Fall 2017

Mementos: A Collection of Essays

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MEMENTOS: A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, English

By

Linda Foster

December 2017

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English

Missouri State University, December 2017

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ABSTRACT

This thesis begins with a critical introduction about my journey from fiction student to nonfiction writer. I use quotes from Michel de Montaigne, Lee Gutkind, Phillip Lopate, Joan Didion, Mark Doty, Jo Ann Beard, and others, to discuss nonfiction writing as a genre. I develop the idea that the nonfiction writer is influenced by past experiences or memories, and uses those memories to create a work of nonfiction. The research and reflection necessary to the writing of nonfiction often allows the writer to be shaped by the narrative she is attempting to shape. This often results in a journey of change in the writer's life, because the writing of nonfiction can bring about understanding, healing, and forgiveness. After the critical introduction, the reader will find six personal essays. These were not written with a particular theme in mind, but most of them have to do with journeys, some of which are short, and others of which are lengthy. These essays explore issues such as change, continuity, family, and relationships.

KEYWORDS: creative nonfiction, growth as a writer, life journeys in essay, memories, personal essays, perspective

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project, and the preceding years of graduate school, could not have been accomplished without many people behind me. I am grateful to my husband, son, stepchildren, grandchildren, mother, siblings, and friends for their unending belief and support.

I would like to express my appreciation and respect for the English Department faculty. Their love for what they do inspires me to continue learning. Special thanks to the members of my thesis committee: Jennifer Murvin for her encouragement, insightful feedback, and suggestions regarding reading material; John Turner, who introduced me to the genre of nonfiction; and Dr. W. D. Blackmon, who allowed me to try a nonfiction piece for his fiction class. I also wish to thank Michael Czyzniejewski, Dr. Margaret Weaver, Dr. Matthew Calihman, Dr. James Baumlin, Dr. Jonathan Newman, and Dr. Etta Madden.

Finally, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gives meaning to my journeys.

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A NONFICTION JOURNEY:

MAKING MYSELF THE MATTER OF THE NARRATIVE

When I began graduate school after retirement from a career with the government, my writing classes were geared toward fiction. Despite this, I began to realize I tended to include elements from my own life in my creative writing. For instance, the antagonist might bear a striking resemblance to a family member, or the narrative might be a fictionalization of an event from my youth. As I grew as a student, I found that my enjoyment of creative nonfiction, particularly the personal essay, eclipsed my fondness for fiction. My studies pointed me toward the French writer some call the "father of the essay," Michel de Montaigne.

When Montaigne published his *Essais* in 1580, he warned, "Thus, reader, I am myself the matter of my book" (2). This intrigued me; I had been deliberately avoiding making myself the subject of my writings. Philip Lopate explains, "To essay is to attempt, to test, to make a run at something without knowing whether you are going to succeed" (*The Art of the Personal Essay* xlii). Indeed, Montaigne was making a run at something not done before. In allowing his reader to see his mind at work and gain insight into his interiority, he invented a new way of writing. His *essai* has since evolved into the modern essay.

Literary theorist Lubomír Doležel writes, "Narrative theory has always recognized that fictional and nonfictional narratives alike are characterized by the presence of a story, a more or less complex chain of events" (31). Montaigne's attempt at something new gives the modern essayist a platform from which to share her story.

Doležel's statement underscores the importance learning how to recognize a worthwhile story, and how to present that story. Lee Gutkind explains, "Capturing a story and connecting the story with our readers is what we are trying to do" (xviii).

While my goal in reading is often to escape my own interiority, I write to better understand that interiority. As I continue my studies in the writing of creative nonfiction, these writers and others, such as Joan Didion, Mark Doty and Jo Ann Beard provide guidance in finding the techniques to share meaningful chains of events from my own life in a way that can engage and connect with the reader.

My eleventh grade English teacher assigned Lucile Vaughn Payne's *The Lively Art of Writing* as one of our class texts. Payne advises a study of words so the writer can find "*le mot juste*, the word that fits precisely the thought you want to express" (133). Although it was many years before I would learn this expression, meaning "the right word," was attributed to Gustave Flaubert, this advice has remained with me due to my love for words. My thesis, *Momentos: A Collection of Essays*, represents my attempt to find not only the right words to share my stories, but the right structure. These essays represent my journey from fiction student to nonfiction writer. Most of them are about an actual journey, whether a fifteen-minute walk to a store, a drive during the middle of the night, a 26.2 mile race, or two years spent on the other side of the world. Other than "A Piece of History," which is about continuity, all of these essays are about change.

In her essay "Out There," Jo Ann Beard writes of a lengthy drive home to Iowa from Florida, where she had gone after learning of her husband's affair. On this drive, she is threatened by a man in another car and comes to believe he plans to kill her. She writes, "If I give him an inch, he'll shove me off the road and get his hands on me, then

the end will begin in some unimaginable, unspeakable style that will be all his. I'll be an actor in his drama" (149). This physical journey parallels Beard's broken marriage. Once she returns to Iowa, the marriage doesn't end quite yet, and Beard has the chance to tell her husband about the encounter with the man. She writes of her husband's response: "'Wow,' he said. Then he turned up the radio, checked his image in the rearview mirror, and smiled sincerely at the passing landscape" (151). Beard is, in a sense, an actor in her husband's drama in which he calls the shots. The journey of escaping a "madman" who wants to cause physical harm can be compared to Beard's return home to a "composed" man who causes emotional harm.

My purpose with "Honky-tonk Rescue" was to write of an emotional journey that matched a physical one. I wanted to write about my relationship with my sister and the fun we had together, but I also wanted to share the fears and worries I had during the time leading up to college graduation—fears I wasn't comfortable voicing because graduation is supposed to be an exciting time. I began with three tired but happy young women out for a drive. As the night goes on, I introduce negative elements such as grease and cigarette smoke as I go from being tired, to exhausted, to ill. The Coca-Cola no longer has a "sparkly bite" but now tastes like acid. The music starts with a Willie Nelson love song, but ends in Johnny Cash's song, "Folsom Prison Blues," about shooting another person. I also wanted to write about feeling violated and my sense that I could be responsible for ruining my mother's happiness. Originally written for a fiction class, my first title was "On My Mind," because the narrative reflects the many thoughts on my mind during this time. My professor suggested "Honky-tonk Rescue" as an alternate title. During the revision process, I decided to go with his recommendation because it

describes the physical journey of rescuing my mother, but alludes to the fact that she was the only one with the power for rescue.

Joan Didion also writes of journeys. In "Goodbye to All That," she tells of her eight years in New York after having grown up in California. She writes, "I liked the bleak branches above Washington Square at dawn, and the monochromatic flatness of Second Avenue, the fire escapes and the grilled storefronts peculiar and empty in their perspective" (*Slouching Towards Bethlehem* 234). While what she is describing is not pretty or appealing, it is the New York that is often glamorized in the movies.

I wanted to write about my two years in Okinawa because my memories are still so vivid. I attempted to begin describing an idyllic childhood on an island paradise, which is true in some ways because I had a freedom to explore while there that I was too old to enjoy once we moved back to the States. However, I can't remember Okinawa as beautiful. I remember the stench of the sea. I remember playing on tombs and finding idols left to gods. I remember arguing, fear, and the onset of headaches. As I began writing, I found that what I remembered most was images of death and decay, so I chose to entitle the essay "Island Memento Mori." While they aren't beautiful, I wanted to share my memories of life as an American girl living in Okinawa the way Didion wanted to share her view as a Californian in New York.

When attempting to write nonfiction, the first lesson the fiction student must learn is the basic distinction between the genres: truth. Lee Gutkind states, "Making stuff up, no matter how minor or unimportant, or not being diligent in certifying the accuracy of the available information, endangers the bond between the writer and the reader… you must be trustworthy and your facts must be right if you're going to be a credible writer of

nonfiction" (20). Lopate echoes this when he writes, "Making things up, bending the facts, throws off my attempts to get as close as possible to the shape underlying experience or to the psychology that flows from the precisely real" (*To Show and to Tell* 81). A work of creative nonfiction is a contract of honesty the writer makes with the reader. Attempting to present oneself or one's story in any way other than an accurate one corrupts the story and betrays the reader. Montaigne understood this. He states, "I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray" (2).

A work of creative nonfiction can take many shapes, including historical, educational, autobiographical, or formal. It can be personal essay, which Lee Gutkind distinguishes from a memoir in that it is "a shorter piece, standing alone" (59). One distinguishing feature of the personal essay is its informality. The personal essay implies a relationship with the reader. Graham Good explains that the "essay could be defined as a letter addressed to any reader" (xi). He further notes, "The Montaignean essay, we can say, is the way of writing which approximates most closely to the natural form of thought" (41-42). This "natural form of thought" is best summed by Montaigne's claim: "And what are these things of mine, in truth, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of divers members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion other than accidental?" (135). Montaigne tackled assorted subjects, such as the pain of kidney stones, letting go of malice, the Christian writer Raymond Sebond, and the treatment of natives in the New World. His intent seems to have been to write on any subject that came to mind in a way that aligns with Good's suggestion of a letter addressed to any reader.

By using words like "I" and "you," Didion practices the technique of direct address to her reader. In her essay "On Morality," she writes, "You are quite possibly impatient with me now" (*Slouching* 159). In "Goodbye to All That" she writes, "But mostly I want to explain to you, and in the process perhaps to myself, why I no longer live in New York" (*Slouching* 227). This act of "talking" to her reader is appealing because readers can imagine themselves as the "you" Didion is addressing.

Montaigne had a medal inscribed with the words "*Que sçay-je*?" Meaning "What do I know?" this phrase contributed to the beginnings of skepticism, yet it's a question many of us can ask ourselves. We write about what we know. We write about what we wish to know. We write about what we have learned. Incidentally, these are often reasons why we read. Lopate states, "The personal essayist looks back at the choices that were made, the roads not taken, the limiting familial and historic circumstances, and what might be called the catastrophe of personality" (*Art* xxxvii). We write to help us sort through those complex chains of events in our lives referred to by Doležel. Montaigne seems to downplay his writings in claiming, "In fine, all this fricassee that I am scribbling here is nothing but a record of the essays of my life" (826), but the reality is that the "fricassees" of our lives are what tell our stories. These essays represent times of significance to me: times of growth, change, and discovery about myself and others. They are, in part, my answer to the question, "What do I know?" Joan Didion expressed a similar thought in a 1976 *New York Times* article: "I write entirely to find out what I am thinking, what I am looking at, what I see, and what it means. What I want and what I fear" (*Why I Write*).

The writing of nonfiction is enticing because of the aforementioned informality. Lopate states, “Personal essayists converse with the reader because they are already having dialogues with themselves” (*Art* xxiv). Because essays are written for the common person, they are also written by the common person whose aim is to interact with other people. Good notes, “The essay stays closer to the individual’s self-experiences than any other form except the diary” (8). In my efforts to share self-experiences with other people, one of the essays I have included is “At Sixteen,” based on an actual diary I kept at that age. While not about a physical journey, it is a pilgrimage to my childhood and reflects a desire to interpret those memories through adult eyes. In my original draft of the essay I commented about the death of my father, who had moved out when I was sixteen, but passed away when I was an adult: “Sadly, that loss created no greater vacuum than the first time he left.” As I began the revision process, I had to ask myself whether that was true. I later amended my statement to read, “Perhaps it’s unrealistic to say his abandonment didn’t leave so much as a vacuum in my life. I miss having a father.” Lopate’s comments about the writer having self-dialogues certainly applied in the writing of this essay, because I found myself having dialogues with my much younger self as well as my modern day self.

While nonfiction can be written by the common person, I have been hesitant because I am not famous or learned, and a collection of narratives on my life might not seem interesting to others. In one of his final *essais*, “On Vanity,” Montaigne derides his work as “some excrements of an aged mind” (721). Though he likely meant this tongue in cheek, it also points to his realization that his reader might wonder whether he had anything of worth to say. It was this type of questioning that led me to continue trying to

fictionalize events from my life. However, I began to see that trying to hide a true occurrence in a work of fiction could possibly be an injustice to the story. This became clear to me in attempting express my love for my home, which is built around a log cabin from the 1800s, by using it as setting for a fiction piece.

While in a creative fiction class, I attempted to write a short story of a couple who moved into home much like ours, but I failed to capture the potential I believed this story had. During a nonfiction class I read Anthony Doerr's essay "Thing with Feathers That Perches in the Soul" about a log cabin built in early Boise by prospector John O'Farrell for his wife Mary and their family. This prompted me to try again, but to simply tell the truth and write something that would not be a memoir about myself, but a history of a house and brief sketch of those who have lived in it. I entitled this essay "A Piece of History" because I wanted to show the connection I feel to those who lived in the house before me. Doerr beautifully describes the scene in which he first noticed the log cabin: "It hasn't rained in two months, and seemingly half the state of Idaho is on fire. For a week the sky has been an upturned bowl the color of putty, the clouds indistinguishable from haze, enough smoke in the air that we taste it in our food, in our throats, in our sleep" (88). I was impressed with the sensory information provided by Doerr; I smelled the fire, sensed the need for rain, and saw the putty sky. I thought of his example when writing the opening line of my essay: "Though the rest of my body was warm in the sleeping bag, my nose and ears throbbed with cold." As I continued that paragraph, I focused on sensory details such as the sound of branches snapping, the sight of flames and mantel décor, and the suggested scent of the early settler's stew simmering in a pot.

