottle after another, after another over his head.

Well, I’ve heard this story for 25 years.
Why’d you have so much cologne? Did ya stink?

Yup.
Well this was pre-air conditioning, and it was summer in the South!
You had to help out, you know.

When we moved out of that house, you could still smell it.

You could smell it.
You could go over to the neighbor’s house and smell it.

I can’t even imagine a world without air conditioning.

But I imagine my Grandfather and I pictured here, would love it.

We share what I call “Cold Wipes” in the family now — the warm blanket vs. us that prefer the air on a nice toasty 78°F.

It’s jumbled warfare, sweating around the thermostat.

So when my aunt comes she brings blankets for us.
We used to have to go from up on the top of the hill, where the old house was.

and the barn was right out there, but we didn’t have no water.
So I had to ride him down the hill where that pump station was, and take a right and go down into the creek and get some water.

I loved that horse.

The closest my sister and I get to the barn is at 2003.

I also tried to imagine life without running water.

You’d think my dad lived the by the way he accounts for the dry cow and the water bill.

when we saw him pulling into
the neighborhood, my mom would yell and we’d go running through
the house turning off all the extra lights.
I loved that crazy cat Rusty.

Rusty was the kitty that me and Leslie got when we moved in to our apartment. He was a little orange tabby who grew and grew and grew to about 20 pounds. And we, young and dumb, we said we would get him declawed so he wouldn't tear up the furniture. And it made him mean.

Every bit he didn't have his claws, he made up with biting people.

Well then Paul comes along. Your daddy antagonized the heck out of him.

He'd like to lay on the back of the couch, and Paul would go by and pop him in the head, and he'd fight back at him—Rusty was mean.

And then we got married and moved in together. There was a spot where Rusty could go behind the love seat. And Paul would turn the corner, and Rusty would jump out and bite Paul's calf.

He would just chomp on him. And so every morning it was, AHHHH, DAMN CAT.

It was a mutual disrespect for each other. Your daddy and that big ol' cat.

He's much nicer to our cats now.
When we were building this house now, Gene had this ol' big German Shepard named Pee Wee.

And he was nuzzling around, and a board fell down and hit him on the head. We didn't see him for three days. He ran off and stayed hid for three days.

Back when we were building the house.

Teddy + Eugene

They like to tell the story - that they had 21 cats at one point

Pee Wee, 1976
My buddy's a realtor, and he was at Friarsgate one day looking at a house.

And he went to move his car and back up and go, and hit a cat.
And he got out and he had hit the cat and killed it, and he just felt horrible about it. He didn't want to just leave it there on the street, so he wrapped the cat up in a bag, and walked it up to the house's steps where the cat had run out from, and left it there.

He felt awful about it, but he left the cat there on the porch and went on.

Years went by and of course Danny, he sold all kinds of real estate, and one day he got called about a prospect. And he went there and recognized the house right off, that that was the house he had killed a cat at.

So he went in and he was meeting with them and talking and getting to know each other. And he started looking around, at pictures, seeing how long they had lived there. And they had this kitten and he asked you know, is this y'all's first cat, and it turned out that cat he killed... hadn't been their cat.

Then they were telling the story about the time that somebody put a dead cat on their porch.

I don't think he ever fessed up.
Dexter, yea, I couldn’t believe when we found that
dog, laying up there beside the road up there
by Pearl Weed’s house.
He was dead.

So Gene he takes the Backhoe over there and
is digging the hole to bury him in, and
here Dexter showed up! It was exactly the same kind
of dog.
That was pretty good.
I declare, I had forgot about that.

I’ll tell ya something messed up.
There was this beautiful dog, he stayed with Uncle
Reuben and went everywhere he went.
One day they were coming home, and
they saw what looked like the dog had
been run over on the side of the road, and
Uncle Reuben was an old man then
so they decided to get some of the boys and
they went down there and got the dog on up off the
road and buried him
and told Reuben and he accepted that the dog was
dead and
went on about their business.

And a couple days later here comes that dog walking
on up!

The heard that
story a few million
times, in a few
different versions.
I've never forgotten this now.

Early one breakfast, we sat down at the table.
Whatever my family had
for breakfast we always had grits to go with it. So
we sat down and there was just
eggs, and bacon and toast.

So I ate my little bit of eggs and bacon and toast, and
I was still hungry and we sat there probably
on our second hour of talking during breakfast and
that fifth piece of toast kept sitting there.
And I thought well I'll go ahead and eat it
so I took the last piece of toast, and
they all turned and looked at me,
and almost gasped, and I was like what, what?

That was Champ's piece of toast, I had eaten the
dog's piece of toast. I'm amazed he still married me.

He was so impressed he fell asleep the first time I
picked her up. I was just another one.

We talked a little bit, and you know there was a pause
in the conversation and the TV was on, and then he
was asleep.

Daddy and his narcolepsy. You should have known
then.

Oh no, I had to go in the back and talk to Mama.
Cause Mama always went to bed. Had to go sit on the
bed and talk to her.

She was back meeting with the Queen.

It was our first date. You were taking me to Mama and
Daddy's. So we get to the house and he kissed me
goodnight in the car, so I got out of the car and went
to the house.

He didn't walk me to the door that time.

- C

- P

Reenacting his proposal
on the Fourth of July
for their anniversary
2015

My mom also
tells asleep at
the drop of a hat
At the time though,
I was otherwise
involved with someone.
So
I had to break up with that person
before I could go out with Daddy.

Friday night he called and asked me out.

---

My parents,
working on 260 years.
Oh, we used to go out.

We went down to the Skyline Club on Saturday nights. Them mini bottles was good; she'd keep them in her pocketbook. And we'd go out to the Columbia Speedway, when everybody was brown-bagging. And my uncle was working for the FBI, and if he ever brought anyone with him, he'd come tell us watch out for him.

When I came home and she had those curlers in, man I knew we was going somewhere.

I always looked forward to pulling into that driveway.
Lived in the same place for 27 years and had 4 addresses.

Route 2 box 282A

Route 6

Newberry Ave

Lake Murray Blvd