THE TASTE OF HOMINY

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

By

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ABSTRACT

THE TASTE OF HOMINY

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The Taste of Hominy is a personal, yet creative project focused on transcribing stories from my grandparents' lives and bringing to life realistic and accurate Appalachian speech and storytelling. It stands as a collection of nonfiction, sequential short stories that reflect two lives lived solely in the Appalachian Mountains. This thesis showcases the changes in technology, transportation, and society from the 1930s to current times, using the lens of my grandparents' lives to explore the evolution of Appalachia over the last eighty years. To stay true to oral storytelling nature, I have interviewed my grandparents, recorded the conversations, and written them in the form of short stories, staying true to their voices and providing exact information. *The Taste of Hominy* is a realistic and non-cliché approach to writing Appalachian dialect, bringing to light the vernacular's beauty by using a storytelling voice that reads smoothly while allowing readers to directly infer the distinct location and dialect of the piece, using grammar, colloquialisms, idioms, and constant references to place to inform. This thesis was inspired by many things, but mainly my grandparents. I always told them I would write a book about their lives, and their confidence in me to write these stories down has driven the thesis, which will also document family history. Oral histories are often lost, and I desire to use this piece to preserve my family's history and knowledge of Appalachian life. Other inspirations for this

thesis were *Mason Jars in the Flood* by Gary Carden and *Fair and Tender Ladies* by Lee Smith. These books greatly influenced my writing and view of Southern Literature. My goal was to combine the comical, dialogue-filled voice of Carden and the elegant and honest words of Lee Smith for the thesis's writing style, simultaneously making it fun and thoughtful reading. The collection is split into five main sections, which are as follows and listed from beginning 'til end: "Paul," "Linda," "Raising Kids and Cane," "Trout Pond," and "Granny and Papa and Me." The first two are separate accounts of my grandparents' lives prior to meeting, with the third section combining storylines after they meet and focusing on their relationship and parenting. The fourth section consist of stories taking place after their children move out. Lastly, the fifth portion brings in my point of view as their grandchild, combined with the voices of both grandparents. Each section is connected by an original poem, and these focus on associated themes or places in the following section. With *The Taste of Hominy*, I hope to provide an exploration of the relationship between two Appalachian people and their sense of place, family, and tradition. Furthermore, I desire to cast a positive, truthful light on the Appalachian dialect, showcasing its intricacies. My long-term goal for this thesis is for it to become a completed collection of short stories to honor my grandparents and their home, something that not only preserves my family history but also showcases the rich Appalachian culture found in Western North Carolina.

CRAFT ESSAY

Writing and reading have always been things I enjoy. Pens and paper made sense to me, and I was that weird kid who loved writing assignments in school, even begged for them. I even got in trouble for reading when I wasn't supposed to. Early in life, I knew I wanted to share this love with others, so I completed the Secondary English Education course at Western Carolina University and became an English teacher. However, this took me away from my own reading and writing, making these things feel clinical and, honestly, unenjoyable. So, I chose to pursue a Masters of English with a concentration in creative writing, something I'd always dreamed of studying. My first creative writing class was not until graduate school, and it was Ron Rash's Advanced Fiction Writing course. For my first assignment, I submitted a horror story set in France that read almost like a fairytale. It was very broad and had very few instances of uniqueness, and it showed my lack of knowledge about the French countryside. I remember Professor Rash telling me this: 'Write what you know,' but how was I supposed to do that? No one wanted to hear about mountain life, and I'd never read much writing like that. Throughout the course of this class, I started reading works like *Mason Jars in the Flood* by Gary Carden, *Fair and Tender Ladies* by Lee Smith, and *The Caretaker* by Ron Rash, and it sounded like home, painting such a clear and familiar picture of areas parallel to where I had grown up and voices that sounded like mine and my family's.

After this, I started writing short stories with Southern characters with Southern names and accents, and I could see the pictures so clear in my mind that I could almost touch them. However, I never could get past more than ten pages about one storyline; everything was one and done with no other leads on continuing that thought. At the back of my mind, I always knew I

had to write about my grandparents' lives more than anything else. Not only could I see their stories in my mind but I could also touch those stories, physically and emotionally. My grandma has meticulously kept pictures of our family over the years, and my grandpa loves storytelling more than anyone I know. Every time I sat down to write a fictional story set in Appalachia, I would hear their voices and use them as a template for writing dialogue. When it came to picking a topic for my thesis, there was no other choice.