In addition to the fear of having nothing of worth to share, another problem with writing personal essays is that memories can hurt. Conjuring up memories in order to write about them has often left me in a state of sadness, even though many of these events occurred almost half a century ago. Some memories allowed old anger to resurface. However, writing has also served as a balm. Remembering those who are gone, and trying to understand their actions has helped me heal. I've remembered good times, and I've understood intentions better, which has fostered forgiveness and peace. Memoirist Debra Gwartney describes the therapeutic process of writing about her broken relationship with her daughters:

> I don't remember, not once, sitting down to write with the intention of repairing the past. I didn't consciously plan to find enough words and put them in the right order to fix what ailed us. I sat down to write because I couldn't not sit down and write. Every time I tried to quit, the book called me back. It nudged me in the wee hours, in the middle of the day, upon waking and upon going to bed. The story demanded to be written and so I wrote it. The rather unexpected restoration, the healing, the catharsis—those were added bonuses, arriving of their own accord and not because I forced them (Brevity).

Gwartney's story begged to be told, but it wasn't healing that allowed her to write; it was writing that allowed her to heal.

Probably the greatest risk in the writing of personal essays is that they will include others who might be hurt by what the writer says. Didion writes, "One last thing to remember: *writers are always selling somebody out*" (*Slouching* xiv). It would be difficult to interest a reader in a collection of stories in which the writer is the only character. One must include those who might not want to see themselves in print. Mark Doty, knowing that publishing his essay collection *Firebird* destroyed his relationship with his elderly father, states, "I am proud of my book, and I wouldn't change a word of it. I wish I had never written it. No, I don't. Yes, I do. No, I don't" (164). Doty seems to

still not be at peace with his choice. Lopate also notes the high stakes of writing about others: "When I first started writing about my family, I changed the names of my siblings," however, one "still has not forgiven me after twenty years" (*Show and Tell* 84). In her essay "Cousins," Jo Ann Beard writes of her cousin: "She has a first name but I've always called her Wendell" (18). This cousin is never referred to by any name other than Wendell. While Beard doesn't say she desires to protect Wendell's privacy, she has, to some extent, managed to do that because the cousin can't be easily researched. Regarding writing of others, Gutkind advises, "Be honest, accurate, and ever so careful" (39). Some of what I have chosen to write has been told with hesitation. I have chosen not to write some stories. In the interest of protecting privacy, I have taken the liberty of changing some names.

H. Porter Abbot writes, "Narrative nonfiction differs from narrative fiction in its referential function. We expect it to convey as best it can the truth of actual events. As such it is 'falsifiable.' It is also constrained in what it can affirm, particularly in the areas where the truth can not be documented" (153). One problem of writing personal essays is the fear of remembering or interpreting an event incorrectly. I encountered this when writing of my childhood. Gutkind makes it clear that "Truth is personal—it is what we see, assume, and believe, filtered through our own lens and orientation" (19). Whether we remember the event exactly as it happened, or interpreted another person's reactions as they were meant to be, we are shaped by what we think we saw or heard. In her essay "On Keeping a Notebook," Didion states, "I tell what some would call lies… very likely they are right, for not only have I always had trouble distinguishing between what happened and what merely might have happened, but I remain unconvinced that the

distinction, for my purposes, matters" (*Slouching* 134). The point of the personal essay is to share the viewport of the author. While this requires an outward, empirical search for truth, it allows the author to search within for the truth as she sees it. Lopate says, "Personal essayists are adept at interrogating their ignorance. Just as often as they tell us what they know, they ask at the beginning of an exploration of a problem what it is they don't know—and why" (*Art* xxvii). The search for truth can often reveal confliction. Montaigne commented on this when he noted, "There is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others" (244). The bond between writer and reader is based on the writer's ability to convincingly connect with the reader. Often, sharing one's conflicted responses can be a compelling indictor of honesty.

The first story I wrote for a fiction class about a real event was my original version of "Coke Money." In reality, my sister, brother and I went to the store for Kool-Aid on the day we were robbed. Because it was fiction, and because we were occasionally sent to the store with a note to buy cigarettes for my dad, my fiction story included cigarettes. As I re-worked this piece into a nonfiction essay, I struggled with the truth. I preferred the story with cigarettes because it exemplifies the 1969-1970 time frame in which it took place—after the U.S. Surgeon General started requiring warnings on cigarette packages, but before the cessation of cigarette commercials in American television in 1971. So, while I distinctly recall that I was carrying a bag with a package of cherry Kool-Aid and some coins, I have chosen to compress events in this essay.

Lopate writes, "Those drawn to the writing of personal essays and memoirs are apt to discover the necessity to do some research" (*Show* 116). Sticking to the truth takes effort. I've researched death records of grandparents, old letters, and report cards. During

my research of Okinawa, I managed to find a picture of a tomb that looks identical to the one I played on as a child. I've listened to song after song, trying to understand why certain words or tunes impacted, or still impact, me. I re-read every entry of my age-sixteen diary. I studied county records to research my home.

I had never written about my marathon experience, and when I wrote "There Will Be a Lifetime" for a nonfiction workshop, I found myself doing a thorough research on the history of running. I wanted this to be a memoir, but I also wanted include some cultural criticism in that I was a woman and a non-athlete training for something I had considered impossible. I had originally planned to mention Kathrine Switzer in the first draft, but I had decided not to because I felt it would muddy the waters and make the essay longer than it was. Between the time that I submitted my essay, and my classmates provided feedback, Switzer ran in the most recent Boston Marathon to commemorate the 50th anniversary of her initial run. One classmate suggested I add this to my draft. I resisted this idea because I was still trying to make it more of a memoir and less about cultural criticism. But as I got to thinking about it, I realized it would be more relatable if I took some of the focus away from my run and moved it toward my perspective of running as a female and as a mom.

Despite the research I've done for these essays, I can't help but wonder how well I remembered and interpreted things that happened to me at six, ten, or sixteen. A memory from forty years in the past can actually be misleading. In addition to my research, I have checked with family members on some things, but have been careful not to allow myself to be swayed by their memories. My life has been shaped by my memories, whether they can be proven to be fully accurate or not. As Abbott points out,

since “the past is open to interpretation… it’s especially important to keep an eye out both for how historians shape the stories they tell and also for what they may have left out” (156.) Abbott makes a valid point, because, even telling the truth, the essayist can tell it the way she wants it to read. Montaigne has this to say: “I have no more made my book than my book has made me—a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life; not concerned with some third-hand, extraneous purpose, like all other books” (504). Per Lopate, “The writing of personal essays not only monitors the self but helps it gel. The essay is an enactment of the creation of the self” (*Art* xliv). These opinions seem to signify that as the writer shapes the story, the story can shape the writer. One benefit of writing and the research that accompanies it is that enables me to come to a better understanding of the event, others, and myself. It forces me to attempt to see others as they see themselves, and myself as others see me. While I might have a clear understanding or perspective of an event when I begin writing, I often find that my opinion has changed once I’ve finished writing. I suspect that, were I to re-write one of these essays ten years in the future, I would end up with an even different perspective. Writing and reading “Island Memento Mori,” which is the longest essay of this collection and the last one to be written, has opened my eyes to the beginnings of my food addiction. Several of the essays bear witness to the Coca-Cola addiction I finally overcame about ten years ago. Abbott writes, “Facts… don’t speak for themselves. They must be interpreted” (155). The act of interpreting and analyzing the facts allows the writer to make better sense of them, which could change the writer’s mind about how to present these facts.

While much of my change in perspective has to do with research, I am also affected by my attempts to create dialogue. I learned I couldn't come up with dialogue until I knew what a person would say and why they would say it. I found myself asking questions like, *Did she really say this they way I heard it? If so, why? What was she going through at the time*? I also asked specific questions, such as, *What made my mom so depressed? Why was my dad so angry? Why was my older sister so bossy? Why wasn't I close to her as a child?* Asking these questions allowed me to gain a greater understating about how to present others in my essays. Mark Doty has this to say on writing about his mother:

> I can make reasonable interpretations and educated guesses, but the fact remains that I must create her as a character in my book, and I am making decisions about how that person—in this case complex, dramatic, haunted—will be presented. I simply can't write a book in which she remains inscrutable, merely the kind of giant shadow on the wall (156).

What Doty is describing is in depth research on the person who will serve as a character in order to create one who is believable. This kind of research allowed me to see others in a new light.

Didion's comment from 1976 about why she writes can be compared to her statement in the preface to her essay collection, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*: "Since I am neither a camera eye nor much given to writing pieces which do not interest me, whatever I do write reflects, sometimes gratuitously, how I feel" (*Slouching* xv). As I embarked on the journey of writing about chains of events in which I am "the matter," I have also attempted to show what I feel and see, sometimes gratuitously. These essays represent the decades of my life: one is set in the sixties, one over the late sixties-early seventies time frame, one from 1976, one from 1983, one from 1998, and one begins with

the purchase of a home in 2001. While I have not specifically written of the current decade, many of my present-day thoughts will be seen in these reflections of my past. These essays are presented in the order in which they were written, because that is the order they came to me. “Coke Money” covers a story time of no more than twenty minutes. In “At Sixteen” I tried to limit my narrative to words actually said in my diary, but tried at times to explain what I was thinking at that age. “A Piece of History” is written in present tense and comes closest to the present day. With “Honky-tonk Rescue,” my goal was to get inside of my college-aged self of so many years ago, so it is told in present tense only with no hint of the future. “There Will be a Lifetime” covers the seven-month time frame in which I trained for and ran a marathon. I also include many present-day reflections about this event. “Island Memento Mori” covers a period of just over two years from age almost-seven to nine while living in Okinawa.

Montaigne wrote, “I want a man to act, and to prolong the functions of life as long as he can; and I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but careless of death, and still more of my unfinished garden” (62). This implies that even at the end of life’s journey, Montaigne hoped to keep on going. He wished never to willingly stop living his life. As a nonfiction writer, I find this advice worthwhile. As long as we don’t stop, we are still journeying.

COKE MONEY

"Can we get a Coke?" my little brother asked, his hand sticky in mine as we waited for cars to pass. I glanced down at his face and regretted that I hadn't taken time to wipe his lunchtime ketchup from it. Several teenaged boys ran past us carrying soft drink crates that rattled with glass. I had seen the boys before, foraging through the neighborhood trashcans for empty bottles to return for a nickel.

"No, James, but we can get a packet of Kool-Aid, and that's almost as good." It wasn't anywhere near as good, but I knew I'd better take the full amount of my dad's change home. "Stop, Liza!" I called, as my sister stepped off the curb. "I'll tell you when to go." She ignored my warning and rushed across the street. She didn't say it, but I knew what she was thinking: "You're not the boss of me." I was nearly ten and Liza had just turned eight, so I felt responsible for her and five-year-old James, especially since I was the one carrying the money. Ordinarily our sister Lana, who was thirteen, would be in charge, but she was at a friend's house and I saw this as my opportunity to prove I was as grown up as she was.

I waited for two more cars and pulled James across. Liza knew I wouldn't tattle, so it was useless to argue with her. Misbehavior—and reporting on the misbehavior of siblings—brought erratic responses from our parents. It was difficult to predict whether an offender would receive the end of the belt, a hand across the mouth, or be ignored altogether in favor of punishing the one who tattled. At any rate, none of us liked to see the others receive punishment, and we often kept silent by mutual accord. On this particular day, a Wednesday afternoon in late September, our dad was home studying

while our mom, who had just begun working nights as a telephone operator, was sleeping. Our father had traveled all over the world during his military career. He had recently retired and moved us all to Baton Rouge, where he began studies at Louisiana State University. We kids were accustomed to his bouts of anger and moodiness, which a semester of college had done nothing to quell.

The Louisiana humidity was still sweltering on this September day. The dress I had worn to school stuck to my skin, and I imagined myself buying the largest Coca-Cola I could find, sucking every last drop through a straw. The convenience store was located half a mile from our apartment complex. Liza skipped ahead, stopping every so often to hide behind telephone poles and parked cars. I refused to let her know I was watching. We were usually very close, but I had been trying to distance myself from her since we had gotten in trouble a few nights before for taking clean towels out of the closet and using them to pretend we had long hair. My father's words kept coming to mind: "Why can't you be more like Lana?"

"Linda?" James's hand squeezed mine. "Linda, can we at least share a Coke?"

I shook my head. "Dad knows how much cigarettes and Kool-Aid cost. He wants his change back. He'll know."

"Aww, I don't know why I had to come, then." He yanked his hand from mine and trudged along. He knew why he had to come along. Dad demanded peace and quiet when he studied. My hand smelled like ketchup and I wiped it on my dress, as though ridding myself of James's sticky lunch residue would relieve me of a burden.

