

A Distinctive Voice:
A Recreation of Episodes from
My Grandmother's Life in Her Own Words

by

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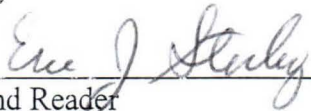
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Prospectus

Summary

This creative writing thesis briefly discusses the importance of grandmothers in family life. It then briefly surveys previous creative writing about grandmothers. Finally, the greatest part of the thesis offers several stories told in the personal first-person voice of my own grandmother. This approach to recording the life of a grandmother seems very unusual. I hope to later explain and attempt to justify why I adopted this approach and how I gathered the material necessary for pursuing this kind of text.

Description and Justification

Many would agree that in today's often unstable family structure, grandmothers play a vital role and frequently step into a matriarchal role for grandchildren. Many of them do so while still being supportive mothers to their own children. For example, grandparents are as important as parents in the raising of their grandchildren. Because more and more parents are in the workforce, attempting to provide financial stability for their family and working towards successful careers, outside care is often necessary for younger children. Nearby grandparents often step in and provide not only childcare, but also love, stability, and parental guidance.

In some cases, parents are actually deemed unfit to retain custody of their children, leaving the kids to be sent to the nearest living relative, which is often grandparents. Even in home environments where grandparents are not regularly needed for childcare, many children maintain steady and healthy relationships with their grandparents. They often do so not only throughout childhood, but also into adulthood.

Many families, then, often rely for many reasons on grandparents, especially grandmothers. The importance of grandparents is often immense. They can greatly influence not only the lives of their own children but also the lives of their grandchildren.

Lack of Literature about Grandmothers

Considering that 65 million Americans are grandparents and that almost three million of those grandparents are raising at least one of their grandchildren (2014 Census Bureau Report), one might think that much would have been written by and about grandparents. However, surprisingly enough, very few nonfiction writings are available about grandmothers and the instrumental role they play in the lives of their children and grandchildren. When searching the Library of Congress for nonfiction writing on grandmothers, particularly memoirs, one finds that less than 15 results match the criteria. Moreover, very few of the selected results focus on the lives of grandmothers. Most of the items listed are memories written from the point of view of the author (usually a grandchild). This more distanced approach differs greatly from what I plan to accomplish through my thesis.

For She is the Tree of Life

Of the books about grandmothers listed in the Library of Congress, one of the most helpful and comprehensive books is titled *For She is the Tree of Life*. This book is an anthology of writing from prominent women writers who all focus on the impact their grandmothers had in their own lives. Using short stories, poems, and memoirs, women writers such as Maya Angelou, Margaret Atwood, and many other well-known authors bring their memories to life on the page, reliving the significant roles of their grandmothers in their own personal development. *For She is the Tree of Life* is an

essential anthology partly because of the diverse types of writings on grandmothers it includes and partly because such influential authors contributed to this volume. There seems to be no other book quite like it.

Categories and Contents of *For She is the Tree of Life*

For She in the Tree of Life contains over fifty writings on the subject of grandmothers. The different authors vary between prose, poems, and fiction to share memories and retell stories of their grandmothers. As noted in the appendix, most all of the writings are personal memoirs written from the author's point of view. While some authors briefly identify the persona and voice of their grandmother, none of the writings are written using solely from the grandmother's voice nor are any of the writings reliant on the grandmother's own words.

Distinctiveness of Thesis

For She is the Tree of Life and the other writings on grandmothers are not only relevant and important, but also thought-provoking and stimulating. However, nearly all published writings about grandmothers seem to have a common voice, the voice of authors reflecting on the lives of their grandmothers by reporting their personal memories. In my thesis, I hope to do something much different, something that appears to be highly unusual. Instead of relying on my own memories of my grandmother and using my own voice as the narrative voice, I intend to take on the persona of my grandmother, using her words and writing in her voice. My thesis will recreate some of the most momentous and meaningful moments of my grandmother's life —moments that were instrumental not only to her life, but also my own. I will do this by relying on her own testimony, which I recorded in great detail in a journal written towards the end of her life.

My grandmother was a splendid storyteller, and I took copious notes about the stories she told me because I wanted to be sure to remember them as fully and accurately as possible. While I will also incorporate bits and pieces of my own creative writing and personal memories, this thesis will rely very heavily on my grandmother's own voice and personal history.

Validity of Stories

One might wonder how I hope to accurately write in my grandmother's voice with her own words by relying merely on a journal. Near the very end of my grandmother's final hospital stay (and, unfortunately, of her life), my grandmother began to tell me many of the important biographical events that shaped her as a woman, friend, mother, and grandmother. For hours, I wrote down her stories by her bedside, using her own words, recreating her voice, and trying to capture even the minutest details of her story. For the sake of discretion, I did change the names of a few characters and locations, but nothing else was changed, especially nothing that would affect the events or outcomes of her stories. Throughout the thesis and through my defense, I will provide legal documents such as marriage, death, and birth certificates that will validate the legitimacy of her stories, while also providing photographs that also prove the veracity of her words.

Structure of Thesis

The thesis, consisting of three stories, is structured chronologically. A brief preface introduces the short stories and explains why I chose to write about this topic for my thesis, the influence of my grandmother on my life, and personal memories I have of growing up with my grandmother. Following the preface is the first short story, titled

“You are Never Really Alone.” This story details a tragic accident that shaped my grandmother’s childhood and that eventually led to her lifelong devotion to Christ, a devotion she valued deeply and instilled in her family. “The Grass Isn’t Always Greener on the Other Side” is the second short story in the thesis. “The Grass Isn’t Always Greener on the Other Side” focuses on my grandmother’s late adolescence and first encounter with love, which ultimately led to her first marriage and child, with a few surprises along the way. The last story of the thesis is titled “You’re No Better than Anyone Else.” This chapter details a personal encounter that highlights the struggles my grandmother faced as a mother with a mentally retarded son. While these three short stories offer only a brief glimpse of the life of my grandmother, they are intended to showcase her impeccable character and remarkable attitude, both of which shaped countless people.

Appendix

This appendix lists all the works contained in the anthology *For She Is the Tree of Life*. I have classified these works by genre. Most of them are personal memoirs in prose. These take up by far the greatest number of pages in the book. Some of the works, however, are personal memoirs in poetry, and a few of the texts fall into other categories. None of them, however, does what my thesis will do: that is, none of them is a sustained retelling of a grandmother’s life *in the grandmother’s own personal first-person voice*. Almost all of them emphasize, instead, the voice of the granddaughter (no grandsons were included as authors). This appendix, then, helps indicate the unusual approach my thesis will take. The appendix will, I hope, help suggest the distinctiveness and value of the approach I am taking.

Personal Memoirs in Poetry

1. Bagget, Rebecca. "Hanging the Wash at Midnight": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 195-197).
2. Caldwell, E.K. "Gramma Minnie": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 121-123).
3. Connolly, Geraldine. "One Death": personal memoir [poem] (pp.178-179).
4. Crooker, Barbara. "Recipe for Grief": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 158).
5. D'Angelo, Mary. "Pears": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 51-52).
6. Davidson-Zielske, Gay. "Cottonbound": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 69-70).
7. Derricotte, Toi. "The Weakness": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 91-92).
8. Highes, Carolyn J. Fairweather. "Lemon Meringue Pie": personal memoir [poem] (pp.45-47).
9. Hogan, Linda. "The Grandmother Songs": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 149-150).
10. Morris, Dilys. "The Sound of My Name": personal memoir [poem] (pp.117).
11. Nelms, Sheryl. "heirloom hocked": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 62).
12. Olds, Sharon. "Birthday Poem for My Grandmother": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 153).
13. Parlante, Shelley. "The Button Box": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 108-110).
14. Piercy, Marge. "For She is the Tree of Life": personal memoir [poem] (pp.7-8).
15. Rendrick, Bernice. "The Trunk in the Attic): personal memoir [poem] (pp. 75-76).
16. Rich, Susanna. "The Buck": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 165-166).
17. Scott, Mary. "Personal Effects": personal memoir [poem] (pp.141-142).
18. Seale, Jan Epton. "Pearl Bell Pittman": personal memoir [poem] (39-42).
19. Thakare, Kiran A. "Letter to Grandma": personal memoir [poem] (pp.170-173).

20. Williams, Lisa. "Grandmother": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 30-32).
21. Zawinski, Andrena. "Second Language": personal memoir [poem] (pp. 184-185).

Personal Memoirs in Prose

1. Angelou, Maya. "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 24-29).
2. Barrymore, Ethel. "Memories": personal memoir [prose] (82-86).
3. Cooper, Amy. "Cordelia Moellendick": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 48-50).
4. Danforth, Pauline Brunette. "For My Grandmothers": personal memoir [prose] (pp.132-133).
5. Egbert, Kathlyn Whitsitt. "Mimi, Passing": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 174-177).
6. Fisher, M. F. K. "Grandmother's Nervous Stomach": personal memoir [prose] (pp.53-61).
7. Freeman-Toole, Louise. "The Good Stuff": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 146-148).
8. Gangaji, "Mammy": personal memoir [prose] (pp.71-72).
9. Gombar, Christina. "The End of the Reign of Queen Helen": personal memoir [prose] (pp.154-158).
10. Gomez, Jewelle. "I Lost It at the Movies": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 103-107).
11. Haiden, Virginia. "Memorial Day": personal memoir [prose] (pp.136-137).
12. Henrikson, Jan. "The Empress of Scents and Non-Scents": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 180-183).
13. Ito, Susan. "Obasan in Suburbia": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 77-81).
14. Kack-Brice, Valerie. "Carrie Adella": personal memoir prose (pp.63-68).
15. -----. "Mary Nina": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 95-96).

16. Loren, B. K. "The Last Diamond of Summer": personal memoir [prose] (pp.15-18).
17. Maki, Marjorie. "Breaking Up Grandma": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 93-94).
18. Makofsky, Serena. "Dancing the Rain with Nana": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 33-34).
19. Markova, Dawna. "Remembering Honeycake": personal memoir [prose] (pp.124-131).
20. Masih, Tara L. "Scrim-Shaw": personal memoir [prose] (pp.35-38).
21. Mateer, Carolyn S. "Carrie Jamison Whittaker": personal memoir [prose] (pp.118-120).
22. Michaelson, Helen. "Bobe Tillie Knows a Girl": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 143-145).
23. Pashdag, Joanna. "Froggy Gremlin, My Grandmother, and Me": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 167-169).
24. Patterson, Stephanie. "Perfect Misery": personal memoir [prose] (pp.138-140).
25. Roxas, Savina. "Grandma's Stern Expression": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 87-90).
26. Shebar, Aile. "Rifka, Grandma Rae": personal memoir [prose] (pp. 19-23).
27. Vigil, Lilly Mary. "Rosaura, My Grandmother": personal memoir [prose] (pp.134-135).

Works in Other Genres

1. Allende, Isabel. "The House of the Spirits": prose fiction (pp.186-194).
2. Brant, Beth. "Native Origin": prose narrative, third person (pp. 111-114).
3. Leslie Marmon Silko, "Childhood in Mexico": prose fiction (pp.9-14).
4. Moss, Riki. "Hannah and Alice": prose narrative, historical (pp. 97-102).

5. Atwood, Margaret. "Bodily Harm": personal memoir prose fiction (pp.159-164).

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Edelman, Hope. *Mother of My Mother: The Intricate Bond between Generations*. New York: Dial, 1999. Print.

Kack-Brice, Valerie, ed. *For She Is the Tree of Life: Grandmothers Through the Eyes of Women Writers*. Berkeley, CA: Conari P, 1994. Print.

McKenna, Megan. *Playing Poker with Nana*. Dublin, Ireland: Veritas, 2008.

Trigiani, Adriana. *Don't Sing at the Table: Life Lessons from My Grandmothers*. New York: Harper, 2010. Print.

Preface

Change is often a funny and ironic thing. In times of struggle and sadness, I find myself craving change, yearning for something or someone to shine a light into a dark situation. Yet, in times of prosperity and happiness, I find myself resentful of anything that threatens to disrupt my life's equilibrium and balance. But the funny thing is that I really think about it, I almost always contribute to any change that enters my life. And whether it is wanted or not, change almost always forces me to reflect. Reflection can be hard, even overwhelming, because an ego is a hard thing with which to compromise. I begin to analyze every choice that brought on change in my life. I challenge myself and wonder whether or not I did the most beneficial things for myself and my future. However, there are certain events in life that are unforeseeable, unexpected, and completely life-altering. It is these events that create a change that can be insurmountable to overcome, and for the first time in my short 24 years of life, I find myself trying to climb a mountain of change with no end in sight and no detour available.

Growing up, children experience all types of different living situations outside of the "normal" two-parent household. I was no exception. Do not get me wrong: I had two loving, hard-working parents who provided me endless opportunities in childhood and adulthood for which I will forever be grateful. My parents were and still to this day are very career-oriented. However, jobs, particularly demanding careers, require time and lots of it. Luckily, I grew up with four parents instead of two to pick up the slack when life got chaotic.

Now, naturally and biologically, we all know I did not have four parents, but it sure felt like I did. Since my parents chose to build our family home in what felt like the

middle of nowhere, I had only two neighbors as a child: Granny and Granddaddy, and even better, we only lived 50 yards apart. And since my parents worked tirelessly and diligently to provide for me and my sister, my time was split between those two houses that sat side by side.

Before I was “school age,” my sweet mother would wake my sister and me up around 7:00 am, load us up in her car, drive for 10 seconds, and then carry us into my grandmother’s house into our special bedroom called “the princess room.” Then she would head off for work. Most of the time, I never even realized that this whole morning routine occurred. I would always wake up in the princess room, still in my jammies from the night before. I spent my early childhood days basking in laziness and relaxation. Granny always made breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack on a strict and predictable schedule that never left me feeling hungry, and I filled my time in between by watching VHS tapes of my favorite cartoons that my mom would record the night before. Between those two women, I never wanted for anything as a child.