For starters, I looked at the current state of scholarship about Appalachia and its people. Some of the more recent or popular works are *Those We Thought We Knew* by David Joy, *The Caretaker* by Ron Rash, *Whispering Winds of Appalachia* by John Ellington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake-Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* by Dennis Covington, *Hillbilly Elegy* by JD Vance, and *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver. Many of these books deal with drug abuse or manipulative behavior that takes place around the mountain area, providing a cynical view of the place and its people. Although these are valid discussions that require further exploration and conversation, I wanted my work in *The Taste of Hominy* to shed light on the hard working, self-reliant, diverse, and compassionate people of Western North Carolina. As in these other books, there were challenges and struggles throughout my grandparents' lives, but my grandparents look back on their years in a predominately positive manner, which I think is equally as important to showcase in writing about Appalachian people.

Throughout the past few months, I wrote as much as I could directly from the interviews, and then I went back and edited for clarity, while trying to keep the stories sounding as if the reader were sitting and listening to them on the front porch. Some stories were shorter, so I turned them into dialogue poems, breaking up the style of writing and trying something new to me. In the last section, I strayed more to the whimsical storytelling side to reflect upon my

experience of having them for grandparents as a child. I desired to portray my childhood through the lens of a storybook with my grandparents as characters, because reflecting on my childhood memories often feels like pieces of a fairy tale.

The most challenging part for me has been navigating my emotional connection to these stories. Although it has been a joy, it has also been a struggle writing this collection. I've always been particular about my writing, feeling that it must be perfect the first time around, but, this time, it has to be perfect for my grandparents, the people who helped raised me and now have trusted me with their stories. However, I have realized that perfection is not my aim, as it is an ever-changing definition for different people and provides an unreachable standard, as nothing can truly be perfect. Although I still struggle with this internal pressure, I have found two things to be true: things can't be perfect but can be increasingly better, and those who expect complete perfection are completely unhappy with themselves and others. Recognizing this for myself has been liberating, giving me grace to try different styles of writing and start new stories, without an overwhelming sense of dread when it comes to criticism.

When writing about my grandparents, I had to also accept the truth of their stories as they told them, refraining from adding my viewpoint as much as possible during their conversations. Although they primarily recollected favorable memories, they shared information I had never heard before, such as my grandmother struggling with being the primary caregiver for their children. When I thought my grandfather would rebuttal, he acknowledged that division and listened to her talk. They also repetitively told me that they were 'just dumb kids,' and their candor throughout the interview process helped me to not only write truthfully about their lives but to also feel more at ease admitting my own blunders when it came to writing. Nevertheless, I still wanted to only put forth what they are comfortable with, so I met with my grandparents over

the course of the project and provided drafts of my thesis, encouraging comments and revisions. However, they always loved it and expressed their excitement to see it in writing, since we had always talked about creating a book about their lives. Instead of asking me to revise or minimize, they told me to start recording because they had more memories to tell.

Overall, this project has taught me perseverance with writing, how to conduct data collection, how to transcribe audio, and how to type like my life depends on it. My grandparents' stories were my first venture into the genre of creative nonfiction, and I would not change that for the world. This piece of writing has been heavy on my mind for a while now, and I am proud to have written something that is true to my family and to our little area of Appalachia in Western North Carolina. Without further ado, here is *The Taste of Hominy*.

PAUL

Mountain child of sweat and dirt

Of farming green and red

From life built on honest work

With suntanned arms and spitfire words.

Tobacco burns sweet in the air,

Around green eyes and dark brown hair.

A look of mischief in his smile,

Well-worn jeans and well-earned scars.

The crack of a bull whip,

The smell of ethanol, the blistered hands,

The pieces of boyhood that built

A Carolina mountain man.

The White Rooster

When I's in the sixth grade, I would slip and smoke. Hide and smoke, that is. When my family moved back from Sylva down here to Whittier, the canhouse was underneath the house, and, when there wadn't nobody around, I would slip down in the canhouse and smoke. Well, we had a big old white rooster and a big game rooster. And the game, he was a fighting rooster, but the big old white one, he took a dislike to me. Any time he caught me out, he would try to flog me, and he had some pretty good-sized spurs on him.