Liza was waiting inside the air-conditioned convenience store when we reached it, her wide grin revealing the gap in her teeth. "I won!"

"We weren't racing," James said, trying to put his hand in mine again. "Were we, Linda?"

I ignored them and handed my father's note to the clerk. After choosing a packet of cherry Kool-Aid, I returned to the front to find James and Liza gazing at the red oblong case of ice-covered bottles.

"Just one, Linda?' Liza implored, the impishness gone from her face.

I shook my head. "Y'all know we can't. Stop acting like I'm being a meanie. I'll be the one to get the belt if we don't take the change home."

One of the teen boys I had seen earlier stood in line with two cases of empty soda bottles. His friends leafed through magazines, laughing and speaking in words I couldn't discern. I got in line behind him and watched as he received his refund. When I reached the counter, the cashier consulted my note again, pulled a carton of Pall Mall Gold cigarettes from the shelf, and put them in a brown bag with the packet of Kool-Aid. "Will that be all?" he asked. I nodded as he totaled the charge and counted out some coins. I put the money in the bag, grabbed James's hand, and headed for the door. Liza, standing near the air conditioner, said, "I'll be along in a minute." I steeled my eyes at her, and she followed me out of the store.

As we got a block away from the store, I heard a voice behind me. "Hey, girl. Let me hold a quarter."

I turned around to face the older boys I had noticed in the store. I had a quarter. At least, *my dad* had a quarter in the bag with the rest of his change. As if hearing my inner struggle, the largest boy stepped forward and leaned in, his face inches from mine. His sneering smile belied the sparkle in his eyes. The thought of not giving my dad his full

amount of change compelled me to stand tall and pull my shoulders back. “No, I don’t have any money.”

He laughed and grabbed my bag with the full force of his weight, pulling me down to my hands and knees. As he turned and ran with his friends behind him, my palms dug into the pebbles in the road.

“Hey, you can’t take our money!” Liza said, as she took off after them. James, whose hand was pulled from mine as I fell, followed her.

I remained on my knees, examining my palms as though I had never seen blood before. Liza and James, realizing they couldn’t catch the boys, returned. I stood up and, with help from my sister and brother, picked bits of gravel from my bloodied skin. My legs felt as soft as the tar in the cracks on the street, but I began limping toward home. Although I didn’t bother to take his hand, James walked beside me.

“I’m going to go home and tell Dad,” Liza said. “You want to come with me, James?”

“No,” James shook his head. “I’ll stay here.”

While Liza was not fast enough to catch the big boys, she fairly flew down the blacktop road. I wondered exactly how the story would be presented. But I knew it didn’t matter, and I limped along as best I could. My body began shaking. My mother usually slapped when she became angry, but my father’s usual punishment of choice was to spank. I hated both, but had begun to notice at “nearly ten” the added humiliation of having to bend over in a dress. As I made my way toward the apartment complex and my father, I could almost hear the whooshing sound of him pulling his belt from his pants, and feel the sting of the leather through my thin dress. But the fear of my father was

surpassed by fury at the older boys and their deep, man-like laughter as they ran away. Without touching me, they had forced me to my knees, proving I was powerless to protect my younger sister and brother, and powerless to protect a flimsy brown bag. They took from me the opportunity to prove to my father that I was no longer a little girl.

As the apartment complex came in sight, our old maroon station wagon approached with my dad behind the wheel. James and I waited as our father stopped the car, climbed out and came toward us.

"I'm sorry," I cried. "I fell and couldn't run after them. They got away."

"You did the right thing," my father answered. "Did he hit you?" I shook my head. "You did the right thing," he repeated. "They could have hurt you." He pulled me into his arms, where I wanted to be, but hadn't been more than a handful of times my almost ten years. I could feel how strong he was. I could smell the smoke on his breath and the Old Spice after-shave on his cheeks. "It's okay," he said. "I'm just glad they didn't hurt either of you. Liza told me how brave you were." This uncharacteristic kindness from him still surprises me to think back on. Perhaps Liza had made a compelling case on my behalf. Perhaps he could see how afraid I was. Perhaps he realized the older boys could have hurt his children. Or perhaps he had decided I was too old to be spanked. As I wondered at his demeanor, I remained motionless in his arms, knowing it would end soon and he would go back to being angry.

He glanced down at Liza, whose face was still beet-colored from running. He brushed a strand of hair from her eyes. "You look hot, Liza. You, too, James. And I need my cigarettes. Get in the car. You kids want a Coke?"

AT SIXTEEN

As a sophomore in high school, I had the fortune to be a student of Ms. Hardaway, a peppy young English teacher who approached her subject with an infectious passion. One day we might read short stories by Stephen Vincent Benét or Saki; the next, she would play Elton John's "Candle in the Wind" or Carole King's "Tapestry" and have us discuss the lyrics. We acted out *Julius Caesar* while she videotaped, something not commonly done in the seventies. She encouraged us to read, not just popular fiction, but classics, biographies, and history. She awakened my passion as a writer and urged me to nurture my talent. But, her best gift was to convince me to start a diary. Not just one of those beautifully bound small things, either, but something on large notebook paper, which should be completely filled each day. I am forever grateful to Ms. Hardaway for this suggestion, because, although I only did it for a few months, I chronicled some of the life-changing occurrences during the spring of my sophomore year that helped me become the woman I am.

I began on January 1st, noting it was the first day of the bicentennial year. I had no idea how to keep a diary, so I luxuriated in the mundane, writing of washing my hair, bed time, hours of sleep, meals eaten, and names of TV shows watched. Titles of short stories read in English class, geometry concepts, and home economics projects were faithfully written about in my diary. My allowance was two dollars a week when all chores were completed. I spent $4.50 on a Helen Reddy album. Our boys' basketball team had a national ranking, so scores and names of opponents went into my diary. Even the result of Super Bowl X between the Steelers and Cowboys was noteworthy. I wrote

about learning to drive and ultimately receiving a license. I wrote about drinking cherry vodka at a school dance. On January 8th I wrote, "Tonight I finished *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. It's probably the best book I've ever read. Some day I'd like to write a book as great as that one was."

The second of four children, I shared a bedroom with my sister Liza, who was a year behind me in school. Our walls were reflective of our diverse interests in music: my posters of Barbra Streisand and Michael Jackson intermingled with her choices, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson. Despite our differences, we were very close, and I mentioned her often in my diary, referring to her as "Lee." My younger brother James was mentioned only when he, Liza and I did something together. My older sister Lana, who had been attending the local junior college, transferred that January to a university in Texas. She had been four grades ahead of me in school, and we had never been close. Shortly before she left I wrote in my diary that I would miss her and that she was "a good egg sometimes." After she left, I made a note of her every phone call, letter, and visit home.

I also wrote about problems with friends, which usually had to do with boys. On January 11th I noted, "In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* there was a girl named Francie… One day she decided that when she grew up she would never have any women friends because women are so cruel. In a way she was right because women are always competing with each other, but some chicks are nice. I'm gonna have a few women friends."

If 1976 were to have an emblem, it would be the liberty bell, which appeared on almost everything that year, including money, furniture, and the cover of my high school yearbook. Our school was within a few miles of an Air Force base, and many of us had

fathers who had served in the military. News of the Vietnam War had dominated the airwaves for as long as we could remember, and we felt a sense of relief that the war had finally ended. We rejoiced as POWs came home. We watched Dorothy Hamill win Olympic gold in February. We anticipated the coming summer Olympics, which would begin shortly after our nation's Bicentennial. Too young to vote, we nonetheless became interested in Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. We wore dresses and pantsuits made of quiana, a soft synthetic fabric popular at that time. Our platform shoes were worn with panty hose or multi-colored toe socks. We went to school dances at the Y, where we did "The Hustle" and sang along to "Saturday Night" by the Bay City Rollers. As a nation, we seemed to be celebrating freedom and the future.

Alone my room, I listened to Janis Ian's "At Seventeen," and Carly Simon's "That's The Way I've Always Heard It Should Be" because the lyrics of the songs seemed to jibe with my sense of alienation, fear, and depression. On April 7th I wrote that I had taken an overdose of ten aspirin. This wasn't sufficient to result in anything other than an upset stomach. Four days later I took nine aspirin. I wrote, "I want to kill myself… I don't know what to do. I don't think I'm going crazy. I don't know what's wrong. Why does God put people like me on earth?" I had no idea how many aspirin a person would need to take in order to cause real harm, and I'm certain I had no sincere suicidal intent. Clearly, my goal was to get my parents to stop their arguments and notice me. What I find most interesting about reading these diary entries is that I didn't share my feelings of worthlessness with anyone. I never considered talking to my mother, sisters, or school counselor. I never took excess pills again, but May 4th I wrote, "It seems like everyone and everything is gangin' up on me. Sometimes I wish I was dead."

In retrospect, my depression was brought on by three situations: rejection, unrequited love, and the unraveling of my parents' marriage. I tried out for the school singing group, a position on the drum corps, and an office in a school club. I was rejected by all three within a ten-day period. To say I felt insignificant is an understatement. I wrote, "Things add up… I'm a failure." In addition, I was wild about our pastor's son, a stereotypical bad-boy preacher's kid who only noticed me when no one better was around. On Valentine's Day I wrote, "I still love him. I don't know why, either. I know he doesn't like me. I'm so used to liking him, though, so I'm used to him not liking me. I've been in love with him for such a long time." What I didn't say, and what I never said, was that we had never been in a relationship. We had never had a date; he had never even held my hand. My feelings were truly a just a one-sided crush. But it was a crush that found its way into my diary every page or so.

Decidedly, my primary problems were related to my home life. I'm of the opinion that it's best if parents can stay together in a loving, supportive marriage. Unfortunately, some parents can't do that, and my parents were in that category. My mother has suffered from mental illness for years, and this had led to a lengthy psychiatric hospitalization during my freshman year. Her emotional weakness didn't mesh with my father's need for the world to revolve around him. By the time I was sixteen I had only seen them kiss twice. They argued on a daily basis and threatened divorce regularly.

On January 20th I recorded, "Dad didn't get home till about 12:30 last night and when he got home him and mom had a big argument and kept me up almost half the night." The note from February 5th reads, "Today was Mom and Dad's anniversary and they argued all day. They do that all the time, though, so I'm used to it."

My mother worked for the telephone company to put my father through college and law school, which he completed after I finished seventh grade. His threats to leave heightened after he began his legal career. “The minute I leave here,” he announced to us kids, “I’m going to turn my back on you and forget that I never knew you.”

On May 11th I wrote, “Dad moved out of the house today, [Liza and I] helped him take his stuff to his apartment. He’s been real nice lately. Rick asked me to the party but I said no.” The fact that a boy I rejected earned a spot in this particular diary entry shows my father’s abandonment didn’t leave so much as a vacuum in my life. Though our mother wept often, she managed to avoid hospitalization for the next few years. The overall mood in our home improved greatly, and we all slept better due to the decrease in tension.

We were soon to learn our father didn’t mean he’d forget all about us. On June 28th Liza and I spent the night with him in his tiny garage apartment. There was no television, so the three of us sat at his table and tried to come up with things to talk about. That night Liza and I slept in the bed while he slept on the sofa. Despite noting in my diary, “we had a real good time,” Liza and I found excuses not to go overnight again. Just as his leaving improved our home life, it also improved our relationship with him. My siblings and I all felt we got to know him better once he was gone from the house. We developed a pattern of meeting him somewhere for an occasional meal, and we eventually learned to find common interests to discuss.

While marital dysfunction played heavily on the musings of my sophomore diary, love left its mark, also. My father’s mother had passed away suddenly the previous August. Just short of six months later, on Sunday February 8th, my grandfather married

her best friend, a long-time widow with no kids. After the wedding I sat down and wrote, "At first I liked Lois but now I'm not sure... She said she wasn't trying to take Gramma's place, and I believe her, but whether or not she means to, she is. And I don't know what to do." The reality was that my father and aunt were furious over this marriage. Within a few days after my grandmother's death, Lois began bringing food to my grandfather. That this wonderfully sweet man could fall for such a blatant trap was beyond any of our belief. And yet, I noted, "At least Grandpa won't be so lonely."

I summed up my grandfather's wedding day like this: "There ain't nothing more weird than goin' to your own Grandpappy's wedding." We didn't call him Grandpappy, we always called him Grandpa, so, although I missed my biological grandmother and had concerns about getting a new step-grandmother, the playfulness of my language leads me to believe I actually enjoyed the day.

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At sixteen I poured my heart out to my diary, chronicling pain and joy, friendship and loss, divorce and marriage. That July our nation celebrated its bicentennial birthday. A few weeks later the Olympics were held in Montreal, and we watched as Nadia Comăneci and Bruce Jenner became household names. My last diary entry for 1976 was in July. I briefly returned to journaling the following year, but not quite with the same vigor.