At the age of 4, against my own will, I started school and left the comforts of my princess room and *The Little Mermaid* VHS tapes. My parents enrolled me in the best private school, but since they were both still working, and since their start times were earlier than drop-off time at preschool, Granny stepped in, as she would countless other times in my life. Morning routines, pretty much stayed the same, except that my ability to sleep endlessly and indulge in *The Little Mermaid* was stripped away by the institution of education. My mom still carried us into the princess room every morning on her way to work, and I still slept longer than I really needed, but now instead of being treated to a made-to-order breakfast in bed, I was reduced to consuming a pop tart in my car seat.

For the next three years, Granny drove me to preschool in the morning and picked me up in the afternoon, every single day. I would always look forward to seeing her white Buick LeSabre pull around the corner of the car line. I would slide in on the royal blue, velvet seats and wait for Granny to pull out my special surprise. Each day she brought me a different soda, always one of my favorite kinds, and wrapped the can in aluminum foil to ensure that it was still cold when I was ready to gulp it down. After I vented about my draining and excruciating day at preschool, Granny would always scratch my back. This may seem like a very unimportant and oddly included detail, but it was always something that meant the world to me. Something about her scratching my back while I laid in her lap brought me great comfort and security. It is something that I would do with her forever, something that changed me, which is really and truly what all this babbling is about.

After preschool, it was time for the real deal – elementary school. With my parents still working and after a commute of about 45 minutes to school, Granny came riding in on her white LeSabre to save the day. Over the next 13 years, Granny would drop me off at school in the morning and pick me up in the afternoon, every single day. Commuting over an hour and a half each day gave Granny and me some serious quality time. In the afternoon, I spent my time with Granny and Granddaddy until my parents could pick us up after the workday ended. She became a mother to me. She became a best friend.

After I left for college, things did not really change between us. We had built a bond that was so special, so unbreakable, that nothing else in my life compared to it. She was the strongest woman I knew, and I really did not know all that much, not nearly as

much as I would later learn. I never doubted whether or not I could count on her, and I only hope she thought the same of me. But I never really understood how strong Granny was until everything changed in 2011. And once again, changes force reflection, and in this case, understanding.

My grandfather married Granny on December 3, 1951. It was the second marriage for both of them, and my grandmother already had one child. My dad was their only child after they married. Their relationship was a model of commitment and stability, always an example for me growing up. But I never realized their devotion to one another until Granddaddy became sick.

Because of the problems with his hip, his colon, his breathing, and his 88 years of hard work, Granddaddy became very sick. He ended up spending almost three weeks in the hospital and was then transferred to a rehabilitation center for two months, and it was during this time that I began to realize who my grandmother really was. I watched her spend every night sleeping on an uncomfortable and awkward hospital pull-out couch for three weeks, only going home to shower every few days. My family and I all begged Granny to let us start a rotation and give her some nights at home. Without hesitation, she refused all of our offers and maintained her residency in a 12 x 12 hospital room, which was quite a relief to the nurses, considering that Granny took control over all feedings, baths, and anything that her feeble hands could do. I watched her, and I admired her. She was tired, exhausted, and depleted, but you would never know any of that. An uncontrollable change had turned her life upside down, but she did not fight against it. Instead, she faced it with bravery and fearlessness, two things that she left behind to change me.

After Medicare and Blue Cross Blue Shield refused to cover an 88-year-old, WWII veteran for an even longer hospital stay, my parents transferred Granddaddy to a rehabilitation center in hopes of allowing him to gain his strength and return home. While I was overjoyed that Granddaddy was progressing to better health, I also felt relief that Granny would finally gain back a sense of normalcy and be able to recuperate from her hard time spent at the hospital. But once again, Granny proved to be relentless in her commitment and dedication to my grandfather. Even though Granddaddy's room at the rehabilitation center was only slightly bigger than his room at the hospital and had a upright, pleather recliner as opposed to an awkward and uncomfortable pull-out couch, Granny moved in for the long haul, bringing her clothes, make-up, and personal necessities. For over two months, Granny never left that rehabilitation center, and, more importantly, she never left Granddaddy.

After months and months of fighting, Granddaddy entered the hospital for the last time in March of 2011. Granny knew what was coming and knew there was no way to stop it. I watched her for days pretend that nothing in her life would change; I watched her hold on to the only life she had known for the past 60 years. Change began infiltrating everything that she held dear, and that change no consideration for how much my grandmother would suffer because of it. On the last night of Granddaddy's life, Granny was, of course, by his side. Before he drifted to sleep, he grabbed her hand and said, "Carolyn, you are still a beautiful woman." My granny would repeat those words to anyone that would listen for the rest of her life, because that was the last thing he ever said. Granddaddy finally got to meet his Maker, and Granny had to return to an empty house filled with sixty years of memories.

Not that my experience could remotely compare with the reality Granny faced, but I missed my Granddaddy. And while I have not focused on his influence in my life directly in this memoir, he was a father to me in the very same way my biological father is. And when he died, all our lives changed, but none more than Granny's. In the following weeks after Granddaddy's death, Granny astonished me with her ability to show strength and dignity in the midst of tragedy. And while Granny and I had always been close, I found myself growing more and more attached and devoted to her.

Because Granny's body had suffered for over three years while she met the demands of Granddaddy's ever-deteriorating health, I think that when she finally had a chance to rest, her body decided to take full advantage. It seemed that with every passing month, some new illness would plague Granny, debilitating her more and more. And, not that I need any sort of commendation or pat on the back, I felt as if this was my time to step up for my Granny out of gratitude for her 21 years of service to me.

Because I lived in Montgomery to attend school, Granny would schedule her doctor appointments, procedures, and just about anything else you can think of on Fridays so that I could drive home on Thursday night and be with her. And that is exactly what I did. While doctor appointments and hospitals can be quite depressing, Granny and I had the best of times, and for the first time, I began to see Granny as much more than a mother; I began to look at her as a best friend. I would tell her all my secrets, cry to her over meaningless matters, seek her advice, and ask her to go with me about anywhere I went – not because I had to do so or felt some obligation, but because I really enjoyed her company. How odd we must have looked – walking hand in hand down an aisle in my favorite clothing store or going to eat lunch together in a trendy restaurant. After the

weekend was over, I would travel back to school, and we would talk every single day at around the same time. It became a routine that I quite frankly looked forward to. Slowly but surely, my life began to revolve around Granny, and I am not ever quite sure how it got that way. It seemed that I subconsciously began to plan my schedule around the things Granny needed to do. Sometimes in the midst of an otherwise boring conversation, Granny would mention to me about going to be with Granddaddy, how much she desired to leave her earthly home because she was so very lonely. Her separation from him started to alter her state of mind, and depression sank in, causing her great discomfort and sadness. Doctors tried a variety of medicines to bring her back some sense of peace and reality, but nothing cures a broken heart.

I started to notice that Granny moved around much slower than she once had. Her hands would shake from simply holding a fork and sometimes, when she looked in my eyes, I could tell that that it wasn't just the cataracts that kept her from truly seeing me. Because I resist change so desperately, I tried to ignore all the warning signs – the heavy breathing, the constant addition of medications, the forgetfulness, and all the slips and falls that heartlessly affected her body. Through it all, Granny remained my pillar of strength, showing no fear in the eyes of death, leaving me ignorant about the reality that was right in front of my face.

In December of 2013, Granny started coughing a lot. It didn't seem like much to worry about. In cold and flu season, even the healthiest of people get a little winded. As she was preparing for Christmas, she seemed out of breath after performing the smallest of tasks, such as putting on her clothes or washing the dishes. But she pushed on, making sure her family had the perfect Christmas that she had always delivered in previous years.

The day after Christmas, my sister took Granny to the hair salon while I went to a doctor's appointment. I didn't think much about it. Getting her hair done was the highlight of Granny's week. I remember lying on the doctor's table while Dr. Guster was pressing on my stomach. My phone vibrated and lit up with a text message from my sister that read: "I'm taking Granny to the hospital. She can't breathe. Medical Center. Come ASAP." Without thought, I shoved Dr. Guster's hands off of me and ran out of that office without paying. I got the bill in the mail later.

Seeing my grandmother hooked up to monitors with breathing tubes shoved in every crevice of her face was more than I could take. Watching the most important woman of my life die in front of me was an out of body experience. She was sick, and this time I couldn't ignore it. The doctors admitted her into the hospital with pneumonia. I will never forgive myself for not noticing the warning signs earlier.

For the first couple of days, while sitting in her hospital room, I played Sudoku and completed word searches at rapid pace. I didn't know what to do but just be with Granny, stay by her side the way she had for me for the past 24 years. She was in good spirits and kept talking about going back home, and the doctors seemed to be really hopeful that she would make a full recovery. But regardless of what anyone said, I was scared and had never seen my grandmother so feeble in all of her life.

On Wednesday morning, Granny and I had run out of things to do. I was tired of Sudoku, and Granny knew everything that was going on in the news. We started talking, reminiscing about all the memories that we had shared over the years, and it was then that I decided I needed to know everything there was to know about my Granny. I needed to

know all of the things that had made her who she was, the things that in turn made me who I am.

I asked her to tell me about her life, the reasons why she believed the things she did and the purpose of all the lessons she taught me. Over the years she had always told me bits and pieces of things that had happened in her life, but never in full detail. Granny was a talker, so she was thrilled at the idea of telling me her stories. I pulled out a journal and pen and just started jotting down everything she said, trying to capture even the simplest of phrases. As hours went on, I realized just how many struggles my grandmother had overcome in her 82 years of life. She was a survivor, and I was amazed at how powerful her story was.

As I listened to each memory, I remember thinking how much I had never known about my sweet Granny. Her words were powerful and poured into my soul. I never tired of writing, and she never tired of telling. It was magical and an experience that I will never forget.

Two weeks later, I got the phone call that I had always dreaded. Granny had fallen asleep watching TV and never woke up. The doctors had tried to revive her, but her soul had already gone to be with Jesus and her heart to be with Granddaddy. I wish I could recount the moments of that day with more clarity, but my memory fails me. My world came crashing down in a matter of minutes. The woman who raised me, loved me, and supported me was dead, and I knew that a part of myself died with her.

And just like that, my life was changed. Everything changed, and I hated every single bit of it. I became resentful and angry, confused by my altered state of life. I wallowed in my hurt for weeks, refusing to find solace in anything. I put everything I had

of our memories in a drawer – photos, cards, trinkets, writings, and the two obituaries that haunted my existence. I couldn't bear to accept the fact that Granny had died, and I couldn't face the change that was infiltrating my life.

Often I would lie on the floor with my dog Lucy and just cry. Nothing could console me, nothing could take away my pain. One night, as I was burying my face and tears in Lucy's fur, I decided to open up the drawer that I tried to stuff all of my pain into. I started going through pictures, each one daggering my heart and reminding me of what I once had. I kept filtering through things and found my journal. With everything that had happened, I had completely forgotten about our special day in that hospital. I had been trying to block out any happy memory that might ease my pain.

I started reading everything I had written, pretending to hear my grandmother's voice as I laughed at the silly catch phrases she often said. In that moment, I knew my grandmother, her story, and the lessons she had taught me were meant for something much more than my measly journal and dusty drawer. Her life had had meaning, and I wanted to make sure that meaning was never forgotten, even when I'm too old to remember. I decided that even though I could never have Granny back, I would bring her alive through the words of her stories and the power of her struggles and triumphs. All of this brings me here.

I don't think that I could ever do my Granny's life justice with my writings or tell her stories quite like she could. However, I hope that somehow this memoir, these stories, her words, change someone the way that she changed me, and if anything, shine a little light into someone's darkness, or at the very least, just make them smile.

“You’re Never Really Alone”

I think there is something to be said for growing up without a lot, especially without a lot of money. Poverty forces you to nurture your imagination and run wild with it, creating and cultivating any idea that ever might occur to you. And that is exactly what I learned to do as a child – use my imagination. Mama and Daddy loved us, and knowing what I do now, that’s worth more than any toy I could have ever had.

Growing up in a house with three sisters, one brother, and barely a toy between us all made for a childhood full of playing house, running in the yard, and turning chores into competitions. Martha and I were closest in age, while Ben, Mary, and Peggy were the babies of the family. Regardless of age differences, we all loved playing together. But, there was something in me that always took it upon myself to mother my little baby brother Ben. He was fun and full of life, a jokester who always kept me laughing.

We lived in a house that was cold, and when I say cold, I really mean freezing. Even when the winter season wasn’t all that cold, it felt like zero degrees between those wood boards. It’s hard to even remember now with all the advances that have come with central heating and cooling, but on nights when I can hear the wind seeping under my doors and windows, I remember what it was like to barely be able to feel my toes walk across that rickety house. And considering that insulation and sealants were expensive and practically unheard of in the early 1900’s, our house was heated the old fashioned way: with wood logs and a box of matches.

The fireplace was the focal point of our living room and responsible for heating the entire house. On cold winter nights, we would all huddle in that 10x10 room to enjoy the fruits of our labor. You see, we kids were responsible for acquiring all the fire wood

needed to keep our house warm during the winter. And since Daddy was blind, we took it upon ourselves to build and maintain the fires at night to try to help Mama out.

The winter of 1938 seemed harsher than other winters before. Days seemed shorter, and nights seemed longer, forcing us to find things to do in the dark hours when the weather was too unforgiving to be outside. It was a Tuesday night, and the fire in the living room was blazing. For some reason, I want to say that it rained that day, keeping us more cooped up in the house than usual. Everyone was in the living room, keeping busy until it was time for bed. Ben and I were still full of energy, though. Our playful spirits refused to let us settle down until the very last minute before bedtime. We were playing, really more like roughhousing with one another. Mama had already warned us to quit it and settle down, but it was just too much fun, and there was nothing else to do. Everyone else scattered about the house, preparing for bedtime routines. But Ben and I were restless and didn't heed the warnings of Mama and Daddy.