Daddy had been remodeling the old house, so he had some corner rounds, about ten-or twelve-foot-long laying on the back porch, and, when you come out of the canhouse, it was just two or three foot over to the edge of the porch. So, I slipped down there to smoke, and I happened to look out. That white rooster had seen me go down in there, he was down there in the corn field, it and the game both. When I started out, I seen him coming, I knew he was coming for me. So, I went ahead and got out of there, and I reached up and got me one of them corner rounds.

As that rooster got within range, I swung at him. It caught him right in the neck. It wrung his neck, and he was a flopping around on the ground. When that game rooster seen him a flopping, here he come just a flying, and he finished killing that white rooster.

When daddy come in from work, I told him, I said, "Daddy, that game killed that old white rooster today."

So, that was the end of the story 'til after I was grown. Before daddy died, we was setting out there shooting the bull one day, and I told him.

I said, "Daddy, you remember that old big white rooster you had?"

He says, "Yeah."

I said, “That game rooster?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, that game didn’t kill that white rooster. I did.”

I told him what I’d been doing and about that game rooster. Once I had that rooster addled, the game come up there and finished the job. Daddy thought it was kind of funny then. He’d have probably beat me half to death if I’d have told him to begin with, especially for me a smoking, too, you know. Kids ain’t supposed to be smoking.

Wagon Racing

Lewis was Daddy's favorite. His momma – my momma's older sister Montez – died. There were two girls in the Denton family, and Daddy married both of them. My momma's name was Eva Nell, and they got married after Montez passed. I've only ever seen one or two pictures of Montez, and all I could tell was that she looked like she was brown headed. But one day, Lewis said that Daddy took him over there where Mac's Indian Village was at.

Daddy said, "Son, would you like to see what your momma looks like."

Lewis said, "Well, yeah."

"Go up there and knock on that door."

Lewis said he went up there and knocked on the door, and this big blonde-headed gal came to the door. Nobody ever found out who it was, but you look at Lewis and he's just as blonde-headed as he can be now at eighty-some, almost ninety years old. Guess Montez must've been blonde headed. But with Lewis not having a momma, Daddy always treated him better than he did the rest of us.

Lewis had a habit of staying with Maw Bradley; that was Daddy's momma. She was married to a Ward, and then, after he died, she married a Bradley and then he died; we called him Pap Bradley, but I never did know him or just don't remember. Well, Lewis lived with her and that made Herman, my younger brother, his favorite. Anything Herman wanted, Daddy'd go to town, and he'd buy candy and bring it in to his little buddy, not offer to share none of it. Ain't no way I was the favorite. I was always the troublemaker, into everything, but I didn't get into trouble much as long as it was Lewis or Herman's idea.

Where that gate's at right up here, the road used to go right down through there past the old barn. It used to be a big old barn, and it had a hay loft in it and three or four stables down

each side. From the house, it seemed like it took forever to get up to the barn. Daddy built the wagon and put rubber car tires on it. When he got the frame and everything together, there was a tongue on it to pull it with the horses. Well, that tongue would raise up, and you could push it back and forth to move the wheels. Lewis, the oldest of us, decided we were going to take a ride on that. We pushed it up here to the property line, and they was me and Betty and Herman and Denny Green and Lewis, don't know if anybody else was there or not.

The sucker didn't have no brakes. The wagon started down the hill, and we come a flying by the time we got down to the yard. Where the driveway at the old house is now, there used to be a smokehouse, a big old building where Daddy kept his shell corn and his liquor down in the corn. He used to make some liquor; there wasn't much the old people didn't do. But anyway, it was a building where they stored their stuff, but we come through there and Lewis sideswiped that building trying to get stopped. Like I say, we didn't have no brakes. Lewis or Herman, one, maybe it was Denny Green, got a splinter crammed through their nose, and then Momma had to pull it out. But we all got banged up pretty bad, and we didn't take that ride no more, warped the wheels on the wagon even.

But we didn't really get in trouble. Daddy didn't do much since Lewis was in charge.