As I close my diary now and return it to its proper place, I reflect on those who played a key role in my life in 1976. My dynamic English teacher got married at the end of my sophomore year and moved away. I've often wondered whether she continued teaching. The preacher and his family also moved away, which, while at first distressing, brought eventual relief to my teenage heart. My mother married several more times

before finally getting it right. My father apparently learned he was not a family man; he remained single after divorcing my mom. He passed away unexpectedly when I was in my early thirties. I didn't realize it at sixteen, but having my father walk out would have an effect on my life that still lingers to some degree, even forty-one years later. Perhaps it's unrealistic to say his abandonment didn't leave so much as a vacuum in my life. I miss having a father. I wish I had known him better. I wish he had known me better. I've been blessed, however, with close relationships with all three of my siblings. I was also wrong at sixteen about not needing female friends. I am fortunate to have quite a few in my life. And, while my parents were unable to show me an example of a loving, supportive marriage, I was able to see examples of this elsewhere, including in my grandfather and his new wife.

Though determined at first to be distant from my new step-grandmother, I was calling her "Grandma Lois" before the year was up. A devout Christian, she never missed a chance to tell me she was praying for me. She learned I liked lemon cake and tried to have one ready when she knew I was coming. Her homemade cream-style corn was "to die for." So was her fried chicken. On birthdays she sent me a five-dollar bill; my college graduation brought a ten. When I married, I became a stepmother to three teenagers. In those awkward first years of forming a relationship with them, I was reminded of Lois nervously wringing her hands in her apron while talking to her new stepchildren and step grandchildren. I thought of her hugging me tightly against her bony body when we said goodbye. I thought of her deep desire to please us with every piece of fried chicken and lemon cake. Her example taught me how to love my stepchildren and their children. Grandma Lois ended up taking loving care of my grandfather for almost seventeen years

before cancer left her a widow again. She lived another twenty years, passing away at age ninety-seven.

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Today a sixteen-year-old girl can document her every mood, facial expression, and poor choice via social media. Frankly, I'm glad I never had those options, and I'm content to have my grainy photos and a notebook full of sloppily written wide-ruled pages. While the entries in these pages will never rival those of Samuel Pepys and Anne Frank in social importance, they remind me of a young girl who was desperately trying to make sense of her world. I am so very glad she left her thoughts behind so I can go back and visit with her.

A PIECE OF HISTORY

Though the rest of my body was warm in the sleeping bag, my nose and ears throbbed with cold. The temperature was somewhere in the teens. An ice storm had left us with no electricity in the house, forcing us to sleep in the only room with a fireplace. My husband snored on one side of me; our son and dog curled against each other on the other. Outside, the winter wonderland serenity was continuously interrupted; branches, heavy with ice, sounded like gunshots as they snapped and fell to the ground. Some grazed the house in their descent. Wide-awake with fear that they would crash through the roof, I watched the fire flicker and form shapes in the large brick enclosure. From nails on the mantel hung a battered silver ladle, and old oil lantern, and a rusted metal trap found in a flea market. I wondered how many fires had roared in the fireplace over the past century and a quarter the log cabin had stood; how many pots of stew simmered, how many books read, and how many stories told. The clock struck twelve times. Sometime later it struck once, and again twice. I grabbed the flashlight waiting near me, opened the double living room doors, and hurried along the freezing hard wood floors to the restroom. A sharp inhale of the bitter air reminded me of why the early settlers kept chamber pots inside; a trip outside on such a night as this would have been miserable. Upon my return, I found my husband adding logs to the fire. I settled back into my sleeping bag and eventually drifted off to sleep, reflecting on the many who had slept, as we were, through a freezing night in an eighteen-by-eighteen-foot log cabin along Pearson Creek in southwest Missouri.

The log cabin had stood vacant until the early 1960s when it was purchased by a man named Orville, clearly a visionary who saw potential in the old rugged home nestled in a small valley, flanked by a winding creek, and surrounded by the gentle hills of the Ozark Plateau. Rather than tearing down the eighty-year-old house, Orville added extensions on the back and both sides, incorporating the small, one-room log cabin into a large home.

After Orville's death, the home was sold to the Scotts, who were in residence for thirteen years. They parted with it reluctantly, their age and health finally becoming an obstacle to caring for an older home with several acres. During their years, they lovingly maintained the rambling house with its pastoral setting. The peaceful beauty of the freshly painted brown house against the green grass, and the sound of the creek trickling across the rocks drew us in. Upon realizing it was only ten miles from our jobs, and within the school district, we knew it was the home for us.

When we purchased the home in 2001, we knew we were buying a piece of history. We knew very little about that history, however, other than that the exact age of the log cabin was unknown, that it had once contained a loft sleeping area, and that it had been vacant until the early 1960s. While we updated some of the surrounding rooms of the house, the rustic log cabin, with its crude wood framing was primarily left as it had been, other than some refilling of the chinking in the semi-petrified wood walls. This room serves as our living room, and we have chosen to decorate it with a few farmhouse primitives—including my maternal grandmother's antique washstand, and a horseshoe I found buried in the dirt at my paternal grandparents' home when I was a child—

intermingled with comfortable furniture and a modern television that seems to have grown larger and flatter over the past sixteen years of our residence.

As we settled in to our new home, our senses became attuned to the beauty surrounding us. We watched cardinals, goldfinches and indigo buntings gather at the feeders. We enjoyed inviting friends and family over for bonfires during cold fall evenings. We took long walks in and along Pearson Creek, which is spring-fed and chilly, learning to avoid stepping on the crawfish as they scurried backward out of our paths. We also learned we could pick up them up with our thumbs and forefingers around their middle sections so as to avoid their pinching claws. On the other side of the creek from us is what remains of an old springhouse, a reminder of the early settlers who once stored their cold goods there.

One of the first things we noticed upon moving in is the melodious singing of the frogs as they gather near the water. That first year, and often during the many years since, we have been able to catch sight of a large snapping turtle as he makes his way across the yard toward the creek in early June. Around the middle of October of that first year, we noticed an avalanche of black and orange box elder bugs crawling over the windows and sneaking into the house. When I first saw them I was reminded of the Laura Ingalls Wilder story about the invasion of locusts that walked up and down their house for days before finally leaving. When reading this is as a young girl, I had always wondered if Wilder's memory had been somewhat faulty and that perhaps she was stretching the truth a bit. After our first visit by the box elder bugs, which lasted almost three weeks, I had more sympathy for the Ingalls family. The box elder bugs return every fall, remain a nuisance for several weeks, and then hide away somewhere until the following year.

Our primary education in the history of our home came in the form of our first arrowhead, found along the edge of the creek within weeks of moving in. We have since found dozens of arrowheads and other hand-made tools in and along the creek. The Osage and Kickapoo tribes lived in the Ozarks at one time. These tribes were forcibly relocated in the early nineteenth century, and I can only imagine the horrors they faced as they left their homes and traveled toward disease and death in western lands. While it's possible that some of the arrowheads we have found might have drifted down the creek from somewhere north of us, I like to think of our toolmaker as keen-minded young man who once drank from our creek, allowed this same dirt to run through his fingers, and watched the oak saplings grow that eventually became the trees that were used to build our log cabin. This man, or this tribe of Native Americans, first settled this land we now call home.

We longed to know more about the history of the people who built our home. In 2002 we received an impromptu visit, which provided answers to several questions. A man named David, along with wife, knocked on the door and said they were looking for the log cabin home in which his grandmother had been born. Although I'm not given to allowing strangers into my home, I was compelled to invite them in and show them around. David had been doing some genealogical research and said his great-grandfather, Charles Redel, a man of German descent, had built the house. David's grandmother, Anna, was born in 1883. A review of the Greene County Plat Book has revealed that C. Redell, a misspelling of Redel, did own the land in 1904, which seems to confirm that the log cabin was built at least by 1883 when Anna was born. That plat book also shows a

school approximately a mile from our home. That school, of course, is long gone, and its exact location is unknown to me.

Anna Redel grew up, married, moved out of her family's log cabin, but remained in southwestern Missouri. She had seven sons, the youngest of whom was born in 1919 and passed away in 2006. According to his obituary, he "never married and remained in his childhood home in northern Greene County caring for his elderly mother until she passed away." This does not refer to our home, but likely the home Anna moved to when she married. Historical records confirm that Anna was born in 1883 and died in 1972. Perhaps I am a romantic, but I like to think of Anna being born in our log cabin, drawing water from the creek, trying to avoid the claws of crawfish and the vice grip mouths of snapping turtles. I wonder if she watched box elder bugs crawl along the walls of the house every autumn. I assume she walked one mile to and from school every day. I imagine her driving away on her wedding day in a horse and buggy, but returning to visit her parents every few weeks or so, and bringing her children as they were born.

It was from David and his wife that we learned the creek had been re-rerouted slightly to the east by the government sometime prior to the 1960s. But the remainder of what happened after the Redel family moved away and Orville came along with his vision to build was a mystery to us until a few years later.

It was a summer day in 2010 when a group of visitors knocked on our door: an elderly woman accompanied by several other people, including an NBC news reporter and camera crew. The reporter explained that he was doing a news story on the lady and wished to interview her in her childhood home. This lady was Mary Price Walls. In 1950, Mary was the first African American to apply for admission to what was then called

Southwest Missouri State College. Her application was ignored. She went on to marry and have two children, eventually working as a custodian. Sixty years later Mrs. Walls was awarded an honorary bachelor's degree by Missouri State University, and this is what brought her to the attention of NBC News. When the interview aired, it showed Mrs. Walls walking down our driveway and standing inside our log cabin living room, explaining that it was where she was born.

Mary Walls was born in the log cabin in 1932. When I spoke with her in 2010, she told me the fireplace looked the same as when she was a girl. She also spoke of playing in the fields and walking to the one-room school. As I do with Anna Redel, I think of young Mary walking to and from school and playing in the creek. I assume she gathered fragrant flowers, found arrowheads, and tried to avoid box elder bugs every fall. When Mary graduated from high school, it was the all-black school, Lincoln High, rather than the all-white Springfield High. She dreamed of becoming a teacher, and I picture her sitting by the fire, filling out her college application before climbing up to the overhead loft to sleep. While I imagine that Mary experienced many joys growing up in this home, she must have known bitter disappointment at the loss of her dreams, a disappointment that was surely intensified by the knowledge her dreams were denied due to her race. When I think of Mary, I think about all of the lives she would have touched as a teacher.

The Price family had obviously moved away by the early 1960s when the empty log cabin was purchased. Orville's walls formed a new home, a completely different home, with electricity, indoor plumbing, brand-new appliances, and a state-of-the-art stereo/radio intercom system. The bills for these purchases were handed down to the Scotts, who handed them down to us, and while many of Orville's improvements have

been updated yet again, the old home still stands as a testament to his vision. While Orville's walls built a new home, the connection between those who have occupied this small patch of land remains.

We have spent many nights in the log cabin living room, but the night we spent during the ice storm was the one that forced me to wonder what life must have been like for those who came before me. The Native American first settlers, the German born Redels who hewed the original log walls, the African American Price family, and many others have called this place home. One day my family will hand it down to someone else, and others will search the creek for crawfish, shut the windows against an invasion of black and orange bugs, and read under a lamp beside a roaring fireplace. May they live, laugh, and love here as they add their own piece of history to the house along Pearson Creek in southwest Missouri.

HONKY-TONK RESCUE

I pass a truck bearing a logo of a camel on its back and side panels. The trucker blows his horn as I move too quickly into the lane in front of him and apply the brake. The small pewter armadillo sways on its chain from my rearview mirror as I turn in at the entrance ramp heading west. My sister Liza braces herself in the front seat, and our friend Sallee leans precariously forward in the back. “Watch it,” they say in unison.

“Sorry, guess I’m still half asleep.” I shake my head until my brain wakes up, wishing for caffeine. It’s 12:45 in the morning, and we are driving along I-20 in Texas, heading toward the town of Tyler, about an hour west of our college town of Marshall. Our destination is a country- western bar where our mother and her newest husband are stranded following an argument with some friends. Liza reaches over and presses the eject button, removing *Thriller* from the tape deck and inserting Willie Nelson. Even though it’s my car and we have a rule that the driver gets to choose the music, I let her have her way. My younger sister and I have been battling over music for as long as I can remember, and I figure Willie Nelson is better than Johnny Cash, who only knows two chords. I sing along to “Always on My Mind” but make sure most of the sound comes through my nose. Actually, it’s my favorite Willie Nelson song (aside from “Crazy”), and, although I’m sure Liza knows that, I’d never admit it out loud.

Good and awake now, I pat my dashboard, enjoying the new leather feel and smell. I got the small Pontiac hatchback three months ago with five hundred dollars down from my part-time job at a movie theater. The monthly payments are killing me, but it’s

an investment toward my future. I'll be graduating from college in December, five months from now, and I'll never get a job at a bank without reliable transportation.

Sallee has been perched on the hump in the backseat, and she now leans forward. "Linda, I'll be needing a gas station pretty soon. My Dr. Pepper has worked its way through."