I was shuffling across the living room, making sure not to knock over anything, while Ben chased me tirelessly. I made a sharp turn around Daddy's arm chair and turned back to taunt Ben with a silly face because I knew I was victorious in this game of cat and mouse. He reached out and gave me a brotherly push on my shoulders. Even though I could keep up with the best of the boys, I was a petite little girl and this subtle push knocked me off my balance. I felt my feet moving out from underneath me, and resisted gravity from pulling me backwards. I reached out to grab anything to save me from the flickers of light I could see in my peripheral vision. As I think back on it, the memory is in slow motion. I could almost make out the word "no" coming from Ben's mouth as he reached to grab ahold of any part of me. But it was all to no avail, and I fell backwards.

The next thing I can remember is pain. Excruciating, piercing, and unbearable pain seeping up my legs and engulfing the lower half of my body. Ben ran, screaming for help, and I just laid paralyzed on that rickety wood floor, watching flames overtake every bit of my legs and stomach. The blaze was relentless and scorching on my skin. I was on fire. I was burning alive. I couldn't scream, couldn't form a single word. It was as if the fire had singed every nerve in my body. I saw Mama's face as she ran into the room and the horror in the eyes of Peggy, Mary, and Martha. But I couldn't hear their screams. All I could hear was the searing sound of my fair skin burning. As they grabbed blankets and began erratically patting my whole body down, my adrenaline wore off, and the agony set in. Tears welled up in Ben's eyes as he looked onto my burning body with sorrow.

As I laid on the floor after all the flames were extinguished from my body, I could see the black smoke in the air and almost gagged at the scent of burnt flesh. Mama unwrapped the blankets from my body, and I looked down towards my toes. My clothes had been destroyed by the fire, and all I could see was open, raw, bleeding limbs. Mama kept asking me to say something, to tell her I was okay, but I couldn't get a word out of my mouth. Mary and Peggy ran and cut what seemed like hundreds of leaves from our aloe plant, while Mama started calling for the doctor.

I know they were only trying to help, but with every swipe of that salve on my body, I could have died a thousand deaths. I don't think there are words to adequately describe the horrific pain that accompanies a burn. Looking at my body from my stomach down, it looked as if I had no skin left, only blood. My nerves and remaining skin had mutated, creating a slimy ooze all over the lower half of my body. The next couple of hours were and still are a blur to me. All I remember is falling in and out of

consciousness, hoping to wake up from a nightmare while screamed cries echoed in the background.

I remember seeing Dr. Adams hovering over me and comforting my face with his palm. He just kept telling me that everything would be alright. I may not have been the smartest girl, but I knew that wasn't true. After wrapping my body in white bandages that stuck to me like glue, Dr. Adams took my parents to the corner of our living room. I couldn't see them because I could barely lift my head, but I could hear every word they were saying.

Because Daddy could only imagine my wounds rather than see them, I don't think he knew how bad it was, but Mama sure did. I heard Dr. Adams say that I had third degree burns on over 40% of my body. It sounded bad, and I know it sure hurt enough, but I didn't really know what that meant. One thing I did understand were the next words Mama spoke.

"We don't have the money." Her meek voiced was muffled by tears.

"And I can't leave him. He can barely make it around the house without me. Not to mention supper and bathing and making some sort of income to keep this house running. Just please help my baby." She sounded desperate.

Dr. Adams left some special salve for me and told Mama to keep me resting. That was the first time in my life that I hated being poor. Mama kept telling me she was sorry and that everything would work out, but I knew I couldn't believe her. My whole body ached, and my 8-year-old self was wise enough to know that only money could get me what I needed.

The next 24 hours felt like 24 years. Everyone took turns watching over me, changing my bandages, applying salve, and telling white lies just to comfort me. Never again in my 82 years of life would I feel such pain as I did that day. I couldn't go to the hospital because we couldn't afford the stay, and I felt the life draining from my body. Somewhere deep inside me, I knew I was going to die, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

When Dr. Adams showed up the next day, and I could barely open my eyes to see him. As time passed, my burns began to eat away more and more at the few skin cells I had left. I didn't even really want to see Dr. Adams. What good could he do me now? The salve wasn't helping, and the burns were beginning to turn into infection. Anyone within a five foot radius of my body could smell that. But, to my surprise, Dr. Adams came with good news, good news that would hopefully save my life. Because of the life-threatening nature of my burns, Shriners' Hospital in Mobile, Alabama agreed to take me in as a patient. And because my family made so little money, Shriners' Hospital agreed to treat me at no expense to my family, with only one stipulation: I had to transport myself to Mobile, which was about three hours away from our home.

While I was and would forever be grateful to Shriners' for their compassion and the opportunity to heal properly, finding a way to Mobile was no easy task. Our family had no car, and we certainly didn't have enough money for me to ride in an ambulance. So Mama did the only thing she knew to do in order to save my life: buy two tickets on a Greyhound bus.

Since the accident, I hadn't moved out of the bed, much less walked or bent my legs. But, when we woke up the next morning, I had no choice but to make my way to the

bus station with Mama. Daddy, Martha, Mary, Peggy, and Ben all saw me off, celebrating the idea of seeing me myself again in the near future. Daddy's friend Ernest gave Mama and me a ride to the bus station and picked us up around 9:00.

When I moved my legs out of the bed the first time, I can only imagine it to be like a fawn right after birth, not knowing quite how to make each leg synchronize in one direction. Except, unlike a baby fawn, with every inch of movement, pain consumed my lower body. With each step I took, I could feel the scabs and remaining skin ripping apart at the seams. Oozing blood soon followed, soaking and seeping through my pants. I knew better than to cry, but I couldn't fight back the tears. I tried to weep in silence so that I wouldn't worry Mama or disturb Mr. Ernest.

At the station, I stood straight up, waiting for the bus. Bending my knees only made the pain intensify and only caused my skin to rip apart further. I knew I would be on a bus for three hours and couldn't even begin to imagine that I would make it all the way to Mobile. You have to remember, I was only eight years old, and I didn't know how to make sense of the world around me. I remember thinking "what did I ever do to deserve this?"

As I saw the bus approaching, I remember hesitating to get on. I had never been away from home before, never even ridden a Greyhound bus. I found comfort in the fact that Mama was with me and tried to remind myself that if I could only make it to Mobile, maybe I wouldn't hurt so much. We loaded the bus and chose a seat close to the front. The seats were cushiony and had a velvety fabric that was soft to the touch. Mama gave me some kind of medicine as we were pulling away from the station. When she said it would make the ride easier for me, I didn't question it; I just swallowed the pill.

The roadway from Dothan to Mobile was a lot smoother than the roads back at home. While there was the occasional bump, it was nothing like bouncing up and down in the back of a truck on the farm. I fell in and out of sleep and don't remember the ride being all that painful. Of course I ached and my legs and stomach writhed in pain, but that had nothing to do with the ride.

As we pulled up to the hospital, I remember thinking how grand it looked. It was stark white and impressive in size. Mama and I had to walk a little ways from the bus stop, and I wasn't sure I could make it one more step when we saw the big red letters spelling out "Emergency." As we walked through the double doors, Mama headed straight towards the front desk with purpose and authority, even though I know she was as befuddled as I was. My little legs had already been through about all that they could take, and I found comfort in a wheelchair that was stationed against the wall. All I could hear was the nurse say, "we've been expecting her" and make her way towards me from behind the desk.

She approached me with the biggest smile on her face and held a little brown teddy bear in her hand. She handed me the bear and said, "Welcome, Carolyn! We're going to take great care of you here." For the first time in three days, I felt a glimmer of hope and a bit of comfort in my aching soul.

The nurse pushed the wheelchair I was sitting in towards the elevator, and we traveled up to floor three. I remember feeling nervous and unsure. I had never been in a hospital before, never had anything worse than a scrape on my knee. She wheeled me into room 311 and parked the wheelchair in front of the bed lined with fresh white sheets. Two other nurses came in, picked me up, and laid me down in the bed. It felt good to

stretch my legs out, and a bit of relief came over me. I was going to make it. I was going to get better.

Mama stood in the corner with an anxious look on her face, while checking the time periodically. I didn't think much about it. This whole experience had been pretty traumatic for her, too. As I was finally beginning to get comfortable in the bed, the nurses said they needed to undress me and get me in a hospital gown. The notion seemed like no big deal until the nurses began to remove my pants. I had bled so much through my bandages that my pants were literally stuck to my burns. With every tug of my pants, the bandages would rip away at my scars. I screamed in pain. It was unbearable, and I couldn't take much more. The nurses tried all sorts of ways to get my pants off with less pain. They started to cut down the sides of my pants and coat my legs in ice water and salve, but the pain only grew stronger, and it was then that I knew this journey would be far from easy.

After finally having my pants removed, I saw the horror that was now my legs. They were hideous, burned, and without much skin at all. I cried at how ugly I felt, and for some reason, I felt a sting of embarrassment. The nurses came back in, and propped my head and back up on the most comfortable feather pillows that I had ever rested on. Nurse Lily told me to hold my arm straight out and count to 10. I didn't know why she told me to do that, but within a matter of seconds I saw her pull a silver needle out of a sealed bag and jab it into my arm. It felt like a bee sting, but compared to everything else, it didn't faze me; I didn't let out a peep. Lily told me that pain medicine was going to come through that little needle, which I found out to be an IV, and that pretty soon I

would feel better. Sure enough, she wasn't lying! Within minutes, I felt an odd tingling come over me, and the pain seemed to more than subside.

When I was just starting to get comfortable and settle in, Mama started crying. I couldn't understand it because everything was seemingly okay. I was finally in a hospital, my family would be debt free, and the pain medicine had put me in a good mood. She walked over towards the bed and grabbed my hand. I didn't know what to expect.

"Baby, it's time for me to go home." She almost whispered the words as if she didn't want to say them.

I had never thought about Mama not staying with me. It never even crossed my mind that she would return home to everyone else. I started to weep, and only had one question.

"Why?" I asked as tears welled in my eyes.

"My sweet daughter. I'm so sorry. I didn't want to tell you before now because I didn't want you worrying about it the whole way down here. But, Daddy can't take care of your brothers and sisters. He can barely take care of himself. Someone's got to keep things running, give us some kind of income in case you need it. I love you, and I know you're going to be a big girl for Mama." Her words pierced me like daggers.

I couldn't respond because all I wanted to do was scream and beg her not to leave me. A little part of me knew that everything she said was true. Daddy couldn't cook, couldn't work, and certainly couldn't take care of my brothers and sisters. But, it wasn't fair. I needed Mama now, and I had never really asked for much before. But I knew that nothing I said could change what Mama was about to do, and I felt a pang of anger and

resentment build up in my heart. I was scared, and for the second time in a matter of days, I remember how much I hated being poor.

Mama collected what few things she had and kissed me goodbye. The sound of the door closing signaled my solitude. The room was quiet, except for the occasional beep of some machine hooked up to my arm. There was a small window across from my bed, and I could tell the sun was beginning to set. I had never spent a night away from home, much less in a hospital. I couldn't hold the tears back as my room became darker and the pain medicine began to wear off.

About 5:30, a nurse named Sarah brought me a tray of supper to my bed. She sat right next to me and pulled the cover off the tray. It looked delicious and was more food than I was ever used to having at one meal. Chicken, greens, cornbread, and a cup of pudding tempted my taste buds, but I was too sad to eat. I didn't want to be rude, so I nibbled on everything on my plate, never eating more than one or two bites. I still hadn't processed this fear that built up inside of me. In my whole life, I never had so much to be scared about.

About an hour later the nurse came in with a couple of books and sat them on my bedside table. She turned on the corner lamp, flipped off the overhead light, and added a little something into the tube in my arm. She said to just ring the bell if I needed anything and told to try and get some rest. I knew better than to think I was going to get a full night of sleep, no matter how good that juice was in my arm.

As the clock on the wall ticked on, I felt myself becoming more and more discouraged and brokenhearted. First, I was angry, wanting to spew hatred to anyone who would listen. Then, I was just plain sad, wondering why I was going through this pain.

Finally, I became desperate, desperate for my family, for any sense of home to bring me comfort. Back home things were never this quiet; someone was always playing, laughing, or crying. The silence in the room was haunting, and I felt like running back to the bus station and going home, even if it meant I would never get better.

Around 9:00 that night, I had run out of things to keep me occupied. I flipped through all the books the nurse brought earlier in the night and counted every spot on the wall. I wasn't in as much pain as I thought I would be, but the sting of my burns ached across my body. As I laid in the bed, staring at the ceiling, I started to remember the God my Mama and Daddy had always talked to me about. I didn't know all that much about God, except that I always heard how much He loved me and would take care of me. Mama always told me that you could talk to Him, and He would listen, that He was the one who created me and would always help me. I never really tried to talk to Him before, but I figured now was as good a time as any.

I remember closing my eyes because I thought I had to do that, and I remember trying to think how I was supposed to start talking. I introduced myself and said that I was sad. That's all I knew to say, and I couldn't muster much more without crying. I begged Him to please help me, and then I said some words of gratitude. It wasn't much, but I felt better. For the first time in hours, I felt a calmness over me. Whether it was the prayer or the pain medicine, I drifted off to sleep and didn't wake until morning.

Sarah greeted my sense of smell with sausage and grits, and I was more than ready to eat the feast set out before me. I found myself in better spirits the second morning in the hospital and attributed my new attitude to my talk with God the night before. I asked Sarah if she believed in God, and I told her that I had tried talking to him

the night before. She slipped out of the room and came back with a little brown book that had “The Holy Bible” scripted in gold letters across the front. Sarah told me that everything I wanted to know about God would be in that book. But before I ever had the chance to open it, a doctor with round-framed glasses and a balding hairline walked into the room.