LINDA

Before the beehive hairdos,
my short hair was still permed,
coiling up to tickle my ears and
rest like light brown cumulus clouds
beneath my chin. It held unfailingly for
basketball games and work at the restaurant
and mothering two little brothers. Momma couldn't
help it, those drives to Asheville and Sixteen-hour
workdays and six-day work weeks of
mothering the kids of the fur coat factory owner.
They might believe that she's theirs, but I know
She is *my* mother, and I her daughter,
The one she bore on Cedar Creek
Some years ago, inside the modest house
With twelve sons and daughters all wedged
between four wood walls and in three small rooms,
the childhood before becoming the mother of two
that my little, sweet momma needed me to be.

School and Work in Glenville

My growing up time in Glenville was spent either at home, in school, or at work. I remember having working horses when we were little, but I don't remember riding horses. When Daddy was alive, he had a big old truck, and we all had to ride on the back of the truck if we went to town. And we had horses and a wagon to work the farm. We had a wagon; everybody had a wagon back then for farming.

When Daddy was still alive, we used to be able to go fishing, too, so we'd all climb in the truck bed and go to the lake. As long as we lived in Glenville, we didn't have to have a license to fish the lake. After he died, Momma didn't get to do a lot of stuff with us, because she always had to babysit for the Jennings family in Asheville. They owned a fur coat factory, where they'd make coats out of mink fur. We didn't do a whole lot, you know, together. Like I said, she had to work all the time, and I kept Tillmon and James at the house. They were the youngest of my siblings, and Momma needed someone to watch them, you know.

During the week, I went to Glenville School. It was all Glenville school, from the first grade to the twelfth grade. I didn't have any run-ins with teachers; I was a good kid, unlike your Papa. But let me tell about the English teacher. He was a preacher at the Methodist church, and all the boys, well, you know how boys does.

They said, "Let's get Preacher Nally talking about the Bible today, and we won't get to have class."

Of course, they got him talking for thirty-five, forty minutes, and we didn't have to have class. Everybody was happy.

And we had home economics. That's where you go in and make a dress or something, learn to cook and sew. Now, I liked that class real well. I didn't like typing, didn't like history, didn't

like any of that stuff. Let me think, I liked when you used letters and numbers and stuff – Algebra. I reckon it just clicked with me, and I could do it in a heartbeat. But history and stuff, everybody should know that I don't like to read, so it wasn't my best subject. Now, your papa has always liked to read.

In high school, I was a good ball player, and I played for Glenville for four years. Me and my older sisters Mary and Mamie all played basketball. James and Tillmon played, too. It wasn't a position in basketball back then. There were forwards and guards, and that was it. I played forward, and the game was half-court, all I played was half-court. At the end of the twelfth grade, they changed over to where one person could go roving over and back. Leola Bryson was the one who done that; she was a guard.

RAISING KIDS AND RIVER CANE

Kids are trouble, and river canes are too,
Both grow like weeds and test the
Boundaries set for them. They both are
curious and spread their branches into
The world, stretching for things we never thought
Were in reach. But roots run deep and act
As anchors, the watershed supplying growth
Much like we provide a home for our own,
Watching them develop a distaste for coconut
And an obsession with game night spaghetti,
Crashing cars and getting married,
Knowing that canes and kids grow upward from
Their roots and towards unknowns, while
The water flows constant underground,
For they are ours to feed life into, and ours to let go.

The Places We've Lived

Paul

We stayed up at Linda's mom's for three months after we got married. We were married in March, and she had to stay up there with Tillmon and James 'til school was out. James was fifth or sixth grade, and Tillmon was in the ninth when Linda graduated, and we stayed up there 'til school was out for her momma to come home and take care of them boys. She was babysitting in Asheville for the Jennings family, worked for them for years,.

Well, I was working in Bryson City at the furniture factory, so I was driving every day from up there in Glenville to Bryson City for work, and I burnt a set of tires off in three weeks running up and down that mountain. They just had the two-lane highway over here, and Glenville was kind of like it is now. I'd leave from up there and be at work in less than an hour. I flew.

But anyway, we moved from there, and we rented Claude Ridley's old house that's across the Swinging Bridge in Whittier. Penny come down to see us one time, and she had to get down on her hands and knees and crawl across the bridge to get up to the house. That was cute. She was scared to death of it, but at least she come to see us.

Then, we rented the Hyde house down here, and we lived in it a pretty good little while, rented it off of Roy and Mary Bell Bryson. That was down here across the creek from the station. I was still working for that furniture company down there at Bryson, making beds, dressers, stuff like that. We all had different parts; the lumber would come down through, and one of us would do something to it, another would do something to it, and then it got back to back, and they put it together and shellacked it.