I nod. Sallee, accent on the second syllable, is our friend, roommate, and co-worker at the cinema. She's the one who answered the phone when my mom called at 12:23, and she willingly got out of bed to ride along with us to Tyler to pick up Mom and George and take them all the way in the opposite direction, back to Mom's house near Shreveport, Louisiana. We'll end up covering more than two hundred miles before the night is through, and we're only a twentieth of the way there. Of course, that doesn't count bathroom breaks. I need a Coke, anyway, so I keep my eyes alert for an open station. I-20 isn't exactly deserted, but most of the signs running along it are dark, signaling business hours are well over. As I watch for gas stations, I'm also watchful of banks and live armadillos. Armadillos, because I love the little critters, and live ones near highways are as rare in Texas as they are in Louisiana. Banks, because the more banks there are, the better chance I have at finding a job when I graduate.

Liza was recently a bridesmaid at a friend's wedding, and she now lays out the plans for the wedding she hopes of have one day. "I think I'll have the photographer take a picture of George standing there with his empty pockets hanging out." I curl my left lip at her. "Don't give me that look, Linda," she says. "I know he's gross, but Jill's dad had a picture like that, and it was so cute. It's for sure Dad won't pay for my wedding, so Mom's my only hope."

I don't answer. Mom got married for the third time a month ago, and isn't likely to pay for either of our weddings. But if she does, *her* empty pockets are the ones that should be photographed. Her new husband, George, has been waiting on a disability check for the six or so months we've known him. Our parents have been divorced seven years and still can't be civil to each other, so the hope of them standing side-by-side and saying, "We do," when the preacher asks, "Who gives this bride in marriage?" is out of the question. I know what Liza is thinking, anyway. If you can't have "normal," you can at least shoot for the appearance of it.

Willie begins nasaling his way through "On the Road Again," using the same two chords Johnny Cash uses in "Walk the Line." Liza should know better than to let this play within my hearing. I sing Johnny's words along with Willie's tune just to prove I'm right. Liza tries to cover my mouth and turn up the volume at the same time.

Sallee moans in the back seat. "Pull over, Linda, I need to pee!"

I see neon up ahead. A Texaco Station. "Here we go, Sallee. Help is on the way." I pull off the highway and into the brightly lit parking lot. Sallee jumps out and runs inside. Liza and I also get out and dig through our purses for money. I pump four dollars' worth of gas and walk into the store to find Liza standing at the counter with a hot dog and two Coca-Colas. Sallee is out of the restroom now, and she squirts mustard on one-third of the hot dog, which she cradles carefully out to the car. Liza and I follow, each holding a can of Coke.

Back in the car again, Liza pops the tab on her Coke, takes a sip and passes it back to Sallee, who hands her the remaining two-thirds of the hot dog. I start the car up and leave the neon lights of the service station behind while I head back to the almost-

empty highway. Soon my new car smells like grease, salt, and mustard. I eject Willie Nelson and put Michael Jackson back in. Liza gives the last third of hot dog to me. Using one wrist to guide the car, I polish off the hot dog and wipe the crumbs from my lap. I take my first sip of Coke, enjoying the sparkly bite.

"Hey, chick, there are two lines on the road here," Sallee says, as I swerve. "Try to stay between them."

There are actually three lines on the road, but why quibble? I look at her through the rear view mirror and sing with Michael, "I said you wanna be startin' somethin'."

Sallee laughs. "Can we have some new music? You two always choose the same things."

Liza switches to the radio, and I listen as she and Sallee sing to "Roxanne."

Liza and I are from northwest Louisiana, an area more deeply steeped in the Texas country-western culture to the west of us than the Cajun culture to the south. While I have eclectic tastes in music—anything from Barbra Streisand, to disco, to Broadway soundtracks, to Peter Frampton—Liza only likes county. I've often suspected she chose this genre so she can have something to talk to our father about. Our every-other-month-or-so meetings with him are awkward, and I leave it to Liza to break the ice by talking about the most recent George Jones or Merle Haggard hit.

I continue my lookout for banks. I wasted several years in the English department before realizing my passion is business. It's too late to change my major, but I recently added business as a minor. The cinema is only open in the evenings, and my part-time job there doesn't pay well enough to support me and pay off the college loans I'm accruing. I can't wait to be free to work more hours. I know I'll have to start at the bottom in a bank,

probably as a teller, but I think I'll enjoy it. Eventually I hope to get an MBA and work my way into the higher echelons of the world of finance.

Liza grabs the chain I have dangling from the mirror—the signal she has spotted an armadillo.

"He's not moving," I tell her.

"I saw him move. Seriously," she replies.

As we pass, I watch him in the rearview mirror. He begins to cross the road. I touch the chain. "I already got him," Liza says.

Liza and I spent a week at our grandparents' tiny Louisiana farm every summer when we were kids. Our grandfather once caught an armadillo overnight in one of his traps. He always checked his traps first thing, and he came back to the house that morning for his shotgun. Liza and I were up and dressed, sitting at the breakfast table in matching pink shorts with pink and white striped tee shirts. We followed him to the edge of his large garden. He held the shotgun a foot away and pulled the trigger. Liza and I screamed as the armadillo flopped a few times before settling in the cage. Liza's shirt was spotted with blood. I looked down at my own shirt and screamed again. I know armadillos are a nuisance in the garden and on the road, but I've kind of been on their side ever since. And I can't see pink and white stripes without picturing splattered blood.

Up ahead on my right I see a sign with bright blue and red running lights, advertising "Big Jim's Honky-Tonk." In Louisiana they are called clubs and bars, but Texans seem to love the word "honky-tonk."

Sallee leans forward in the back seat. "I think this is the exit." I pull off and drive the short distance to Big Jim's. While most of the businesses in East Texas are closed at

this hour, Big Jim's is alive and hopping. John Anderson's "Swinging'" blares from the outside speakers. I recognize my mom's pink cowboy boots almost immediately; she and my stepfather are tangled together against a darkened outside wall. They part as my headlights settle on them. She walks toward me doing the Sweetheart Schottische (which I suspect she wouldn't know how to spell). She is wearing a pleased grin, and she thanks us for getting out of bed to come to their rescue.

Sallee gets in the front to share the bucket seat with Liza. Mom introduces George to Sallee, then she and George crawl into the back seat. A sudden whiff of beer causes my greasy bite of hot dog to re-assert itself, and I feel a headache coming on. I drive back to the interstate, heading east toward Louisiana. George lights a cigarette and nuzzles my mother's neck. My mother begins railing against her best friend, Sandra, whom she calls a "witch." Shreveport has no shortage of country-western bars, but Mom and George had decided tonight to make the long drive to Tyler, Texas, with Sandra and her date to hear a band there. There had been an argument (I suspect it was George's fault), so Sandra and her date drove the two hours home to Louisiana, leaving Mom and George stranded in Tyler. "That witch, Sandra," Mom is saying now. "This is the last time we do anything with her, right, Sweetheart?" George doesn't answer, though, because he has passed out against her. I suspect Mom would rather call Sandra something stronger than "witch," but she has always held that people who use profanity are only showing they are too ignorant to come up with a better word. Sandra has a Cajun last name, and I wonder if she might really be a witch. She and my mother work together and have been friends for several years. In between men, they do the singles scene together. Mom and George just got

married last month, and I wonder how this marriage will affect her friendship with Sandra.

George awakens, and he and Mom begin kissing in the backseat. Liza digs her elbow into my ribs, and I press my foot to the pedal. Mom was straight, narrow, and church-going until she and my dad broke up. Since then, she's had two marriages and a few live-ins. I still have trouble seeing her as a sexual creature, though. I've accepted that my parents had sex often enough to produce children, but I draw the line at envisioning Mom and George. For starters, George is even thinner than I am. When Liza and I drove home for Easter Sunday dinner a few months back, I spilled gravy on my jeans and needed something to change into. George offered to loan me a pair of his pants, and I couldn't squeeze into them. I finished the meal with a towel wrapped around my waist while waiting for my jeans to dry.

The backseat sounds grow louder. Sallee reaches across Liza and pops a tape in the player. Michael Jackson. Sallee clearly doesn't care what she hears as long as it covers up the noise coming from the back. I turn the rearview mirror so I can't see what's going on. My mother is fifty. She met George at a bar earlier this year and took him home with her that night. Even after all these years, I'm still perplexed by my mother's choice in men. Most have been unemployed and without transportation. George is on probation, to boot. But my mother always preens and smiles when she talks about the night they met: "All the women wanted to dance with George, but he chose me!"

Sallee and Liza are finally comfortable in their shared bucket seat, and both fall asleep. Mom and George have pulled apart, and my head begins to throb in response to cigarette smoke. I cough a few times. Mom whispers, "Sweetheart, Linda doesn't like

smoke in her car." She and George finally fall asleep, too, and I drive along in near silence, listening as the "The Girl is Mine" and "Thriller" play at reduced volume. Once the tape finally ends, I eject it and put Willie Nelson back in. Like Sallee, it no longer matters what I hear. My eyes are burning, my head hurts, and I'm desperate for something to keep me awake.

We pass back through Marshall about 2:40. I think of my soft bed near campus. Willie sings, "Little things I should have said and done, I just never took the time, but you were always on my mind." I watch as the mileage signs change. I watch for armadillos, but I don't count the banks as I head back toward Louisiana. The future isn't at all clear, but I know one thing: I won't be moving back home following graduation.

My dad has moved multiple times since my parents divorced. Now he is living over a friend's garage in a tiny apartment with no refrigerator or stove. When we meet with him, it's usually at the Pitt Grill or some other greasy breakfast spot. There would be room for me at my mom's house, but I don't see myself fitting into her life with George. In between her relationships, she has made the rounds of bars, church singles groups (Catholics, Baptists, Unitarians, doesn't matter), and non-church singles groups. She has said before that she was lonely when she was married to my dad. I get a sense of how lonely the years since then have been, too. I hope she's finally found what she's looking for.

The car crosses into Louisiana. I think for the umpteenth time that college gradation isn't all it's hyped up to be. Sallee's parents are after her to move back home. Liza is likely to get married next year, and I'll be on my own. I can't remember my last date, and don't see me thinking about settling down with anyone in this decade. I add up

my car and college debt. My grades aren't high enough for graduate school, and I wonder how I'll convince an MBA program to give me a chance.

We reach Shreveport, and, despite my determination to never return to Louisiana to live, I can't help but notice the abundance of banks. I exit the interstate around 3:35, and pull into an Exxon station near the diner where we usually meet our dad for breakfast. I wake my mother up, telling her I need some gas. Liza gets out to pump. Mom wakes George, "Sweetheart, do you want to go inside and pay?" George and Sallee follow me inside the station. While George waits for Liza to finish pumping, he lights up a cigarette and chats with the pretty girl at the counter. He seems fully awake now. I go to the restroom, and then stop by the cooler for three Cokes, which I place on the counter. George uses my mom's credit card to pay for the drinks and gas, all the while telling the cashier that his two college-aged daughters and their friend had to come to his rescue tonight.

We drive in silence through the seedier part of town, passing a mile's worth of sleazy bars. The neon flashing lights advertise, "Disco," "Girls," and "Beer." The parking lots are empty, and I wonder why these businesses are paying for electricity to advertise booze and sex when their businesses are closed.

I pull into Sandra's apartment complex and park beside Mom's car. I press the cold Coke can against my head. Mom and George get out, and Sallee moves to the back seat. Liza offers to drive home. I slide over, while Liza gets in driver's seat. We wave to Mom and George. Liza takes her foot off the brake. George hops back out of Mom's car and walks toward us. Liza stops the car and waits while he approaches my side of the car and motions for me to roll the window down. "I just wanted to thank you for coming to

get us," he says. He sticks his head in the passenger window and kisses me full on the mouth. I can taste stale cigarettes and beer. We sit in silence and watch as he and Mom drive away.

"What was that all about?" Sallee wants to know, as Liza removes her foot from the brake again.

I try to shake my head, but it hurts. I look at Liza, who says. "I think he was trying to be gross."

"He was already that," I say.

"Maybe he's trying to be fatherly," Sallee says.

"I have a dad," I answer. "And he has never kissed me on the mouth. He doesn't even hug me."

I try to sip my Coke, but it tastes like acid. I pour some of it on a Kleenex and scrub my lips. Liza puts a tape in the player. Johnny Cash sings, "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die." My hands clench around the can. *Did Mom see her new husband kiss me? Did her smile seem less bright as she drove away? How can I stop him from doing it again?* Liza gets on the entrance ramp of I-20 west. We leave the harsh lights of the city behind and head back to Marshall.

THERE WILL BE A LIFETIME

As usual, I was up and dressed early for my Saturday morning run. I laced my shoes, cut a mint chocolate energy bar into bite-sized squares for my pocket, and headed outside. The sky was dark as rain pelted down, soaking me immediately. I ran east, toward the route that kept me closest to home without being too repetitive. The roads were wet. My hearing was limited due the ongoing thunder. Cars honked at me as they passed; many sprayed water and mud on me, as if on purpose. My glasses became foggy and coated with rain, preventing me from a clear view of where I was going. I knew the path, though, and did my best to stick to it. I stayed on the edge of the sidewalk, keeping as far away from the road as possible without running in the wet grass. I reached the hospital and turned around. Six miles after my start, I arrived home, soaked and miserable. I changed into dry undergarments, clothes, socks and shoes. Then I downed eight ounces of water, and headed back outside to repeat the whole run all over again.