Dr. Lennox was all business and not as comforting as Lily, Sarah, or any of the other nurses. He told me that third degree burns were covering almost half of my body, but this came as no surprise to me. He also told me that because I had already gone three days without proper medical treatment, I might face permanent nerve damage. While that information was new to me, I didn’t exactly understand what it meant, so I wasn’t all that scared by it.

I soon learned what nerve damage meant when feeling began to evaporate in my limbs. There was still immense pain, but now as Sarah changed my bandages, I couldn’t always feel her fingertips. It worried me as I settled into a routine of ice baths, liquid salves, and lots of juice in the tube in my arm. Day two seemed to drag on for hours, and I didn’t have much to do to pass the time. I felt lonelier than ever before. I yearned for Mama and Daddy, the only two who could provide me with the comfort I really needed. Calling to talk to either of them was not an option as there was no phone in my room. Sarah brought me some paper, pen, envelopes, and promised to return with stamps the next day. I spent the early night writing to everyone back home, telling them anything that my mind could come up with. But after I stuffed the last envelope, I had nothing else to do, no one else to talk to. I pulled out the brown Holy Bible that Sarah gave me earlier in the day.

At first, I found myself bogged down in the confusing words and stories that I couldn't relate to. I kept turning pages, starting a different book each time after feeling confused. I finally made my way to Psalms, and I found myself a kindred spirit to David and Solomon. They were both suffering, too, in much different ways than I was. Sometimes I couldn't understand exactly why they were so sad, but I recognized the desperation in their writings and prayers. I felt empowered by their words and began repeating them to God, begging for him to help me the way he helped David and Solomon. And for the first time, I started really talking to God, telling him the way I felt, expressing my anger, resentment, and sadness. I read where David and Solomon did that, so I felt like it was appropriate since they wrote a whole book of the Bible. And it seemed that with every hardship I turned over to God, I felt another weight lifted off of my shoulders. On that second night, I went to bed still homesick but not feeling so alone. I found comfort in that little brown book Sarah had given me and the peace I felt from my prayers.

After the second night, time seemed to start moving faster. I kept up with my routine of salves, more salves, ice baths, and pain medicine. I started walking up and down the hall, stretching my new skin. I found it hard at first, and I didn't want to keep going, but then I would say a little prayer in my head. I found strength, strength that I had never experienced before. At night, I would keep reading that brown book, soaking in every word that would teach me more about God. I kept talking to him, leaning on him the way my Bible taught me to. I still really missed Mama, Daddy, and the family back at home. But, I soon learned that I wasn't alone. God was in my heart, and He wouldn't leave me. When I would feel lonely, I would cry to Him, sometimes scream out in

loneliness. He would answer my prayers with a comfort that would consume my body. I started talking to Him all the time, and began asking Him to help me get better. I found not only a love, but also a friendship with God.

Pretty soon a month passed by, and I celebrated my first birthday alone. Mama sent me a birthday card and told me how much she loved and missed me. Sarah brought me a cupcake with a candle lit on top and a little basket of candies. I was thankful, but felt overwhelmingly lonely, more than I felt in a long time. For the first time in a month, I didn't want to pray to God. I was sad, lonely, and tired of being imprisoned by the hospital room. I stayed angry all morning, fussing about everything that happened for no reason at all. I started acting mean to everyone around me, spouting off smart-alecky comments, which was something out of my character. But then, the strangest thing happened. I felt God trying to talk to me, trying to tell me that He loved me. It's difficult to explain how I knew it was Him or how I knew He was trying to talk to me. All I can tell you is that it was Him, and I couldn't ignore His voice. My anger began to melt away, along with my sadness and resentment. Rejuvenation crept into my soul, allowing me to feel free again. That was the last time I would try to ignore God and all the things I learned from that little brown book.

I ended up staying at Shriner's hospital for eight months, the longest I would be away from home my entire life. I wish I could remember and detail everything that happened over those eight months, but so much clouds my memory. I remember the pain, Sarah (who had become more of a friend than a nurse), Dr. Lennox and his ill-mannered attitude, the chocolate pudding that came with dinner on Thursday nights, the excitement of the mailman coming, all of the bandages, but most of all, all the things I learned from

the Holy Bible. That book and the God behind it all changed my life, but more importantly, saved it. Never once in eight months was Mama able to visit me again or anyone else from our family. Money was too tight, and it just wasn't a possibility. But I soon learned that I had another parent, a Father in Heaven who would never leave me or forsake me. I finally realized that no one is ever really alone. I realized that no matter the tragedy, God was always nearby, waiting to be called upon. This was a revelation that would carry me through my entire life and comfort me in my darkest days.

One thing I will never forget is the day the hospital discharged me. There were no bandages, but still some salve to take home with me. Mama had sent me money for a bus ticket home. I packed up the few things that I had collected during my eight months at Shriner's, careful not to forget my brown book. Sarah cried as I walked out of my room, pain free. I started to cry too because I loved Sarah. She was a mother to me, a light in a dark tunnel. She insisted upon walking with me to the bus station, holding my hand the entire way.

I bought a one-way ticket to Dothan, Alabama and after kissing Sarah, never looked back towards that hospital. The bus ride home seemed to last for days, and anticipation was building inside of me. As we turned the corner on Jean Terry Road, I saw Mama waving in the distance, Daddy sitting on a bench nearby, and Martha, Mary, Peggy, and Ben bouncing up and down. Tears streamed down my face from pure joy. I thanked God for bringing me home, for traveling the long journey with me.

I barely took one step off the bus before hands wrapped around my entire body. Mama wept, and my sisters giggled in excitement. Daddy couldn't see me, but he got up from the bench to make his way towards the screams of giddiness. Ben stood far back,

crying, scared to come near me. I made my way to him and squeezed him as tight as I could. He whispered, "I'm sorry." I said, "Don't be." And just like that, we were brother and sister again.

Mama prepared the best homecoming meal I could ever have hoped for, and we all sat around the table, everyone asking questions about Mobile. Unfortunately, I didn't have much to report about the city, but I did have plenty to tell them about God and how much he had helped me over the past eight months. After dinner I wasn't quite ready to roughhouse with Ben, and I definitely kept my distance from that fire place. When it was time for bed, I went to the room that I shared with Martha, Mary, and Peggy. We were all undressing to put on our nightgowns when I heard the simultaneous gasps from my sisters. I had become quite used to the scars that covered me from my bellybutton down, but I don't think the girls were prepared for what I would look like. I assured them that I was okay, slipped on my gown, and curled into my old bed. It felt strange to be home, and I started to grow uncomfortable in my childhood room. But then I remembered that all I had to do was pray, and I finally got to share that joy with my sisters. We lit candles and stayed up for what seemed like hours as I read them my favorite parts of the Bible. I found joy in celebrating God's love with others, which soon led me to start attending church with Mama.

I could go on and on about what those eight months taught me. At the time, I had no idea of the hardships and struggles that I would face in my later years. After what I had been through, I thought the worst was over. But I would soon find out that life likes to throw curve balls and try to bring you down just as you start to see the top of the mountain. What I did know is that no matter what would come my way, I would never be

alone. While my scars would never let me forget that dreadful Tuesday, my God would never let me hold myself back because of it.

“The Grass Isn’t Always Greener on the Other Side”

People say that “every little girl dreams of her wedding day.” I’m not exactly sure that there’s a whole lot of truth in that cliché, but I do think that there is something programmed in a young girl’s heart that makes her yearn for love and companionship, despite all reason and logic. I don’t think I was quite as desperate for that type of fulfillment as other girls my age, but it was hard to be a teenage girl in the 1940’s without a suitor in sight, especially with watchful eyes anticipating when your leap into womanhood would finally occur.

I often found myself so busy that I didn’t think too much about love, marriage, or romance. Our house was a working household – all hands on deck! Daddy was pretty much out of commission, and I found myself much more apt for working than my siblings. But, every now and again when I would be out in town running errands for Mama, I would see a girl my age walking down the sidewalk hand-in-hand with a man who seemed to be blinded to anything or anyone outside of her. It was in those moments that I felt a pang in my heart that reminded me that there had to be more to life than collecting peas in a field, cooking dinner with Mama, and scraping my knees on the back roads of the farm.

At seventeen years old, I was doing a whole lot more than most girls that I had gone to school with. Responsibility was something that my circumstances forced me to learn at an early age, and quite frankly, I felt trapped between the wooden walls of our house, which felt more like a working factory at times. There was always something to do between cleaning, cooking, attending to three siblings, and helping a blind daddy. Money was tight and food wasn’t always easy to come by, and while I loved my family, I

wanted more. Girls who came from more privileged backgrounds than I did had their picking when it came to men and suitors. But for a girl with tattered clothes, calloused hands, and literally no family money, I wasn't what one would call a "great catch."

In the summer of 1948, I was helping Mama work on Mr. Raymond's farm about two miles from our home. He would pay us for picking and shelling his peas and butterbeans in the summer time and give us extra work when he could. It was tedious and not very lady-like, but it gave us enough money to put supper on the table.

I remember the Friday afternoon that I met Doyle, Mr. Raymond's son. The blazing sun was beaming and the heat was blistering my fair skin. Beads of sweat rolled from my hairline to my jaw, and my cheeks were as red as the tomatoes in the field. I heard old Mr. Raymond holler "Doyle!" and run for the dirt driveway. I glanced in the direction to which Mr. Raymond was heading and saw a handsome man in his army uniform, slowly hobbling up the winding path. His brown hair was buzzed short, his muscles noticeable from his loosely fitting shirt. When he smiled at his father, I noticed his bright smile and tiny dimples in the corners of his cheek. I became immobilized in that field, mesmerized by the most handsome man I had ever seen.

Mama jolted my shoulder and scolded me to get back to work. As Mr. Raymond and Doyle walked arm in arm towards the field, I quickly refocused my attention to the green plants beneath me, pretending never to have noticed the striking man that stood behind me.

"Doyle, I want you to meet Carolyn. She started helping her Mama out here." Mr. Raymond introduced me more out of courtesy than necessity.

I turned my neck slightly to look up at him, trying to hide the embarrassment and sweat on my face. He reached his hand out to help me up from the ground, and I hesitated to take it because my hands were dirty and rough.

“Carolyn, what a pleasure it is to meet you.” Doyle said as he almost forcefully pulled me from the dirt.

I nodded my head because I couldn’t muster any words out, inhibited by my own lack of self-confidence. We stood there in awkward silence, as he waited for me to say something, anything. Finally he broke the silence.

“Well, I guess I’ll be seeing you around.” He shrugged as he continued down the crop row with his father.

I sunk back to the ground, embarrassed by my behavior. Mama didn’t seem to notice, as she probably never even realized that I might have dreams outside of this pea patch. As I finished my day of work, I could never quite get back in the swing of things. My heart confused my mind with feelings of what I only thought could be love, and my mind battled with my dreams and my reality. At the end of the day, I would always be a girl from a broke family with no status, working in the fields of any farmer who would give us work, while Doyle would always be a war hero who grew up in a family with money, land, and farms. Like most other people I envied, he could have his pick of any girl he wanted, and I’m quite sure that I wasn’t at the top of that list.

The next morning, Mama woke me up early to head over to Mr. Raymond’s. I had stayed awake most of the night feeling embarrassed, while also fighting anger and resentment over the cards I had been dealt in life. I didn’t want to see Doyle again. I didn’t want to be reminded of the feelings that had bubbled up in me and the reality that

smothered any dream I had. I grabbed my stomach and told Mama that I wasn't feeling good. Since I never missed a day of work and barely ever complained of an ailment, Mama didn't question it too much. She pulled the covers back over my chest, and she told me if I felt better to run up to the Food Mart later in the day and grab some milk and bread. I nodded my head and rolled over on my stomach, stifling my tears in the pillow.

I stayed in bed that morning later than usual and moped around the house as I made breakfast for Daddy, Mary, Peggy, Martha, and Ben. I didn't eat and, after cleaning the dishes, walked in my room to choose from the three pair of pants I had and the couple of shirts that I shared with my sisters. I slipped on a pair of denim pants with a red pattern patch at the knee and paired it with a once-white shirt, now permanently discolored from use. I told Daddy I was going to the store for Mama and made my way up the street.

It was about a 15 minute walk up to the Food Mart, and I didn't hurry myself. I felt defeated in something that I had never even been a part of. I don't know why meeting Doyle that day bothered me so much, but I think the old saying rings true, "the grass always looks greener on the other side."

I finally made it to Food Mart and wandered aimlessly up and down the aisles as if I could afford any of the sugary treats that tempted my eyes. I bent down to grab a loaf of bread from the back of the rack. Mama always taught me that the freshest bread was kept in the back. As I was rummaging through the loaves, I heard my name.

"It's Carolyn, right?" The voice was husky, and I could feel someone hover behind me.

As I turned around, I immediately fell back on my bottom out of surprise. It was Doyle, dressed in khaki pants and a checkered print shirt. He reached down, grabbed my

hand, and pulled me from the tile floor. Why did it seem I was always on the ground around him? I guess it was pretty symbolic.

I stood up and brushed my hands together to rid them of the particles they collected from the floor. He started talking to me but I couldn't hear a word he was saying. I kept fidgeting with my hair, my shirt, my pants, anything that might make me look more presentable. Finally, he caught my attention.

"So, anyways, I was about to head over to the post and mail some letters to my friends back in the army. Would you like to join me? Maybe get some ice cream on the walk back?" He smiled and looked effortlessly handsome.

"Sure," I murmured under my breath. In reality, I wanted to scream, grab him, and jump up and down. But my body was subdued by shock and what I can only guess was love at first sight.

We walked down to the post, and I didn't say much. He would ask me questions about working for Mr. Raymond and about the farm, my family, or anything that would keep the conversation going. I didn't say much, partly because I was trying to hold things together, but mostly because I was embarrassed about where I came from and what I had to offer. As we walked, I noticed that he moved slowly and seemed to be off balance. He didn't have a limp, but he definitely didn't move as the soldiers did that I would see around town. And just like a cat, curiosity got the best of me.

"Did something happen to you during the war?" I asked more forcefully than I had intended.

He stopped in his tracks and remained silent. I immediately regretted opening my big mouth.

“It’s, it’s just that I noticed you were a little off balance and, and I just wanted to make sure you were okay, that’s all.” I tried my best to climb out of the hole I had just dug for myself.

“I got caught up in an explosion in the war. I lost a kidney, but they say the other one’s still good.” His face turned red, and he looked to be embarrassed as he turned his eyes from me.

“I know it’s not something a girl looks for in a suitor – someone to nurse and take care of – but I can do most everything for myself. But, I would understand if you didn’t think much of me now,” he said as his head shrugged toward the ground.

I was shocked by his comment. Not think much of him? Did this mean he was interested in me, too? I didn’t want to speak too soon and jump to a conclusion. I mean, surely, Doyle Buie wouldn’t be thinking of courting a girl like me. If anything, I thought this little walk to the post reflected pity, not flirtation. I waited for a few minutes to gather my thoughts before responding.

“I wasn’t thinking anything of the sort. I can’t imagine a girl not thinking much of you. You’re the most handsome man I’ve ever seen.” My cheeks flushed red as those last words rolled off my tongue.

Doyle grinned from ear to ear and grabbed my hand. A man had never grabbed my hand before, and my first instinct was to jerk it away. He laced his fingers between mine and pulled me a little closer to him.

“Well, Carolyn, I think you’re the most beautiful girl that I’ve ever seen. I thought so since last Friday in the field, and I’d be honored if you would let me take you to dinner.” He gently squeezed my hand as he spoke.

“I sure would love that!” I almost squealed from excitement.

We walked hand in hand towards the post and spent the rest of the afternoon talking. I didn't say much about my family, but I knew in the back of my mind that Doyle already knew I didn't come from much. But he never mentioned it and treated me as if I was one of those dainty girls on the streets with the freshly pressed dresses and clean white shoes. He walked me home that night. I'm quite sure the milk had spoiled, but Mama didn't seem to notice when she saw Doyle standing on the porch. She greeted him in a business-like manner and told me I'd better be getting inside because it was dark out. I thanked Doyle for the wonderful afternoon and felt a bit of excitement as he reminded me about dinner.

When I walked inside, Mama looked as pale as a ghost. She questioned me about why Doyle had walked me home and what I had been doing out all afternoon with him. As I reminisced about the day for her, I couldn't help feeling like Doyle was more than I could ever have hoped for in a man. He was wealthy, privileged, and from a family with more prestige than I could ever garner in my whole life. Mama's biggest concern was ruining the working relationship with Mr. Raymond. She was quick to remind me who I was and where I came from. I think she meant well and wanted to protect me, but I couldn't help feeling bitter after hearing her words.

The next day, I was more than eager to return to work. I was the first one up in the house. I picked through my hair and rummaged through Mama's powder in the bathroom, trying to cover the blemishes on my face. The walk to work seemed much longer than usual as I couldn't stop thinking about Doyle. Mama kept trying to talk to me, but I couldn't focus on our conversation. We finally made it to the winding driveway at Buie

Farms and from a distance I could see Doyle sitting in the rocking chair on the front porch. I didn't know what to do, and I didn't want to make too much out of what happened the day before. But as soon as Doyle's eyes spotted me, he jumped up from his chair and started jogging towards me. He embraced me and kissed me on the cheek. I could have melted into the dirt right then and there.

Doyle spent the day picking and shelling peas with me, never short on words to build a conversation. I felt happy, and more than that, hopeful. As 4:00 rolled around, I felt disappointed as I knew that the day was coming to an end.

"You're staying for dinner tonight, right?" Doyle asked reassuringly.

I was sweaty, dirty, unkempt, and unpresentable for dinner with the Buie family. But Doyle's face looked so hopeful, and the last thing I wanted to do after the past 24 hours was disappoint the only man who had ever shown interest in me as more than a worker or friend.

"Of course! Let me just run home and change first" I almost shouted unintentionally.

In all my days of working for Mr. Raymond, I don't think I ever made it home faster than I did that day. I sprinted down the dirt road, leaving Mama in amusement. I felt flustered, excited, and nervous—so many emotions bundled into a heap of energy. I rushed through the front door, leaving it wide open in my wake. I didn't have time to make a bath, so I did the best I could with a washcloth and basin of water. By the time I had scrubbed as much dirt as I could from my body without leaving my skin raw, Mama had made it home. As I was standing in the only bathroom in our home, Mama came in

with a pale blue dress on a hanger. I didn't even know Mama owned a dress, much less one as delicate and beautiful as the one before me.

"I want you to wear it. It was my Mama's, and I've never had the chance to wear it anywhere, so I'd rather you get some use out of it than watch it collect dust," she said with sincerity.

I smiled and didn't have the words to adequately thank her. I shuffled into the dress. It was a little loose, but it was the most beautiful piece of clothing I had ever worn. I kissed her on her cheek as I made my way out of the bathroom and out of the house. I trotted towards Buie Farms, careful to maintain a pace where I didn't build up a sweat.

As I reached the driveway, I felt a bit nervous, wondering how in the world I could make conversations with folks as fine as these. The Buie family had money and lots of it, not to mention acres and acres of farm land that had been in their family for years. I was a fish out of water and didn't want to remind myself how out of my element I really was. I knocked on their white, wooden front door and twisted my fingers as they approached the door.

Mrs. Buie answered the door, and I knew from the moment I saw her that I wasn't exactly what she had in mind for a dinner guest.

"Carolyn, Doyle said you were coming for dinner. You must be so excited for him to think to invite you." Her tone was disapproving and condescending, and all I wanted to do was smear her white dress with dirt.

"I'm just the luckiest girl in the world." I could be sarcastic, too.

Before Mrs. Buie could come up with another snide comment, Doyle came dashing down the stairs, his smile revealing the curvatures of his face. He wrapped his

arms around me and whispered, “You look absolutely lovely.” And in that moment, I knew I could endure anything if only to hear those words for the rest of my life.

We made our way into the dining room, and all I could notice was how pristine everything looked. Electricity illuminated every room, showcasing memorabilia, art, and elegant tapestries. The dining room table was large and set out with elegant china and wine glasses. Never in my life had I been somewhere so grand. I felt myself crawling back into my shell as I realized once more that I had nothing in common with these people. My home had no electricity, no running water, and barely enough beds for the people in it. My father was blind and couldn’t work, and my Mama practically begged for work just to put food on the table. Who was I kidding? I could never fit in here, much less deserve a man who grew up this way.

As we sat down for dinner, all I could think about is how I wanted to run home. I wanted to walk across the cold wooden floors and sink into my lumpy mattress. There were three forks set out before me, and I didn’t know what to do with any of them. There were two plates, a bowl, three glasses, and a maid shuffling in and out of the kitchen. I wanted her job; at least I knew how to do that. Doyle reached over and clasped my hand in my lap. He smiled at me, and for a moment, I felt a sense of relief. Then, Mrs. Doyle began to speak.

“Carolyn, your father’s blind, right?” she asked sternly.

“Yes ma’am, he sure is.” I sounded more sarcastic than I had planned, but the woman already knew Daddy was blind. She just wanted to make sure I remembered it, too.

“Well it must be real hard for him to find work. What does he do?” She didn’t need an answer. She already knew.

“Daddy doesn’t work,” I snapped at her.

“Oh, what a hard life you must have had.” There was no trace of sympathy in her voice, only malice.

I didn’t respond as I twisted in my chair to avoid crawling across the table to pull out her pearl earrings. Doyle kept squeezing my palm, and Mrs. Buie kept talking, reminding me what a good worker Mama was in the fields and throwing in her apologies for how “bad I must have had it.” Mr. Buie didn’t say much; it was clear who was the head of this household.

Just as I thought Mrs. Buie had run out of subtle insults, she made sure to pipe up one last time

“Doyle, did you know Anna Claire is back from South Carolina? I ran into her mother, and she said Anna Claire is just dying to see you! I’m hoping you two can pick right back up where you left off before the war.” She was rambling, making sure to grab my attention.

There was an uncomfortable silence. Doyle looked at me apologetically, but he had nothing to be sorry for. Mrs. Buie sat in smug victory across the table, as if she was really anticipating a response from Doyle or myself. Mr. Buie just looked frustrated, almost pulling his hairs from his scalp.

“I’m sorry, Mother, but I have no interest in seeing Anna Claire.” He scooted his chair closer to mine.

“What? Why? We all thought you two were going...” Mrs. Buie couldn’t even finish her statement before Doyle cut her off.

“I’m in love with Carolyn. And I know it hasn’t been but a few days, but I intend to marry her,” he said in a matter-of-fact way.

I thought Mrs. Buie would fall flat out of her chair as her mouth hung open and her hands trembled, but instead she gulped down every drop of red wine from her glass. Meanwhile, I felt like I had just lost every bit of air in my body, leaving me gasping for breath. Married? I had barely had time to wrap my mind around a courtship. And did I want that? I barely knew Doyle, and he didn’t know me at all. Before I could process everything in my mind, Doyle turned my chair towards him and grabbed both of my hands.

“So, what do you say, Carolyn? Do you want to be my wife?” He looked hopeful and excited.

For a moment, I couldn’t come up with anything to say so I just nodded my head, but I wasn’t sure I meant it. Of course I found him handsome and had wallowed in my school-girl crush for the past few days, but marriage? I was only 17-years-old and didn’t know much about life besides hard work and putting meals on the table. But on the other hand, I would never have a better opportunity in my life. I could finally be something more than the poor girl who worked in the fields, and I knew that if I could find happiness in the hardships of my life, it would be easy to make a happy life with Doyle, no matter if I was sure I loved him or not.

Doyle embraced me while Mrs. Buie kept calling his name and shouting for Mr. Raymond to do something. When no one would answer her screams, she asked for me to leave, and I was more than ready to. I needed to process everything that had happened, and more than that, I knew that unintentionally I had won the battle with Mrs. Buie. For that, I felt a sense of smug joy.

Throughout my life, I would always wonder why Doyle proposed to me so quickly. While I believe Doyle loved me and saw me as a good woman, I think there were bigger issues that fueled his decision. From what I had heard, Doyle and Anna Claire were practically already married before he went off to the war. But while he was off fighting, she found herself other things, or should I say other people, to occupy her time. More than Anna Claire and as I would later learn, I think Mrs. Buie had a habit of always getting her way when it came to Doyle and his life, and for once, Doyle wanted to make a stand to her controlling ways. Regardless of any ulterior motives, I knew Doyle cared about me and that his heart was pure.

Contrary to my earlier run to the farm house, I took my time walking home. I thought about being a wife, a mother, having a home with running water and electricity, never having to wonder if there would be enough food for the next meal, and not spending my summers going from farm to farm working in the fields. And it was on that walk home that I realized that any hesitation I could think of could never be as bad as spending my life in poverty. I was going to be Mrs. Doyle Buie and be a member of the upper class. It seemed like something that could happen only in my dreams.

When I made it home Mama and Daddy were sitting in the living room in front of the fireplace. Mary, Peggy, Martha, and Ben had already gone to bed, and the house was quiet.

“How’d it go, dear?” Mama smiled as she beckoned me to her with her words.

I didn’t know where to start or how to let Mama know that I wouldn’t be here anymore. I loved Mama and Daddy, but I couldn’t stay forever. I finally just blurted out everything that happened so quickly that I don’t know how she even understood me. I started giving reasons why I should marry him, then apologizing for leaving them, then second-guessing my decision altogether. I was rambling, trying to avoid any reaction from Mama that might make me change my mind.

“Carolyn, it’s okay. I’m happy for you. You deserve the world.” She patted my knee and soothingly comforted me and a sense of relief overcame my anxious body.

We didn’t say much more, only sat in silence around the fireplace that cracked a spark across the room every once and a while. And in that moment I knew that no matter how much luxury I could ever live in, there would always be something about these cold floors, drafty walls, and silent nights that I would always miss. This place was my home, and a part of me would always miss the memories.

The next morning, I had slept later than I anticipated. Mama didn’t wake me to go to work. I can only guess that when you’re engaged to a Buie you don’t have to work on their farm. When I woke, I made breakfast for my sisters and brother. As we ate scrambled eggs and shared two pieces of toast, I gushed to them about Doyle, growing more excited with every gasp of my sisters.

Before I could clean up the kitchen, there was a knock on the door. Doyle was standing on our rickety front porch with a small bouquet of wild flowers that I can only assume he had picked on the walk over here.

“Good morning. I know last night ended in a rather oddly, and I was hoping I could make it up to you today.” He sounded so proper when he spoke.

“Of course,” I said with a smile. “Just let me get dressed.”

I headed to the bedroom, ransacking every piece of clothing that my sisters and I shared. I didn’t want to keep him waiting too long so I tossed on the cleanest outfit I could find, tussled with my hair, and slid on a pair of moccasins.

We walked up the first road for a while, talking and laughing together. He held my hand and kept reassuring me that no matter how sudden his proposal had been, it was sincere. I felt a sense of comfort and stability with him that I had never had before in my life. When we passed his family home, I didn’t say anything, but I wondered where we could be going.

About two miles past his family home, there sat a stately white house on top of a hill. It was surrounded by oak trees and had a lovely garden out front. We walked towards the house and up to the front porch.

“So, if it is suitable for you, this is where we will live. I know it needs a little work, but it’s been in the family for years. I think with your help, we could really make it a home.” He sounded hopeful, yet nervous.

Suitable for me? This place was like a very expensive hotel compared to my shack. I could see from the windows that there was electricity on in the house, with furniture already in the visible rooms.

“It’s perfect! The most beautiful house I have ever seen!” I said with joy, excitement, and not one bit of hesitation.