It was August 1, 1998, and I was training for the Dallas White Rock Marathon, set for December 13. Like the postman, I couldn't allow rain, heat, or other elements to get me off track.

Looking back, I'm still amazed that I would end up training for and completing a 26.22-mile event. To begin with, despite the fact that the "marathon" has been around since antiquity, women hadn't been official participants in U.S. marathons until recent years, and the struggle to be accepted was hard-fought. In 1966 Bobbi Gibb attempted to register for the most famous of U.S. marathons, the Boston Marathon, but was told "women are not physiologically able to run a 26-mile marathon, and, furthermore,

women are not allowed to run more than 1.5 miles in a race." She ran that year as an unofficial participant, and returned the following year, 1967. That year, Kathrine Switzer also decided to run. Switzer has been quoted as saying that the race officials were afraid to allow women to run the marathon for fear "their uterus might fall out." Having registered under her initials rather than her first name, Switzer was awarded a bib number. During the race, Switzer was famously shoved by a race official once it was realized a bib number had erroneously been issued to a woman. Another race official said that if she'd been his daughter, he'd have spanked her.

Gibb is recognized as the first woman to complete the Boston Marathon. Switzer, who finished the marathon almost an hour after Gibb, is credited as the first woman to complete it officially. But the battle for equality was not over for female runners. The Boston Marathon didn't formally sanction women as participants until 1972. The Title IX laws were signed that same year. The first Olympic Women's Marathon didn't take place until 1984.

All of these changes occurred in my lifetime, but not early enough to encourage an interest in athletics on my part. In elementary school I excelled at the field day races, but there were no other opportunities for me to run. As a high school sophomore, I joined the track team, but quit after one day. In my Louisiana hometown, girls were generally not interested in sports, and it was too hot and muggy for me to participate in something none of my friends wanted to do. I decided I would much rather curl up with a good book and a snack.

As an adult, I came to see running as a quick and economical way to work off the calories I took in while reading. By May 1998, when my friend Sharon first presented the

marathon idea, I was regularly running three miles, three days a week. Together, Sharon and I had done several local five-kilometer fun-runs, and on this particular day we were halfway through a 5-K race to benefit a food pantry. She had decided to register for a 25-mile military run to be held later that year, and wanted a training partner. I was the mother of a toddler and was frustrated by my inability get my pre-baby body back, so I was ready for a new challenge. As we ran along, I outlined my arguments against the idea. For starters, I had only known one person who completed a marathon—a male co-worker who complained that his nipples had bled. I remembered watching the finish of the first women's Olympic competition in 1984 as one woman staggered in a disoriented fashion for minutes before she crossed the line and collapsed. I had heard of another well-known elite marathoner whose episode of diarrhea was captured by a camera crew as she neared the finish line. This was before the Internet, so I hadn't seen the video, but these few examples of the human body breaking down during a marathon left me convinced that our bodies simply were not meant to go 26.2 miles.

In addition to my responsibilities as a wife and mother, I had a full-time job, so there was little extra time to train. Furthermore, I wouldn't be able to go to New Mexico to do the military run, and I had no idea how to choose a marathon for myself. Sharon swatted down my arguments: good jogging brassieres prevent chaffing; elite marathoners don't take restroom breaks, which is why they have occasional accidents; regular people like us aren't trying to win, so we have the freedom to stop and use the portable toilets as necessary; we would only need to do a long run once a week; and there were plenty of marathons within a four-hour radius from us. By the end of our 3.1-mile run, Sharon managed to talk me into training for a marathon.

My training began on May 16 with four miles. I followed running guru Jeff Galloway's method, which was to alternate a five-minute run with a one-minute walk. His assertion is that this one-minute walk enables the body to recover faster and go further. Due to scheduling conflicts, Sharon and I didn't train together on long runs, but continued doing three to four miles together at least twice a week during the weekdays. I did my training run every Saturday, following Galloway's plan of adding a mile a week. I had never done more than ten kilometers, 6.2 miles, so each new mileage number was a thrill, and I faithfully recorded "7 miles," "8 miles," etc, in my training log. On June 27, I hit the 10-mile mark. By that time, I had chosen to do the Dallas White Rock Marathon to be held in December. While it was close to eight hours away from where I lived in Missouri, my mother and stepfather would be able to drive there from Louisiana to see me run my first marathon.

I ran in the heat of the summer, when the smell of my own sweat repulsed me. I ran through the fall leaves, and the scent of bonfire clung to my clothes and hair. I had heard rumors that the menstrual cycle would lessen or be eliminated altogether with excessive exercise. While this might be true for some, it was not true in my case. On these days, I planned my running route so I could be near a public restroom. Sometimes the pelvic pain was so intense I wondered whether, as Kathrine Switzer had been infamously warned, my "uterus might fall out."

My feelings toward my body began to change as my leg muscles acquired definition. I became more comfortable wearing shorts and skirts. I had more energy to play games with my son, Nick. I learned how to discuss form and pronation with the salesclerks as I shopped for shoes one size larger than usual. I learned about anti-chafing

ointments. I read books by writers who had completed a marathon. I tried the many energy drinks, bars, and gels on the market. Running became second nature to me; I knew I had to get ready for the marathon, so I no longer had to argue with myself about getting up and running.

One obstacle I faced during my training was loneliness on the long runs. I spent a lot of time in prayer during these runs—for strength and energy, as well as for my family. I tried to think of peppy tunes to play in my head to help me find my rhythm and keep pace. This was pre-iPod era, and I didn't want to carry a heavy Walkman cassette player. For some odd reason, the old George Gershwin song sung by Ella Fitzgerald, "Fascinating Rhythm," became my anthem. As I ran, I would keep time to, "Fascinating rhythm / You've got me on the go / Fascinating rhythm / I'm all a-quiver."

While running was lonely, it was also a great way for me to clear my head and deal with the stress of my government job. I had recently been given a temporary assignment in a newly created unit. If I succeeded at this assignment, it could result in job advancement. However, I had increased duties with no extra pay, there was friction within our newly formed unit, and our state-of-the-art computer system crashed regularly, losing any unsaved work. Marathon training, particularly in the beginning, helped me decompress after a hard week at work.

I returned from each long run exhausted and hungry. After consuming large amounts of carbohydrates, I would shower and take a long nap. I struggled with more headaches than usual during this time, likely due to excessive sun exposure and pounding on the pavement. I found that my training schedule did, indeed, infringe upon time with my family, but I was committed to making this work. After my nap, my husband, son and

I often went to a local amusement park where we enjoyed the kiddie rides and games. I had a breakdown moment near the end of my training when my husband and son drove past one morning and honked at me. I waved and burst into tears. I missed staying up late with my husband on Friday nights; getting up for a long Saturday morning run meant an early Friday bedtime for me. I missed curling up with Nick under his Noah's Ark blanket and watching Saturday morning cartoons. He had turned three by this point and was talking and sharing stories. I was missing out on his childhood. I was bored with running down the same roads over and over. The endorphins produced while running no longer controlled the job stress. And I was hurting.

Injuries are a common plague on those who have a sudden increase in exercise, and I was not spared this. On November 14, four weeks prior to the marathon, I ran in a local half marathon. Following that, I could barely walk due to right knee pain. My doctor referred me to a physical therapist whom I saw three weeks and two days before the marathon. I showed up to that appointment and announced to the therapist, "I'm running a marathon in three weeks. Tomorrow is my twenty-six mile practice run. What do I do?" The therapist found it wasn't my knee at all, but Iliotibial Band (IT band) tendonitis. She suggested ibuprofen, ice, and rest. She didn't tell me not to run, but said to take it easy and stop if the pain became too intense. I did complete my practice run, with much pain, and did very little in the way of exercise until the day of the marathon.

Prior to the marathon, a friend gave me a card with the words, "There will be days when I won't know if I can run a marathon. There will be a lifetime knowing I have." While this should have given me hope, it incited fear: *What if I can't do this? What if I hit the wall? What if I crash and burn? What if there* won't *be a lifetime knowing I have?*

Jeff Galloway stresses that the good night's sleep before a marathon must take place on *the night before* the night before the race. We drove eight hours to Dallas on Friday, December 11, in time for a nice meal with my mom and stepdad, who had driven in from Louisiana. I followed Galloway's advice and went to bed early Friday night. Saturday was spent seeing an old college friend. I slept only a few hours Saturday night; I kept getting up to make sure I had gathered everything I would need for the race.

Dallas on Sunday, December 13 was very cold. An estimated thirty-two hundred marathoners gathered in clumps, waiting for the gun to go off. I wore a pink long-sleeved shirt over my tee shirt, jogging pants over my shorts, and a wide grey headband to protect my ears from the cold. Fearing my leg injury had been inflamed by my newest running shoes, I made a last-minute decision to wear an old, worn-out pair. I would come the regret this later, along with my choice to wear brand new socks. My son was at the hotel with my parents, and my husband followed my every pre-marathon move with the video camera. I stood away from the crowd, a bundle of nerves. The loudspeakers blared upbeat music, including one of my old favorites, "I Saw Her Standing There," by The Beatles. As time drew near, I peeled off my jogging pants and handed them to my husband.

The announcement was made for the runners to take their places. The amplifier played José Carreras' "*Libiamo Ne' lieti Calici*" from Verdi's *La Traviata*. This seemed an odd choice since it's a slow opera song, but I later discovered it's known as "the drinking song." I searched for the pace sign for the ten-minute mile runners, and took my place. Finally the gun went off and "The Yellow Rose of Texas" came across the speakers. I moved slowly, stuck in a crowd of people who were stuck in crowd of people. I finally reached the starting line about ten minutes after the race started.

The race itself was amazing, hard, and wholly satisfying. I stayed with the Galloway method of running five minutes and walking one. I saw people who were older than I was, and many who were clearly overweight. I was surprised to find myself passing others, and I entertained myself in this fashion. As soon as I passed one person, I looked for someone else. One man, noticing my pink shirt, called out, "Good going, Pink Lady!" There was camaraderie among us as we ran along saying, "Where are you from?" "Is this your first time?" "Keep going." Most of us were first-time marathoners, and I couldn't help but wonder if the elite runners were enjoying the same kind of camaraderie.

We ran out of the city and around White Rock Lake, a sprawling body of water which seemed to last forever. The wind off the lake was freezing. As we began heading back toward the city, I felt a somewhat premature thrill of anticipation. I could see the tall buildings coming into view, but I knew eight miles still remained in the race. When I got hot, I pulled off my pink over-shirt and tied it around my waist. Eventually, I took off my headband and tied it on the shirtsleeve. I had to stop and use the portable toilet at some point. My right leg throbbed. Soon, my left leg did, too. My old shoes provided no arch support, and my new socks caused blisters. I hit "the wall" at around the twenty-mile mark. By this point, I had switched to running one minute and walking five. People I had passed earlier were catching up to me or passing me. "Pink Lady," I heard a male voice say behind me, "keep going!"

I kept going. I never once considered quitting to be an option. I hurt. I cried. I prayed. Ella Fitzgerald's voice urged me on in my head with "Won't you take a day off / Decide to run along / Somewhere far away off / And make it snappy." Over the course of 26 miles and multiple aid stations, I was handed water, Gatorade, orange and banana

slices, bits of energy bar, energy goo, and the best sugar cookie I have ever had in my life. But I was hungry, exhausted, and longing for the finish line. Near the end I found encouragement from neighborhood people who sat in lawn chairs, cheering us on and holding signs that read, “Four miles left!” “Three miles to go!” “You’ve got this!” The race had been going on for hours, and I was near the back of the pack. I was honored that they treated me as though I was one of the elite runners.

I finally I saw the finish line, and, as soon as I got close enough, I began to run again with an energy I found from somewhere deep within. I looked for my family, but the crowd was too large, and I couldn’t see a familiar face. The Young Rascals’ “I’ve Been Lonely Too Long” was playing in the background. This seemed appropriate because of the seven months I had spent training, and the 26.22 miles I had just run alone. As I crossed the finish line, the announcer read my name as a first-time marathon finisher. I was too tired to raise my arms in triumph. Everything inside of me felt like gel. But, it was over, and I had done it!

Through all of the commotion at the finish line, I finally heard my name called and turned to find my family—my husband, son, mom, and stepdad. My husband ran toward me carrying the video camera in one hand and pushing Nick’s stroller with the other. At three, Nick had no idea I had accomplished something special. He just knew he hadn’t seen me yet that morning, and he wanted me to hold him. I hugged them both, not bothering to apologize for my stench, and we waited for my mom and stepdad to catch up. I posed with my medal while my husband and mom took pictures. Afterward, the five of us enjoyed a nice pasta meal, and returned to the hotel so I could have a shower and nap.

My official time was 5:21:16, which doesn't take into account the time I spent waiting for the crowd to thin out so I could cross the start line at the beginning. I was number 752 of 876 female finishers. There were 2846 who finished the marathon that year, with men outnumbering women by more than two to one. The male winner's time was 2:20:37; less than half the time it took me. His 9 x 6-inch picture appeared on page one of the *Dallas Morning News* sports page. The female winner finished with a time of 3:04:34. Her 4 ½ x 2-inch picture appeared on page ten, demonstrating that female runners still had a long way to go toward equality in 1998.

Interest in marathon running does not seem to be waning. In 2016 the Dallas Marathon had 2812 overall finishers: 1751 were male and 1061 were female. While men finishing the Dallas race still outnumber the women, the ratio is somewhat reduced. The Boston Marathon of 2017 was more balanced, with 14438 male finishers and 11973 female, including Kathrine Switzer, who, at seventy years of age, ran to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of her barrier-breaking run.

I lost both big toenails after my marathon, but they did grow back. I stopped the rigorous training and my IT band tendinitis resolved. I never attempted another marathon, for the primary reason that I couldn't bear the thought of any more four-and-five-hour Saturday training runs. I eventually switched to power-walking and began doing half marathons, even traveling to Disney World to take part in one. During the quiet moments of the half marathon, I still hear Ella Fitzgerald telling me to "make it snappy." Currently, I am sidelined due to a left hip/knee injury, but I don't consider my "athletic" career over. I look forward to crossing the finish line of many more half marathons.

As a mom, I regret many of the things that took me away from home or kept me occupied during my son's early years. While it was hard, training for a marathon is one thing I don't regret. It helped add another layer of inner strength from which to draw. As I ran back toward the Dallas skyline that day, seeing the tall buildings ahead of me and feeling they were so close I could almost reach out and touch them, I was also aware of how far away they were and that I had about eight miles to go before I would be running beside them. I broke those eight miles into smaller increments and told myself to run one more 5K, run another mile, go one more block, take one more step. That sense of breaking big undertakings into small tasks has stayed with me. Since my marathon experience, I have faced other moments of fear or doubt; moments when failure seemed certain, or the goal seemed insurmountable. During those times, I focus on each task in turn and remind myself I am still the same woman who got up and ran six miles in torrential rain, and then turned around and did it all over again.

I am grateful to women like Bobbi Gibb, Kathrine Switzer, and the many others who fought for the right to see how hard women could push themselves. For the right to prove women *do* have the physiological make-up to run 26.2 miles. While it still attracts the most fit among men, the marathon is no longer an elusive goal for the rest of us. Since the inclusion of women in this ultimate test of endurance, the marathon has seen the disabled, aged, overweight, and nonathletic alike run, walk, or wheel their way across the finish line.

Current estimates show that one out of every two hundred Americans has run a marathon. Chances are I'll never do another, but there will be a lifetime knowing I already have.

ISLAND MEMENTO MORI

1. ***(Ichi)***

Every street before me was lined with light pastel houses, each separated by a cement wall. I turned in circles, trying to figure out which street led home. It was Friday afternoon, my first week in Okinawa, and my second day at my new school. The day before a neighbor boy had told me when to get off the bus, but on this day the door closed behind him and the bus began driving before I realized he was already walking toward our street. I had gotten off at the next exit and had no idea where I was.

I stopped circling and began to walk. I knew my house was at the end of the street at the top of a hill, but I didn't know my address and couldn't read street signs. I had just started first grade and would be seven in late October, a few weeks away. I had already been saying I was seven because we celebrated my birthday before we left the States so I could have a party with my friends.

My stomach growled and reminded me that hours had passed since the pimento cheese sandwich I had for lunch. I began grabbing at the sides of my blue and red plaid dress, scrunching the fabric into balls. I feared I'd be in trouble when I finally got home. I knew it was my fault for not watching the neighbor boy. I used the fabric of my dress to wipe the tears from my cheeks. A lady stopped her car beside me and rolled down her window. She was friendly, like all of the moms on the base in North Carolina had been. *Are you lost?* I nodded. *Don't worry, I'll help you. Get in my car, and we'll drive around until we find your house.* I got in, and she drove up and down the streets. They all looked the same. I tried smoothing the sides of my dress as I explained that my house was at the

top of a hill in Old Sanube, which I pronounced, “Snobby.” As she turned a corner, I recognized my pale green house, and she stopped at the bottom of the hill. I caught the scent of barbeque as I ran up the hill up to my new house.

My little brother was on the front porch, feeding something to a stray dog. Inside, my mother, who had been unpacking boxes all day, was handing dishes to my older sister, Lana. Both were too busy to notice I was late and I headed back outside to look for my younger sister, Liza. She was sitting on top of the cement fence in front of our house, looking into the back yard of the house down the hill from us. There was sheet of canvas on the ground with smoke coming out of it. Three young airmen were standing around it holding cans of beer. One man pulled the sheet back and revealed a brown figure on a bed of ashen coals. Liza elbowed me in the side and said, “It’s a pig.” The smell of burning flesh was nothing like the pleasant aroma of the burgers my mom sometimes grilled. The man stuck an apple in the pig’s mouth and pulled the canvas back over it. I turned away from the roasting pig and went inside the house.

2. ***(Ni)***

Almost as soon as our plane landed in September, we began hearing warnings about Stealie Boys—Okinawan teenagers who broke into houses in the middle of the night and stole things. Before breaking in, they would put a tube in the window and pipe gas in to make sure the family slept through the burglary. It was hotter in Okinawa than it had been in North Carolina. Our fans didn’t keep our house cool enough for us to be able to close and lock the windows at night. Knowing Stealie Boys could be outside hiding underneath the windows often kept me awake and fearful.

As soon as I became aware my Midge doll was missing, I was certain the Stealie Boys had it. I checked the chest of drawers again, digging through the third drawer where I had last seen Midge, wearing her forest green dress with light green flowers, which was almost identical to one of mine. I pulled off my tee-shirt and shorts and walked to the closet to get my own dress off the hanger, thinking wearing my matching dress might help me find my doll. I put the dress on but didn't take the time to zip it. It was a little faded because it had belonged to Lana before it became mine. My old dress had been passed down to Liza.

Some of our friends had multiple Mattel dolls, but our mother said we couldn't afford more than one apiece, so Lana had a Barbie doll, Liza had Barbie's little sister Skipper, and I had Barbie's friend Midge. Only having one doll would have been easier for me to accept had it not been for the fact that James, who was only three, had two G. I. Joe action figures. My mother justified this by explaining that our three dolls could play together, but G.I. Joe needed a friend to play with. She tried to make it up to us by sewing matching doll dresses to go along with the "sister dresses" she usually made for us girls. Lana was ten by this point, and no longer played with her Barbie. She kept it in its original box. As I stood there in her hand-me-down dress, it occurred to me that she should also hand her Barbie down to me.

Still wearing my unzipped dress, I stepped across the hall to the room Lana shared with James. Lana didn't answer my knock so I opened the door. Everything, even James' toys, was in perfect order. I looked through Lana's drawers and finally found Barbie, completely naked in her box, at the bottom of a drawer. I sat on the bed with the doll in my hands, thinking about ripping her head or an arm off. Then, when Lana saw it was

broken, she'd give it to me. I decided I didn't want a broken Barbie, either, and put it back in the box in the bottom drawer.

Outside James and the redheaded neighbor boy were behind the house having a pretend snake and mongoose fight. They did this by wrestling around on the ground and saying, "Give? Give?" until one of them gave. I went out and watched them for a while. Some of the teenage boys in the neighborhood had been to the village, where they had real snake and mongoose fights. It was commonly known that the mongoose usually wins. As much as I hated snakes, I hated even more that the villagers made them fight knowing they would lose.

My dad was in the front hammering boards on the windows in preparation for the coming typhoons. He knelt down to pick up more nails. I squatted beside him, still wearing my unzipped dress. "The Stealie Boys stole my Midge doll," I told him.

"Go tell your mother," he replied, and began sticking nails between his lips.

"Is a typhoon worse than the storm in *The Wizard of Oz*?"

He nodded, and I watched as he stood up and began hammering.

"Have you ever seen a snake and mongoose fight?"

He answered through his nail-clenched teeth for me to leave him alone.

I went back to my room, pulled Lana's old dress off and threw it on the floor. Then I put on my tee-shirt and shorts and started looking for my Midge doll again.

3. *(San)*

My mother was dressed and ready for a meeting. Her skin was milky white, and her curly hair was brown. She often complained that she was fat, but she was soft when

she hugged me. While she applied red lipstick and blotted her lips on a napkin, Lana picked up her old argument about being allowed to wear makeup. My mother finally agreed that Lana could wear it when she started college. This seemed to satisfy Lana, and Mom got away with no further argument. I followed her outside and watched her drive out of sight. Then, I headed for the wall.

Between every house was a cement wall, and I was just tall enough to climb up on it. The cement was rough against my bare feet as I stood very still and looked toward the water. We were only a few blocks from the East China Sea. The beach was narrow and rocky, and was covered with seaweed and drainage from the sewer pipe that ran along it. My mother had warned us repeatedly that she had better not catch us going anywhere near it. The stench of sewer and seaweed kept me from breaking her rule. I enjoyed watching the water, however. When I stood on the wall on a clear day, I could see a landmass I assumed was China. I waved, just in case some Chinese girl was standing on the beach looking toward Okinawa.

I began to walk along the wall past several houses, carefully putting each foot in front of the other. It was a long drop down from where I was; I could see the roofs of the houses below. Our off-base housing, called Sunabe, was mostly military with some Okinawan families, but there were no girls my age. I hated playing alone, but on this particular day I had no companion.

I walked along one wall until it ended, then jumped off and climbed on another. Soon, I reached the tomb where many of the neighborhood kids ended up playing. Lana had told me once that there were actual dead bodies in the tomb behind the square cement door, but I had never seen the door open, and I doubted her story. Two boys were rolling

off the slanted roof of the tomb and jumping to the ground below when they got to the end. I watched them until they left, then I made my way up the wall to the top of the tomb, like I had seen them do. I got down on my side and began rolling. The boys had made it look easy, but I began screaming as I rolled. Soon the small ledge caught me. I stared down at the tiny pebbles, cigarettes butts, and broken bottles on the ground. I wasn't brave enough to jump the way the boys had. I turned back over and climbed up to the slanted roof again. On my third roll, the edge failed to stop me, and I fell to the ground, leaving a large amount of the skin of my arm, back and leg on the cement ledge as I fell.

I managed to limp home before my mother got back from her meeting. I found Lana, who helped me clean up the blood and get covered with Band-Aids.

4. ***(Shi)***

My parents were arguing in their room. It occurred to me that they had not argued during the time my dad was Okinawa and we were still in North Carolina, nor had they argued during his temporary assignment to Turkey. Being together seemed to be what made them unhappy. The previous week I had come home from school to find Liza hiding under the desk in our room, crying. When I asked her what was wrong, she said, "Mommy told me today that she and Daddy are going to get a divorce and we have to go back home." I wanted to call her a liar, but Liza always seemed to know what was going on before I did. As I lay in bed listening to them, I wondered why Mom shared this information with Liza but still hadn't mentioned it to me. I wondered where home was. Could we go back to our old house on the base in North Carolina? We had a globe in my

classroom, and when new students arrived from the States, our teacher pointed out the state they had come from on the globe. Looking back, I assume she was trying to help us keep our identity as Americans, but I had been in Okinawa long enough that neither North Carolina nor the United States seemed like home. I couldn't imagine going back there without my dad.

Our room was hot, and the curtain fluttered softly at the open window. Usually the sound of the fan at the foot of our bed helped me sleep, but I had spent most of this day sleeping because of a headache. I hadn't eaten since vomiting my lunch. Although my stomach still felt as though it had been squeezed empty, I knew I still couldn't keep anything down.

I felt the soft rise and fall of Liza's chest against me, so I knew she couldn't hear Mom and Dad. Across the hall, James and Lana were in their room. James was asleep, I was sure, but I pictured Lana awake and listening.

My father was yelling now, "You're not going to take the kids." My mom was crying, as she usually did when he yelled. As much as I didn't want to go back to America without him, I don't want to stay in Okinawa without her. I sat up on the edge of the bed in an effort to go to Lana's room. My head began throbbing, and I started crying, hoping my mother would hear and come to me with a wet washcloth. Instead, I heard their door close, and the house went dark. I crawled closer to the fan and let it blow on my face, forcing my short hair to lift away from my neck. The room seemed to spin, so I moved back to my pillow. I thought about our old house in North Carolina. I tried to breathe slowly, and I began to feel myself falling asleep. I had a sensation of leaving my body. I saw myself lying in the bed beside Liza, two little blonde-haired girls fast asleep.

I felt myself floating very slowly across a round globe, past Japan, past China, past the ocean. I kept floating until I saw my old house in North Carolina. There, I hovered over the roof. I peeked through the window of my old room and saw myself sleeping there, too. I floated over my friend Joanne's house. She was playing outside. I wanted to reach out and touch her, but my arm wouldn't stretch that far. Soon I was asleep.

Although I had migraines for many years afterward, I never experienced this type of out-of-body sensation again until adulthood when I was being weaned from oxygen during a hospitalization for pneumonia. This led me to regard my childhood experience as a hallucination, and wonder whether the "Stealie Boys" had been trying to break in that night.