He wrapped his arms around my waist, lifted me from the ground and kissed me as I my feet dangled in the air. And with that kiss, I was his and would be forever his. I knew that this was more than some step up in society; I loved Doyle and was so very thankful for his interest in me.

The next week seemed to fly by as I packed up the few things I stored in my home. Doyle and I decided to just get married at the courthouse. With him just coming back from the war, his mother not exactly thrilled, and my family without a thing to wear to a wedding, it just made sense to not make a big to-do over our marriage. Regardless, I couldn’t wait to marry Doyle, to start a life with him atop that big beautiful hill. Everything had already happened so fast that it seemed silly to prolong the engagement. We would be married that Friday on a hot August day, and my life would change forever.

The ceremony was shorter than I had imagined it would be, and neither of Doyle’s parents came to witness. Mama was there, and Daddy sat in a chair in the corner of the room. As Doyle and I walked from the room, they both wished us the best of luck, sincerity and love evident in every word they spoke.

We spent our first night together in our new home. I couldn’t get used to turning on lights instead of lighting candles. I didn’t have to trek back and forth to a well in order to have a decent bath. The house was already completely furnished with the finest pieces and most delicate linens. It truly was more than I had ever imagined myself having.

About a week after we were married Doyle received a compensation check from the Army for his injuries stemming from the war, and Doyle knew right where he wanted

to spend it. Since I didn't make the money, I certainly didn't have a say in it, but more importantly, I trusted Doyle to make the best decisions for me and our household, so I never questioned him. He decided to buy a farm in conjunction with his Uncle John, and the two of them would run it together.

With his newly acquired farm, Doyle spent the first few weeks of our marriage busy with business like securing the land, purchasing equipment, deciding what crops would be planted. His absence left me with a lot of free time. I started adding my personal touches to our already perfect home, making sure every surface was clean and dusted, cooking three meals a day with more groceries than I had ever had at one time in my life, doing laundry, going to the market, and buying a new wardrobe with the money Doyle would leave, and most of all, making sure to keep my husband satisfied and happy. To only be 17-years-old, I felt like I was more than meeting the challenge, and Doyle seemed to be pleased with my adjustment to marriage and upper-class life. At least once a day I would go down to see Mama and Daddy, taking them extra food for meals. And never once in our first month of marriage did Mrs. Buie come to our home. I can only assume that she would see Doyle while he was out on the farm, but she never came to see me. In fact, the last time I had seen her was the night when Doyle proposed. It didn't bother me, and her presence was not something I needed in my life. But soon she found a reason to take an interest in me.

I could count the amount of times I had vomited in my whole life on one hand. I wasn't one to get sick, much less give into it. But pretty soon, I found myself unable to keep solid foods down or be anywhere near the kitchen. I started to feel sluggish, unable to keep up with my daily routines, and I already knew it could only mean one thing, and

Doyle did, too. Within two days of the non-stop vomiting, Dr. Adams made a house call and confirmed what we already knew: at 17, I had been married for about a month and was already pregnant. And while it was a bit sudden and scary, I knew that being a mother was something I was born to do. I had practically raised my four siblings, and couldn't wait to raise one of my own. Apparently, Mrs. Buie didn't think I was quite up to the challenge.

The next morning, I went down and told Mama and Daddy the good news, completely bypassing the Buie Farm on my way. I was sure Doyle would tell them, and I didn't want their friendship just because I was carrying their grandchild. But when I made it home, I noticed the front door was slightly open. When I walked through, there stood Mrs. Buie, tracing her fingers over my tables, inspecting them for my deficiencies in cleaning.

"Carolyn, how lovely to see you. I've been waiting for you." She was more condescending than kind.

"I can see you let yourself in." I really needed to quit with the smart-alecky comments.

"Well, I lived here once myself, just wanted to see that things were still in order." She smiled half-heartedly, and I broke our stare and walked towards the kitchen.

"Listen, Carolyn, I know we've had our differences, but Doyle stopped by this morning, telling us the news. And, you must know how happy we are for Doyle....and, you of course." She had to force that last part out.

There was a long pause. I could guess she was waiting for me to say something. But I had nothing to say. She could be happy all she wanted but that didn't change her silence over the last six weeks.

"So, I came here to propose that we start over. I think it will be in the best interests of everyone. Don't you?" She, too, sounded so proper when she spoke.

"I suppose so." I smiled, but it was fake.

I continued into the kitchen, and she followed me, asking me all kinds of questions, still looking through every open cabinet and drawer. I would give her the occasional head nod, acknowledging what she was saying, but not participating in conversation. I finally told her that I needed to start lunch before Doyle came home, hoping she would take the hint. And while it took her a few minutes, she finally started making her way to the door. Right as she was leaving, she turned back towards me to shout "let me know if you need anything!" Sure, she was definitely the one I would go to.

When Doyle made it home for lunch, he asked if his mother had stopped by, as if he had already expected her surprise visit. And when I told him that she and I had already talked, he seemed happy, so hopeful. I could tell that he wanted the two of us to connect in some way. Even though I thought she was vile, she was still his mother, and I knew he would love her forever, and I knew what I needed to do for my husband and our marriage. During lunch, I made a commitment to forgive the shame and hurt Mrs. Buie had brought upon me, and so I chose to love her as a mother-in-law, not because I wanted to, but for the sake of my husband and unborn child.

Over the next couple of weeks, I stuck to my commitment, dropping by Buie Farms to say hello, inviting Mr. and Mrs. Buie to come to dinner, doing everything I

knew to do to build a bridge across an ocean that seemed to be endless, even forgoing time with my own family to appease them. And while Mrs. Buie was cordial, she certainly wasn't kind, but it was nothing that I couldn't handle. Things seemed better between Doyle and I than they ever had been. He finally felt that his family had united just in time for his own child. But happiness was short lived, as it always seemed to be in my life.

Pretty soon, Doyle started coming in earlier from work, vomiting, unable to walk. Since we knew he wasn't pregnant, something had to be really wrong. He couldn't eat solid foods, even when I made mashed potatoes and soup. He could barely get out of bed in the morning and began constantly complaining of abdominal pain. I wasn't much help, cleaning up his vomit while vomiting myself. Dr. Adams came and told us that if his symptoms didn't diminish soon to bring him straight to the hospital. I was so happy that we had the money to visit a hospital; it was a bit of relief in a stressful situation.

Within 24 hours, I accompanied Doyle to the hospital. I was only about three months pregnant, so I was comfortable walking and standing. Doyle was hooked up to tubes, stabbed with needles, and attended to by nurses from across the hospital. There was so much staff in our little room that I barely had a place to stand. Everyone knew the Buie Family and went the extra mile just for that last name. I stood in the corner, unsure what to say or do. I could tell Doyle was in pain and all I could do was grab my stomach and pray that our baby would grow up with both parents.

It wasn't long before Doyle's parents showed up, pushing me even further into the corner. Mr. Buie stood by the door with a solemn face and his arms folded while Mrs. Buie sat on the bedside, making sure her tears were noticeable. The nurses rolled Doyle's

bed in and out of the tiny room, telling us that all these tests would be able to give us some insight into what was causing Doyle so much pain. After about four hours, Dr. Hill came in, shook Mr. Buie's hand, and placed his arm on Doyle's shoulder.

"Unfortunately, Doyle, your kidney is failing and since it's your only one, we need to make sure that doesn't happen," Dr. Hill said as he pushed his spectacles up.

Ever since Doyle had told me about his injury from the war before we were married, I had never really thought about it again. It didn't interfere with his day to day life, and he never complained of any pain from his stomach. And I didn't know much about biology and organs, but I was smart enough to know you had to have a kidney. I didn't know the right questions to ask or any way to make it better, but I did know that I had to make my way out of this corner and towards my husband.

"So, what can we do?" I asked as I walked toward the bed and sat in front of Mrs. Buie, replacing her hand with my own on Doyle's arm.

Dr. Hill looked surprised to see me, as if he had never noticed me before that moment.

"Well, the good news is that we have new medicine that should get everything back working again." He made it sound so simple.

And with everything I've learned throughout my life, I feel silly ever believing that a regimen of pills could sustain a kidney. But at the time, there was no such thing as organ transplants, dialysis, or any of the other things that modern medicine has brought to us. I was only 17. I was pregnant. I had very little education. Who was I to know better?

Mrs. Buie sighed loudly, scooting up the bed as to push me off. I held my ground and told Doyle that he didn't have to worry; I would always take care of him. Dr. Hill

came back about an hour later with a paper bag of pills and told us we could head home and to call him if we needed anything.

As I got Doyle into bed that night, I made sure he had everything he needed as I climbed in beside him. The medicine did not seem to be working yet. Doyle was still vomiting, seemingly in unbearable pain, and I felt helpless. As he finally laid back, he placed his hand over my stomach and managed to spread a smile across his face.

“I can’t wait to have a family with you,” he whispered as he fell into a sleep.

The next week was a whirlwind. I was starting to feel more of the effects of my pregnancy, and Doyle started to feel more of the effects of his failing kidney. I must have rung for the doctor at least once a day, telling him about Doyle’s inability to eat, walk, and sleep. I was wrecked with exhaustion, and it didn’t help that Mrs. Buie was spending her days telling me just how to take care of my husband when she wasn’t doing a damn thing for her own son. Luckily, Mama came up to the house every spare moment she could and helped me clean, cook, and slip in a bit of sleep for myself and the demanding baby in my belly who was paralyzing me with fatigue.

After eight days of hell, Dr. Hill finally told us to come back to the hospital. I had already prepared a bag for me and Doyle, and was expecting an extended hospital stay until we could get this kidney thing under control.

We settled in a tiny room on the second floor of the hospital. The upright chair in the corner was to be my bed, just close enough to Doyle so that I was able to hold his hand. The night hours crept over us, and there was a peace that neither of us had felt in days. Every once in a while, we would whisper things to one another even though we were the only two in the room. We talked about our baby, names we liked, things we

wanted to do together. Finally there was silence as we both fell asleep dreaming of what our future would be together.

“I NEED A DOCTOR. NOW. RUSH IT” The screams woke me from my blissful peace.

I opened my eyes and saw a nurse with a stethoscope on Doyle’s chest where his gown had been ripped open. Another stood at the door, screaming into the hallway. I couldn’t process anything that was happening, couldn’t force myself to wake up from my dreams. I stood up from the chair and looked over my husband, his body still and eyes blank.

“HE’S NOT BREATHING! I SAID WE NEEDED A DOCTOR!” The nurse was louder now than before.

I brushed my hands over his face and fell to my knees. Tears streamed uncontrollably and I begged Doyle to wake up.

“Doyle! Doyle! Doyle!” I shook his face as nurses began pumping his chest.

“You can’t leave me. Not now. Not ever” My voice lowered and instead of screaming, I was pleading.

“Everybody move! NOW!” Dr. Hill rushed through the doors.

He put his fingers to Doyle’s throat and his stethoscope to Doyle’s chest. He listened quietly, and finally he removed his fingers and stethoscope, but he didn’t say a word. He stood there for a few moments, looking at Doyle and then looking at me.

“I’m sorry.” He mouthed the words but did not say them.

Every piece of my heart broke in that instance. I grabbed Doyle, laying my body on top of his. The nurses pulled me back, and it took everything in me not to fight them,

but I had no more fight left in me. They escorted me out of the room, and I started walking down the white hallway toward the exit. I saw Mr. and Mrs. Buie rushing down the hall, screaming, presumably at me. But I couldn't hear them; I couldn't hear anything. I was in a hazy fog, unable to exist in the reality around me.

I walked home and soaked in the cool autumn breeze around me. I couldn't believe everything that had transpired in the past 12 hours. Only moments earlier, Doyle and I had been planning our future, holding one another. A mere two weeks ago the two of us were living in perfect marital bliss. And now I was walking to the home we had shared together to spend my first night alone in our bed. As I walked in the door, I couldn't bear to turn on the lights. I immediately went to the couch, unable to lie in the bed we once shared together. I wrapped my hands around my belly, bellowing cries to God, hoping to soon enough wake up from this nightmare of reality.

As the sun shone through the windows the next morning, Mama was already walking through the door. I didn't move from the couch as she came and sat by my feet.

"Lots of people will be coming by today. We need to get you up and dressed," Mama said with her usual kindness.

I didn't care who was coming or when, I didn't want to move from this couch, change clothes, shower, or do anything to change exactly the way I had been the last time Doyle and I were together. But it didn't matter that I didn't want to, because just as Mama had said, soon people were filtering in and out of our home, dropping by casseroles and condolences. Mrs. Buie finally showed up, dressed to perfection from head to toe as if nothing was even bothering her. She never spoke to me except to tell me that they would be taking care of the funeral arrangements. She and almost everyone else

who walked through the door acted as if I didn't exist. Everyone told Mrs. Buie how sorry they were, but then they would look at me with disdain. It didn't bother me. I didn't need them anyway.

I had never been to a funeral before, and I didn't think that the first black dress I would ever wear would be to bury my husband. The services were at Little Grove Baptist Church and the burial was right out back. I couldn't tell you what was said during that service; I fixated my eyes on the open casket, catching the last glimpses I would ever have of my husband. I sat on the front row with a huge gap between myself and Mr. and Mrs. Buie. After everything was over, I sat in the cemetery with Mama for hours. We never spoke. We didn't have to.

I didn't sleep a wink that night. I walked throughout the house, remembering all the memories Doyle and I had made in the home that now seemed like a claustrophobic box. I had yet to sleep in our bed again and made myself a little pallet on the couch. My eyes had barely closed before I heard a pounding knock on the front door. The sun was barely creeping in the windows, and I couldn't imagine who would wake me at this hour after everything the past few days had brought to me.

"Carolyn! Open the door! It's time to wake up!" I would know Mrs. Buie's voice from anyone.

I walked towards the door prepared to tell her to leave me alone for good. I didn't have to make things easy for Doyle anymore. He was dead, and as far as I was concerned, she was dead to me, too. As I opened the door, she rushed in before I could even get a word out.