5. ***(Go)***

I had been in second grade for several weeks. Due to overcrowding in the schools, the children in my neighborhood were moved to a temporary school set up on another base, which required a long bus ride. Liza had started first grade so she rode the bus with me now. Our new "school" was nothing but row of twelve Quonset huts.

The typhoons had been heavy, and the water was unsafe to drink. At home my mother boiled the water in a big pot. It tasted like bleach. At school we made origami paper drinking cups that looked like little hats. Every morning and afternoon we lined up near a canvas "Lyster" bag that hung on three poles tied together like a teepee. There, we filled our cups with water that tasted like bleach that had been sitting in a hot canvas bag. While I enjoyed using cups made from paper, I had an unquenchable thirst during this time and couldn't wait for the drinking water to go back to normal.

Liza and I came home from school one day to find Kyoko, the new maid, cleaning the house. Our mother was at the store with James, and Lana wasn't home from school yet. I went into the kitchen and drank a glass of bleached-flavored water. Two long, black cockroaches flew across the floor, and I climbed up on the kitchen countertop, hoping they couldn't jump that high. On the countertop, ants were crawling across sugar cubes someone had left out. I found a cube without an ant on it and put it into my mouth. The sugar helped remove the lingering taste of bleached water.

Kyoko was cleaning in the hallway and singing along with the radio station. I thought about asking her to clean the dirty kitchen counter, but I remembered that my mother had slapped me recently for my "sassy" mouth, and I decided I'd better be quiet. Kyoko was the third maid we'd had since moving to Okinawa the year before. The first two quit, complaining of the mess. "Mama-san," one had said, "family too messy." I wondered why people with clean houses would need a maid, but I agreed with her that our house was messy. All of the military families in Old Sunabe had an Okinawan maid. They would arrive on a bus each morning and take another bus home in the afternoon. The next day they would go somewhere else. I overheard my mom telling Lana once that the only reason we were able to afford a maid was that they worked cheap. I placed another sugar cube on my tongue and felt it dissolve. The Beatles were on the radio now, singing "Run For Your Life," the only one of their songs I hated, and I would have turned it off had Kyoko not been singing along to it. While John Lennon sang, "You better run for your life if you can, little girl. Hide your head in the sand, little girl," I sat on the countertop wiping ants off sugar cubes and eating them. I imagined digging in sand and finding a little girl's head. Soon, I had eaten so many sugar cubes I began to be thirsty

again. Kyoko stepped into the kitchen and looked at me. “Girl-san!” she said, pointing to the floor. I stuffed another sugar cube in my mouth and jumped off the counter. While I headed outside, Kyoko said something in Japanese. It wasn’t one of the Japanese words I knew, and I didn’t look back at her.

6. ***(Roku)***

My mother’s dad was sick back home in the United States and she kept going to her room to cry because she was afraid he would die before we left Okinawa. Dad was in the living room reading his paper. Liza, James and I were fighting over a game, so our father sent us outside. James was four by this time, but Liza and I hated getting stuck watching him.

Someone in the neighborhood was having a pig roast; I could hear laughter and music, and smell the familiar burnt flesh and canvas. James was too little to play on the tomb, so we couldn’t take him there. We wandered around to the back yard and threw sticks for the dog. I finally sat under the shade of a tree and stared up at the hill behind our house. This seemed as tall as a mountain and had several caves. I had only been in one, though. One of the paths to the hill was in our back yard. I wanted to climb it now, but James was too little to make the climb. Liza and James began arguing over which one the dog belonged to. I had thought they’d quit fighting once Liza started school and they were no longer together all day, but it seemed to be worse.

I couldn’t get my mind off of my mom. I was afraid my grandpa would die back in the States and that it would be my fault. I had gotten mad at my mom a few days before, and she sent me to my room. As I reached my doorway, I turned back and yelled,

“I hope your father dies!” before I shut the door. My grandfather was a very old man. He had been fifty-five when my mother was born, and was eighty-nine now. I thought of him as he was when I last saw him the year before, a feeble old man sitting in his wingback chair.

I stood up. “Let’s explore the cave,” I said to the other two. James threw his stick down and ran after me before I changed my mind. Liza was always willing to explore, so she got in line behind him, and we started single file up the path. It wasn’t far to the first cave, but the hill was steep. Liza and I worked together to help James climb. Soon I could no longer smell the roasting pig. We made it to the first cave. James held on to our hands while his eyes adjusted to the dark. There was no wind in the cave, but the air was cool and I began to relax. The three of us saw gold at the same time and rushed toward it. On a low ledge were two small statues about eight inches tall. I had never seen them before and wondered whether they had always been here. Liza and I each took one in our hands, though James argued that he found them the same time we did.

“James, they belong to all of us,” I told him. I wished they could belong only to me. I’d heard stories of kids finding treasure, but I never thought it would happen to me. The statue felt heavy and solid in my hand and as we climbed back down. I imagined how happy our parents would be. They were always talking about being poor.

We entered the house together and placed our treasures on the table. My father had finished his paper and was now in the kitchen having coffee. He took one look at the two golden figures on the table and demanded to know where they came from. Liza, James and I talked over each other and soon the story spilled out. Lana and Mom heard the commotion and came into the kitchen to stare at the small statues. Once we finished

explaining how we found them, my mother began crying again, saying we would make the Okinawans mad by disturbing their idols. My father told us all to march back up to the cave and put them where we found them. Lana was given the job of escorting us to make sure we did as we were told. After we returned home, our parents explained that the caves belonged to the people of Okinawa, and it was where they went to worship their gods. They explained that we believed in God and Jesus, but the Okinawans had a different religion, and we had to respect their customs since we were living in their country.

I have often wondered about the idols we found. They looked gold, but could have been bronze. They were not identical and had human-like features. We never climbed the hill or explored the caves again.

7. *(Shichi)*

We were finally in base housing. All of the houses in our new neighborhood were two-story duplexes. It was fun to have stairs in our home, but I didn't enjoy sharing walls with another family; I could hear our neighbor's voices when they got loud, and I worried that they could hear my parents when they argued. One upside to finally being on base was that we were not as close to the dirty sea, and the Stealie Boys couldn't get on base. Perhaps the best thing about being on base was that there were several girls my age. I missed playing on the walls and tomb, but we had a tall hill behind our new house that was almost as high as the one behind our old one, and we were allowed to climb it. At the top of the hill was a deserted house that had allegedly belonged an American man who had once been the mayor. There were rumors that a skull had been found there. My

sister Lana said she heard that there had been a war on the island at one time. I didn't understand until many years later that she was talking about World War II.

I was walking home from a Brownie meeting one afternoon. Liza was lagging behind, and I walked slowly, waiting for her to catch up. My dad and some of the other men from the base had been deployed for some time to South Korea because the North Koreans had captured the U.S. Navy ship *Pueblo* in January. I was proud of my dad's job with the Air Force—changing tires on planes—because tires were necessary for planes to take off and land. I knew his job wasn't dangerous, and I was used to his deployments, so I didn't worry about him being gone.

As I waited for Liza, I stopped in front of each house to read the name signs. Ours had my father's name, followed by TSgt, which signified the rank of Tech Sergeant. The off-base houses didn't have these signs, and I liked having one because I thought it looked important. My friend Katie had recently told me that her dad's rank was higher than my dad's. I wasn't completely sure what she meant. Her house was bigger than ours, but I assumed that was because they had more kids.

The house I was standing in front of was almost as big as ours, but it wasn't a duplex. There was only one sign in front of it, which read SMSgt. When Liza caught up, I said, "Look at this house. I think it's just for one family."

"Yep," she said, "these are the Senior Master Sergeants. That's even higher than Katie's dad. He's Master Sergeant.

Liza was only in first grade, but she often knew more than I did, and although I didn't understand issues like status as well as she and Katie did, I stopped feeling proud of my father's TSgt sign and tire-changing job.

8. ***(Hachi)***

The museum was small, which made the turtle on the wall seem large by comparison. I stared up at it, thinking I could almost use the hard brown shell for a bathtub. At any rate, James could. My father looked up at the turtle, also, and said it had lived to be one hundred years old. My grandfather had been eighty-nine when he died a few months earlier. I pictured my birth certificate, tucked away in my parents' lock-box. It proved how old I was. I assumed my grandpa probably had a birth certificate, too, and I wondered how we determined the age of a turtle. I wanted to ask my dad, but I didn't dare because I didn't want to ruin his mood.

My mother had told me a few days earlier that Dad was going to start spending time alone with us kids, like on a date. Though I was the second child, he had decided to start with me.

This day at the museum was the first time in my life to have him all to myself, without Lana, Liza, or James. It also turned out to be my last time. I woke up that morning and put on a clean dress. My father took me to the Base Exchange and bought me a jumbo-sized Hershey candy bar, telling me to eat it all before we get home, and not to tell my mother about it. I put in my purse and ate bits of it as we walked around the solid wood floor of the small museum. The turtle was the only interesting thing in the museum, but I didn't complain or ask to leave. As my father stopped and looked at each exhibit, I kept turning toward the turtle, trying to see if he had a date stamped on his shell somewhere.

The museum was off-base some distance from our house. When it came time to eat, I hoped he would choose one of the local restaurants I had heard my friends talk

about, but he drove us back to our base at Kadena, and we ate at the NCO club, which was where our family usually ate when we went out for dinner. I ordered spaghetti and a cherry coke, and tried to eat without making noise. I'd never eaten alone with my dad before, and couldn't think of anything to say. We were quiet, but I enjoyed being alone with him.

That night, as Liza and I were falling asleep, I told her about the candy bar and the one- hundred-year-old turtle in the museum. She never got to have her turn with him; I ended up being the only one who had this special day with our father.

9. ***(Ku)***

I was sitting in the kitchen drinking hot tea the maid Ikuko had fixed for me. I wasn't allowed to use a glass mug, so I was using a tall plastic Tupperware cup. I enjoyed getting the full sensation out of eating and drinking, so I was using a straw. The plastic glass was warm in my hands as the straw released sweet hot tea onto my tongue. I'd never had tea before, and I felt grownup sitting in the kitchen with Ikuko while she worked and sang to the radio, which she had tuned to her favorite station. My sisters were at school, but I was home because of another headache. James was taking a nap, and my mother had been spending a lot of time in her room since she heard the news about Martin Luther King's death a few days before. She hadn't been able to go back to the States for her father's funeral, and she was afraid her brother would die, too. Her brother was on a human rights commission, and had met and worked with Dr. King a few times. By this time, I had begun to be aware that my mother tended to blow things out of proportion. My father said she was being ridiculous and that Martin Luther King was

killed because he was black, and her brother is as white as a ghost. Still, I was worried about her; nothing seemed to cheer her up when she had her crying spells.

Ikuko was scrubbing the floor now, and from time to time she stopped and muttered, "Messa, messa, who make-a messa?" I stirred my tea with my straw. "*Ue o Muite Arukō*" came over the radio airwaves. I didn't know the name of the song at that time, but I knew it was popular in Okinawa because I had heard it many times on the Japanese radio station. I liked the way the singer stretched out the sound when he sang. It sounded like "Ah-roo-ko-wo-wo-wo," and I often tied to imitate it. I only knew a little Japanese—enough to count to ten and say "just a moment," "please," and "thank you'—but I listened intently. Ikuko stopped her work and sang. I was afraid to try to sing along with her.

Years later the disco group A Taste of Honey released this song with English lyrics and entitled it "Sukiyaki," which is a Japanese dish. Later still, I heard a Japanese performer sing it on stage, and it made me cry to hear it sung in his language because it took me back to my childhood in Okinawa. I finally learned the title, "*Ue o Muite Arukō*," and that the lyrics were meant to express the writer's frustration at the continued presence of American military.

10. *(Jū)*

Our boxes had been packed and we were waiting for the movers to come and load them on the truck. The boxes would later be put on a boat and taken to America. My dad was retiring from the Air Force after over twenty years of service, and we were moving to Louisiana, the same state his parents lived in, so he could go to college.

My mind was on one thing only and that was the Baby Magic doll I had received a few days earlier on my ninth birthday. Baby Magic had been packed away in a box, and I was afraid she would be scared. Lana complained that I was being a bigger baby than the doll was, and my mother told me not to let my father hear me crying. She said "Re" would be just fine. Re was the name my mother chose for me to give the doll, after my two grandmothers, Ruth and Ellen. I did not want to name her Ruth Ellen, and I didn't want to call her Re, I wanted to name her Susanna or Angela. Even though I'd only had her a few days, I didn't want to travel to a strange country without her. My father, overhearing my tearful pleas, unpacked the box and handed Baby Magic to me. After the movers came and loaded our belongings, we went to temporary housing to wait for my father's retirement papers to be completed.

Two weeks later, in the afternoon of November fifteenth, I carried Baby Magic with me as we boarded the plane out of Tokyo. After crossing the International Date Line, we arrived in California in the morning of November fifteenth. We picked up our old station wagon from storage and began our drive to Louisiana. There, I discovered nine-year-old girls don't play with dolls, and Baby Magic, who was never called Ruth Ellen, Re, Susanna, or Angela, ended up hidden away in an old toy chest.

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