“I hate to be the one to do this Carolyn, I really do, but there is no sense in prolonging what has to happen. It’s better to just get it all over with at once.” I had no idea what in the world she could be talking about.

“I left some suitcases on the porch, and you’re free to pack your things in them. Make sure to leave anything that belongs to the house, only taking things that you brought with you,” she said as she was walking through the house, inspecting things.

“Are you expecting me to leave?” I shouted at her out of frustration, anger, fear, resentment, hurt, and sadness.

“Oh, my dear. I don’t just expect you to leave. You will leave. Did you honestly think you would stay here? You have no claim to this home, to any of this. You and that bastard child can find yourself a new host to leech off of. You may have bamboozled Doyle, but you won’t make a fool out of me. I assure you of that.” She stood with her arms crossed, condescending and hateful.

“You’ll never see this child if you do that! I mean it! Never!” I tried to use the last bargaining chip I had left.

“Good. That’s what I was hoping for. Mr. Buie and I would rather forget that this whole little fling happened. Don’t worry, we won’t bother you.” She smiled and winked at me.

I wanted to slap her. Tear the strand of pearls from her neck and hang her from the ceiling. Maybe it was the pregnancy hormones or maybe Mrs. Buie really was an awful woman. Either way, I hated her more than I had ever hated anyone. She walked to the porch and brought the suitcases in, telling me that I needed to be out in an hour. I was so angry that I couldn’t comprehend the emotions and hurt that were overtaking my body.

I hadn't had much with me when I moved in, so I didn't have much to take with me. I grabbed some of Doyle's shirts that still smelled like him. Since it took me only about 10 minutes to pack, I walked around our home, taking mental pictures of where the best days of my life had taken place. I remembered eating dinner together in our dining room, sharing laughs on the floral print sofa, and catching a glimpse of Doyle shaving in the bathroom mirror. And without warning, the flood gates burst open, and I couldn't stop crying, wailing really.

If Mrs. Buie was anything, it was prompt. Within an hour she appeared back in the house.

"Time for you to go, Carolyn. Please don't contact us any further. We don't want any contact with you or the baby," she said in a very matter-of-fact way.

I wanted to respond, muster up the strength to spew back a hateful comment that would destroy her. But I could think of nothing as I turned away and headed down the hill towards the dirt driveway. And once again, I was the poor farm girl, with no money, no husband, no food to eat, and a suitcase carrying everything that I owned.

I had only one place to go. As I stood in front of that old rickety house with the front boards splitting, and broken steps, I hung my head towards the ground and squeezed my stomach tight. And even though I was a 17-year-old pregnant widow moving back in with her blind Daddy and poor Mama, I knew I had something that Mrs. Buie would never have – a family. The grass on that hill four miles up the road may have been pristine, but it sure wasn't any greener than the dirt beneath my feet.

“You’re No Better Than Anyone Else”

We lived in a blue house right in the middle of town. It was close to everything, and there were plenty of places nearby to keep oneself busy. But Austin didn’t really like me going out anywhere by myself, especially with Jerome in tow, because he feared that if anything went wrong, he wouldn’t be able to get to me in time. And, really, I was a little scared too. Jerome was born with fluid in his brain. They never did find out why it had happened or what could have caused it. But, regardless of the reasons why, God made that little boy special, and I loved him all the same. It did mean that Jerome would face the difficulties that come with being mentally retarded, but it also meant he would have a mother who acted as if she never noticed them at all. Austin worried about the two of us every day; I think he worried more about me than he did about Jerome. Either way, even little quick trips to the grocery store were out of the question. Reasonably, I understood why, but that didn’t keep me from dreaming about the greener grass on the other side. I was left in my little blue house of solitude.

Since Austin worked 24 hours on and 48 hours off as a firefighter and did a lot of farming and business work in between, I found myself alone with Jerome during the days after little Diane would go off to school. Most of the women my age were busy during the day, working or keeping pace with something or another, so there was never really anybody to call up and talk to. And from the time he was born until the day he died, Jerome was never able to speak one word, leaving me with only my thoughts to communicate with.

In the early years of Jerome’s life, I found it easier to keep busy. He was much needier then. I would be so busy trying to get him to eat something and cleaning up the

mess he would leave behind that I seemed to forget that I was all alone. Plus, I think that after a while everything becomes a routine. And as routines go on, they become easier to maintain. Don't get me wrong, there were certainly times that I remembered that I was all alone. Sometimes I would want to resent Austin for leaving me at home with Jerome and Diane, but then I would remember he was only trying to provide for our family, and I would always love and respect him for that. Medical bills for a mentally handicapped child were expensive and never-ending. We couldn't leave him in child care, so Austin had to work, and I had to stay home. That was the end of the story. That was the way the cards had been dealt. And as Jerome grew older, I found him able to do more things by himself like play with his toys for short periods of time or walk around the house. As Jerome was able to accomplish these new tasks, I found myself with a little less to do and a growing emptiness.

We did have neighbors, but I never really got to know most of them because they were never home during the day, with all but one exception. I can only assume that most of the women that lived on our street either had day jobs or had the freedom to be out and about during the bustling hours of the day. But I would often notice my neighbor to the right of me, Mrs. Tillmore. Usually around noon she would be out in her yard fiddling with her tulips and roses or trimming some bloom or another. We would speak in passing but never about anything too in-depth. There were times that I would secretly watch her out of my bedroom window. Jerome would be screeching, the only way he knew how to communicate, and tears would be streaming down my face as I tried to block out the sound. I would watch Mrs. Tillmore collect her prized flowers with such delicacy and precision. She was meticulous in her movements, careful not to cut one bloom too soon.

As Jerome would be pulling on my leg, I would long to walk a day in her shoes, carefree in a garden of hard work and spare time.

On one particular Tuesday afternoon, I had endured about all I could take. You see, the cortex of Jerome's brain that controlled melatonin and sleep was dysfunctional, so that boy really needed no sleep at all. He could go days without one wink of shut eye, which meant I had to learn how to do that, too. And on this Tuesday, we had not slept for almost 48 hours. I am serious; it had been two days of nothing but a miniscule nap that did not suffice. Austin had been on shift for the past 20 hours, so all I had done was talk to the wall. Literally, sometimes I think I would have to talk to the wall to keep some bit of my sanity.

Even after the 48 hour hiatus, Jerome was full of energy, and I was running on fumes and craving some adult interaction. I had done everything I knew to do to keep his attention, and I called everyone I knew to call who might keep me busy. Nothing was working, and nobody was answering. As I was looking out my window, I spotted Mrs. Tillmore out in her garden. She was basking in her well-manicured yard, while I was trying to clean the dried oatmeal from off of my shirt. Then I had a thought: I could just walk over to Mrs. Tillmore's house. We were similar in age, and she seemed nice enough. Lord knows I would have talked about anything that might have interested her just to engage with another adult. So I decided it right then and there – Ms. Tillmore and I would be friends, and I would try to be the best friend she ever had.

I put on a fresh shirt and powdered my face. I dressed Jerome in a pair of khaki shorts and a navy blue collared shirt and combed his hair over to the side. I remember being so excited about the endless possibilities of my friendship with Mrs. Tillmore,

more excited than I had been about anything in a long time. It may seem silly, but it meant a lot to me.

I wracked my brain to think of how to keep Jerome on his best behavior. I sat him down and gave him the best “serious” talk I could muster. But, God bless his soul, he didn’t understand a word I was saying. So I was forced to pull out the best card in my dwindling deck – saltine crackers. Yes, you read that right. I said saltine crackers. Jerome loved those things. I’m not sure what it was about them that he enjoyed so much. Maybe it was the crunch sound after biting into the cracker or maybe it was the little morsels of salt that excited his taste buds. Whatever it was, he loved the things, and I reserved them for only the most special of occasions. I figured if I gave them to him all the time that they might lose their luster. So I pulled out a sleeve of crackers, grabbed his hand, and headed out the door.

Mrs. Tillmore saw me coming and gave me a partial wave. It wasn’t inviting to say the least, but I figured that she didn’t know me all that well and might suspect that I only wanted something. We crossed the barrier into her yard, and I immediately greeted her with the friendliest smile I could stretch across my face. There was a nice shed with a covered porch close to where she was working in her garden, so I sat Jerome down and opened the pack of saltine crackers. His eyes dazzled in wonder, and he immediately sat Indian style trying to devour every saltine cracker that he could possibly get his fingers on.

I walked toward Mrs. Tillmore and started to make small talk. I made sure to compliment her on anything that was in my peripheral vision: her house, her garden, her outfit, her car. But despite my best efforts, she couldn’t even make eye contact with me. I

felt like she was less present in our conversation than the wall at home. Her eyes were eerily focused on Jerome, and I could see the hostility and anger boiling in her eyes. And without warning or notice, she erupted in a scream that a deaf dog could have noticed.

“Are you just going to stand there and let him eat those crackers like that?” She said with as much confusion as she did anger.

I looked over at Jerome and didn't notice anything too out of the ordinary. He was smiling from ear to ear, with little white remnants across his gleeful face. I was caught off guard. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do. Taking the crackers away would have resulted in a war greater than I was prepared to fight. But before I could even think to respond, Mrs. Tillmore was bellowing again.

“Are you listening to me? You! Are you listening to me?”

I think I started to mumble something that sounded like an “um” because honestly I couldn't form any words. I think I was starting to swallow my tongue. I got out the only thing that seemed reasonable.

“I'm, I'm sorry.” But, I didn't even know what I was sorry for.

“That retard is getting cracker crumbs all over my porch! Get him! Take him home now! NOW!” She said with such force that one might tremble.

It took everything I had not to punch that woman smack in the nose and give her a good piece of my mind. I bit right through my tongue and turned towards Jerome, who knew nothing of what had just transpired. He was still sitting quietly, enjoying every taste of cracker he could. I went to him, and before even picking him up to go, I kissed him on the forehead. I'm not even sure why I did it. I certainly wasn't trying to stall, only angering Mrs. Tillmore even more. I wasn't trying to prove her ignorance wrong, and

Jerome didn't need consoling because he didn't know what the old bat was saying. I guess I just wanted to make sure that in that moment Jerome knew he was loved, even if he didn't need to know. I grabbed his hand and gave him a tug to let him know we were leaving and never coming back. With his crackers in tow, we started walking toward our house. I wasn't even going to respond to Mrs. Tillmore. I wasn't going to give her any more reason to spew hatred. But, apparently, she didn't feel the same way.

"Are you just going to leave these crumbs all over my porch?" She asked with demand rather than inquiry.

"I didn't ask for this, and I shouldn't have to be the one to clean it up!" I guess she needed to add insult to injury.

I wanted to curse her with every word known to my vocabulary. I wanted to hit her, hurt her the way she had damaged my feelings. I wanted to educate her about her ignorance and reprimand her for her hatefulness. But, I couldn't do any of it. I couldn't say anything. I felt humiliated. I was defeated.

I let go of Jerome's hand and made my way to the porch. As Jerome continued to eat his delicacy in the safety of our lawn, I bent down on my knees. I filled my palm with every cracker crumb my eye could spot, leaving her porch as pristine as it once was. She stared at me from a distance, as if she needed to monitor the clean-up capacity of a grown woman. I rose from the ground, clasped my hand, and headed towards my boy, whose smile diminished any anger that my heart was harboring.

I could vaguely hear Mrs. Tillmore say "thank you" in the distance, but I didn't turn to acknowledge her. I didn't need her gratitude because I didn't do the cleaning for her. I did it for every mother, father, sister, or friend who suffered scorn because of a

child who couldn't help himself. I did it for my boy, who was more special than any child that Mrs. Tillmore could ever have. I did it for my God who showed me so much grace and mercy that the least I could do was spare some for Mrs. Tillmore.

I'll never forget that day. It taught me one of the most important lessons that I would carry with me throughout my life and pass down for generations. I would never again think myself superior to anyone else, no matter the circumstance, status, or situation, because truly, I was no better than anyone else. I would never allow my children to belittle or isolate others because of who they were. I would never turn my nose up to someone in need. If I took anything away from that day besides a disdain for Mrs. Tillmore, it was that everyone is special in their own right, and everyone is fighting some hidden battle.

As years would go on, I would still see Mrs. Tillmore out my bedroom window. She would still go out in her garden, trim her shrubs and pick her blooms. But her flowers never looked the same to me, and her garden never looked quite as mesmerizing. Somewhere along the way, I forgot that with every rose comes five more thorns. I think Mrs. Tillmore was growing a lot more thorns than she was roses, and I reveled in the fact that one day she would get pricked by what she held most dear.

Biographical Appendix

1. Obituary of Austin Fowler.

Birth: Mar. 11, 1922
Death: Mar. 9, 2011
Dothan
Houston County
Alabama, USA

Mr. Austin "Smiley" Fowler

Austin "Smiley" Fowler, a resident of Dothan, died Wednesday, March 9, 2011 at Southeast Alabama Medical Center. He was 88.

Funeral services for Mr. Fowler will be held at 11 AM Friday, March 11, 2011 in Clearman Chapel at Southern Heritage with Reverends Rick Glen, Jim Tate, Eddie Littlefield and Reverend Thomas Harrison officiating. Burial will follow with full Fireman Honors at Memphis Baptist Church cemetery with Southern Heritage directing. The family will receive friends Thursday, March 10, 2011 from 6 PM until 8 PM at the funeral home. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Memphis Baptist Church Building Fund, 4595 Eddins Road, Dothan, AL 36301.

Mr. Fowler was born March 11, 1922, to Kinion B. and Stacy Dixon Fowler and raised in

Houston County. He was a 1942 graduate of Cottonwood High School. After graduation he was drafted into the United States Army and served in World War II from 1942 to 1946 with the 114th Ambulance Corp. His active service included tours in the European Theatre. The 114th Ambulance Corp followed the initial infantry landing at the Utah Beach June 6, 1944. Upon Mr. Fowler's return he was employed with the Dothan Fire Department in July, 1951, and retired December, 1985, as Assistant Fire Chief. He was also engaged in farming and a member of Memphis Baptist Church. He loved his family and church deeply.

Mr. Fowler is preceded in death by his parents; son, Jerome Fowler; three sisters, Eunice Jones, Lois Parsons and Dovie Thomley.

Mr. Fowler is survived by his wife, Carolyn Fowler, Dothan; son, Tim Fowler (Stephanie); daughter, Dianne Rigsby (Ken) all of Dothan; four grandchildren, Candy Gilley (Tim), Kip Kelley (Angie), Hillary Fowler, Caroline Fowler; four great grandchildren, Ethan Kelley, Hayden Gilley, Dillan Gilley, McKay Kelley; two brothers, James Fowler (Billie), Allen Fowler (Glenda) all of Dothan; many nieces and nephews.

Family links:

Spouse:

Carolyn Jo *Ellison* Fowler (1931 - 2014)*

Children:

Dianne *Fowler* Rigsby (1949 - 2014)*

Jerome A Fowler (1952 - 1960)*

*Calculated relationship

Burial:

Memphis Baptist Church Cemetery

Memphis

Houston County

Alabama, USA

Created by: Don Atwell

Record added: Mar 09, 2011

Find A Grave Memorial# 66704353

SOURCE: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi->

[bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=66704353&PIpi=39525978](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=66704353&PIpi=39525978)

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2. Obituary of Carolyn Fowler

Birth: Jul. 2, 1931
Newville
Henry County
Alabama, USA

Death: Jan. 28, 2014
Dothan
Houston County
Alabama, USA

Carolyn Jo Fowler

Carolyn Jo Fowler, a resident of Dothan, died Tuesday, January 28, 2014 at Flowers Hospital. She was 82. Funeral services for Mrs. Fowler will be held at 11 AM on Friday, January 31, 2014 at Memphis Baptist Church with Reverends Jim Tate and Eddie Littlefield officiating. Burial will follow at the church cemetery. Family will receive friends and loved ones one hour prior to the service. Mrs. Fowler was born July 2, 1931 in Newville, Alabama to the late Robert Joe and Willie McKay Ellison. In 1949, Mrs. Fowler moved to the Hodgesville area and lived there the remainder of her life with her husband of 59 years, Austin Fowler. Mrs. Fowler spent her life serving others in her family and the community. In all aspects of her life, Mrs. Fowler selflessly prioritized her family and gave her time to ensure the comfort and wellbeing of those she loved the most. Mrs. Fowler most enjoyed cooking and preparing meals for not only her treasured

family gatherings, but also for those in her community and church. Most importantly, Mrs. Fowler cherished her relationship with the Lord and lived a life a service to His will. Mrs. Fowler valued her church family at Memphis Baptist Church where she was a member for over 40 years. Mrs. Fowler was preceded in death by her husband, Austin "Smiley" Fowler, son, Jerome Fowler and a sister Martha Haire. Survivors include her daughter and son in law, Dianne and Ken Rigsby, Dothan; son and daughter in law, Tim and Stephanie Fowler, Dothan; four grandchildren, Kip and Angie Kelley, Candy and Tim Gilley, Hillary and Caroline Fowler; four great grandchildren, Hayden and Dillan Gilley, Ethan and McKay Kelley; sisters, Mary Hutchison and husband, Francis, St. Louis, MO, Peggy Hollwedel, Montgomery; brother, Robert F. Ellison and wife, Arlene, Pensacola, FL. Southern Heritage Funeral Home and Crematory, (334) 702-1712, is in charge of arrangements.

Published in Dothan Eagle, January 30th, 2014

Family links:

Parents:

Robert Joe Ellison (1905 - 1978)

Willie Alice *McKay* Ellison (1909 - 1992)

Spouse:

Austin Fowler (1922 - 2011)

Children:

Dianne Fowler Rigsby (1949 - 2014)*

*Calculated relationship

Burial:

Memphis Baptist Church Cemetery

Memphis

Houston County

Alabama, USA

Created by: Don Atwell

Record added: Jan 30, 2014

Find A Grave Memorial# 124348992

SOURCE: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=124348992>

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3. Austin Fowler's Discharge from the Army

Pfc. Austin Fowler, son of Mr. and Mrs. K. B. Fowler, of Ashford route one, has been discharged from the Army after 41 months service; the public relations office at Fort McPherson, Ga., has announced.

Overseas 20 months, he served as a driver with the 418th Ambulance Company and earned the ETO ribbon with two battle stars, and the American theater and Good Conduct ribbons.

SOURCE: *The Dothan Eagle* (Dothan, Alabama) · Sun, Feb 10, 1946 · Page 23

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4. Death Record of Jerome Austin Fowler.

Jerome Austin Fowler

Alabama Deaths

Name: Jerome Austin Fowler

Event Date: 01 Apr 1960
Event Place: Dothan, Houston, Alabama
Gender: Male
Age (Original): 7y
Birth Year (Estimated): 1953
Father's Name: [Austin Fowler](#)
Mother's Name: [Carolyn Ellison](#)
GS Film number: [1908950](#) , Reference ID: **8879**

Citing this Record

"Alabama Deaths, 1908-1974,"
index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JXQT-9P1> :
accessed 4 May 2015), Jerome Austin Fowler, 01 Apr 1960; citing reference
8879, Department of Health, Montgomery; FHL microfilm 1,908,950.

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5. Census Record of Carolyn Ellison Fowler's Father.

Robert Ellison

United States Census, 1930

Name: Robert Ellison

Event Type:	Census
Event Year:	1930
Event Place:	Kinsey, Houston, Alabama, United States
Gender:	Male
Age:	24
Marital Status:	Married
Race:	White
Race (Original):	White
Relationship to Head of Household:	Head
Relationship to Head of Household (Original):	Head
Birth Year (Estimated):	1906
Birthplace:	Alabama
Father's Birthplace:	Alabama
Mother's Birthplace:	Alabama

Household	Role	Gender	Age
Robert Ellison	Head	M	24
<u>Willie Ellison</u>	Wife	F	20

District: **0020** , Sheet Number and Letter: **8B** , Household ID: **158** , Line

Number: **66** , Affiliate Name: **The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration**

(NARA) , Affiliate Publication Number: **T626** , Affiliate Film Number: **19** , GS Film

number: **2339754** , Digital Folder Number: **004531779** , Image Number: **01009**

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6. Census Record of Carolyn Ellison Fowler's Mother.

Willie Ellison

United States Census, 1930

Name: Willie Ellison

Event Type: Census

Event Year: 1930

Event Place: Kinsey, Houston, Alabama, United States

Gender: Female

Age: 20

Marital Status: Married

Race: White

Race (Original): White

Relationship to Head of Household: Wife

Relationship to Head of Household (Original): Wife

Birth Year (Estimated): 1910

Birthplace: Alabama

Father's Birthplace: Alabama

Mother's Birthplace: Alabama

Household	Role	Gender	Age
Robert Ellison	Head	M	24
Willie Ellison	Wife	F	20

District: **0020** , Sheet Number and Letter: **8B** , Household ID: **158** , Line

Number: **67** , Affiliate Name: **The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration**

(NARA) , Affiliate Publication Number: **T626** , Affiliate Film Number: **19** , GS Film

number: [2339754](#) , Digital Folder Number: [004531779](#) , Image Number: **01009**

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7. Archie Doyle Buie's Army Service

Two Registrants Report For Service

Officials at Houston County Selective Service Board Three today announced the names of two registrants who have reported Ft. McClellan for induction into the armed forces.

The registrants were Alvin Coolidge Shurley and Archie Doyle Buie.

SOURCE: *The Dothan Eagle* (Dothan, Alabama), 10 Oct 1945, Wed • Page 1

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8. Evidence of Archie Doyle Buie's Birth and Death

Name: Archie D Buie
Birth Date: abt 1915
Death Date: 23 May 1949
Death Place: Webb, Huston, Alabama
Death Age: 34
Gender: Male
Father Name: Wallton Buie
Mother Name: Mamie Joiner
FHL Film Number: 1908839

Source Information

Ancestry.com. *Alabama. Deaths and Burials Index, 1881-1974* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

Original data:

"Alabama Deaths and Burials, 1881–1952." Index. FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2009, 2010. Index entries derived from digital copies of original and compiled records.

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9. Further Evidence of Archie Doyle Buie's Death

Archie Doyle Buie

- [Memorial](#)
- [Photos](#)

- [Flowers](#)
- [Edit](#)
- [Share](#)

[Learn about sponsoring this memorial...](#)

Birth: Dec. 25, 1924, USA

Death: May 23, 1949, USA

Parents Archie Walton Buie and Mamie Joiner.

Siblings Hattie Jane and John Coy.

PFC WWII. Enlisted 17 Nov 1945 Camp

Shelby, Mississippi.

Burial:

Webb Cemetery

Webb

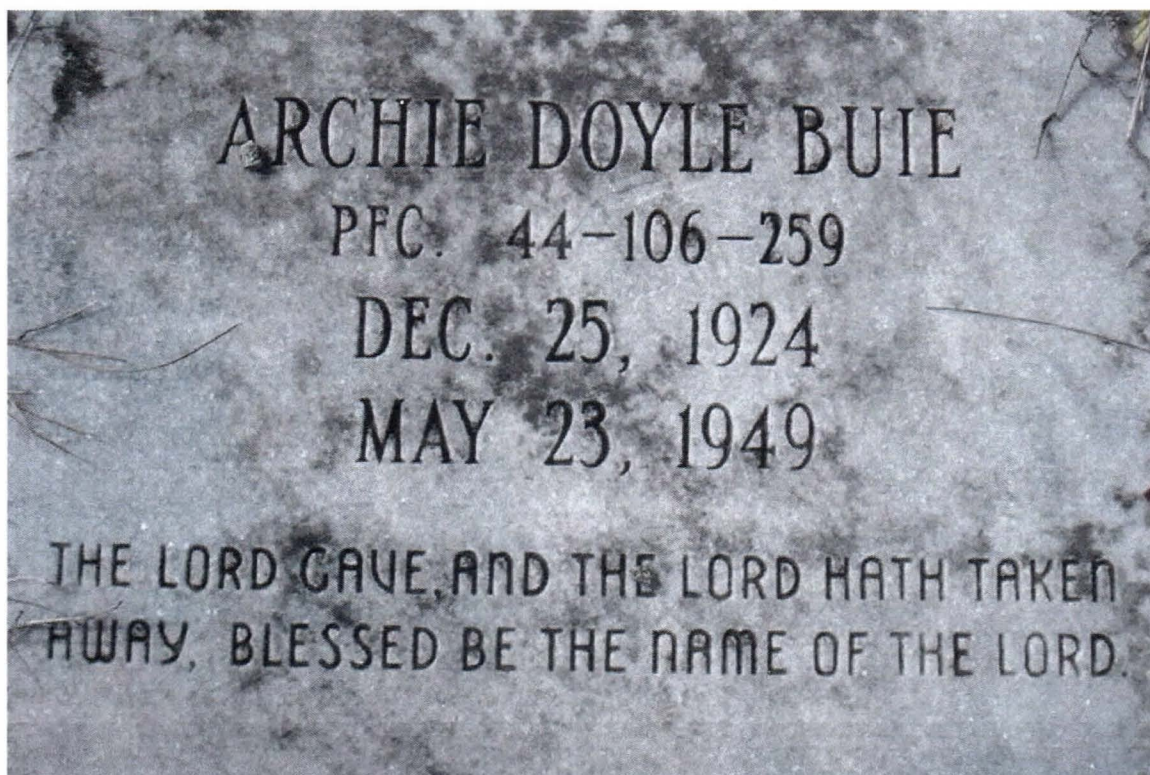
Houston County

Alabama, USA

Created by: Judy Samson-Shealy

Record added: Feb 26, 2012

Find A Grave Memorial# 85770215



SOURCE: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=85770215&ref=acom>

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10. Party for the Daughter of Doyle and Carolyn Buie.

Mrs. Buie Honors Daughter At Party

Mrs. Doyle Buie was hostess at a party Saturday afternoon celebrating the first birthday anniversary of her daughter, Dianne.

Refreshments were served from a table placed on the lawn and the table centerpiece was an arrangement of colorful summer flowers. The birthday cake embossed in pink, held one pink candle.

Baskets of mints were distributed as favors.

Assisting in serving were Mrs. Tucker Forrester, Mrs. Murray McKay, and Mrs. Bob Ellison.

Guests included, Linda Ann Knowles, Herbert Buie, Jerry Kirkland, Loyd, Floyd, Elizabeth and Elaine Givens, Joy Bryant, Larry Clements, G. W. Powell, Glenda, Larry and Shirley Varnum, Minnie Laura Harper, Mary, Martha and Peggy Ellison, Patsy and Billy McKay.

• • •

SOURCE: The Dothan Eagle (Dothan, Alabama), 25 Jul 1950, Tue • Page 4

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11. Evidence of Carolyn Buie's Second Marriage.

View Image

NAME: Carolyn E Buie

MARRIAGE: 3 Dec 1951 - Houston, Alabama

SOURCE: <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gss=angs->

[c&new=1&rank=1&msT=1&gsfn=doyle&gsln=buie&msgpn ftp=Alabama%2C+](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gss=angs-c&new=1&rank=1&msT=1&gsfn=doyle&gsln=buie&msgpn ftp=Alabama%2C+)

[USA&msgpn=3&msgpn PInfo=5-](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gss=angs-USA&msgpn=3&msgpn PInfo=5-)

[%7C0%7C1652393%7C0%7C2%7C3246%7C3%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C&ms](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gss=angs-%7C0%7C1652393%7C0%7C2%7C3246%7C3%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C&ms)

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