Anyway, we lived over there for a couple of years, and then we bought our trailer and moved it down there at my mama's house, and stayed there a year. Then, we moved to Waynesville. I went to work for Cannon Brothers Gas and Oil Company, driving the gas and oil truck, and I done that for a while. Down there behind Dillsboro, where that big beer joints out now, that's where the oil company was set up, Cannon Brothers Gas and Oil. One day, I went by Dayco, me and somebody, and we put in our applications for a job. It was a factory that made rubber hoses and stuff, and they paid more. So, they hired me, and I told them that I'd need to work a notice at the gas company before I could start. I come down there and told old Cannon that I was turning in my notice and that I was going to work at Dayco. Oh, that man come all to pieces. He called Dayco, and he throwed a fit on them for hiring me.

Anyway, I went to work at Dayco, and I was coming home one morning after working graveyard, and it snowed. As I come around up there on the mountain, coming down this side of Blanton Branch, there was snow on the highway, and my tires just wouldn't hold. My car, it would slide sideways like that, and I'd bring it back around and it'd go back sideways like that. It got fast on me and turned all the way around, and here I am going down the road backwards, knew I was going to go off the road and didn't want to hurt my neck. So, I laid my neck back against the seat and plowed up the ditch line. When it stopped, I jumped out, and there was somebody behind me that worked at Dayco. So, I jumped in the vehicle with them, and they brought me on home. Then, I went back up and got Sammy Cogdill there at Cogdill Motor Company to run up there and pull me out. Me and Sammy, we growed up together.

Anyway, I come home to the house then, and I know I needed to report it but hadn't seen no highway patrol. A day or two later, I went up to Patrolman Marr at Sylva, there on the Fairview Road, got him out of bed, and told him what had happened.

He said, “Alright. Your vehicle get tore up? Did you get hurt?”

“No, it alright, and I’m alright.”

“Don’t worry about it then,” he said.

After that little mishap, I decided it was about time I quit having to drive that far.

~

Linda

When we moved from the Hyde house and bought our trailer and set it up next to Ward’s parents, I was pregnant with Jeff. I moved all day long, carried stuff from the house over to here, and went and had Jeff that night. Yeah, I worked so hard.

They was okay then, everybody was okay then living next to your family-in-law. We had to move in with them there for a little while before we rented that house across the Swinging Bridge. We got the back bedroom on the first side at the end of my parents’ house down there, and that wadn’t long, ‘cause we wanted out of there. Five of Paul’s sisters were living at home – Barbara, Joyce, Ruby, Norma Lee, and Eva Dean – so no privacy.

Anyways, after I’d picked up and carried all day to move into the trailer, I had Jeff. Paul had went to work, and I ended up going to the doctor and they put me in the hospital. Dr. Mitchell was my doctor, and Paul’s momma, Eva Nell, was there and a couple other people, and they stayed with me a little while.

Doc Mitchell came out when Paul got there and said to him, “You ain’t got no business being here. Ain’t nothing you can do, so go onto the house. She ain’t going to have no baby tonight.”

Back then, you didn’t have anybody with you in there. Just the doctors and nurses.

So, he went to the house, and I had the baby right after he left, and it felt like no one cared about me with me being all alone at the hospital, and you weren't allowed nobody back there with you, not even my momma could've been there. We've seen a lot of changes in our lifetime.

Free Gambling

Paul

He pulled out a hundred dollars. He says, “Here.”

He said, “Go in there and spend that in there.”

I said, “I don’t want to go in there and lose your money.”

“You won’t be losing my money ‘cause

I own that place; I’ll be getting it back.”

I said, “Okay,” and Linda said, “I’ll take it!”

and she reached and got it.

Now Linda says, “How dumb we was. He give us

a hundred dollars, we went in there and blowed every

penny of it. We could’ve come back out with that hundred

dollars and we would’ve had another dinner or two off of it.”

But anyway, we came back out and ran into him.

He said, “How’d you do?”

Linda said, “We lost every bit of it. You got it back.”

And we did, every penny of it. Didn’t win nothing.

All the Way to Glenville

Paul

It come a real good snow one weekend, and I had a date with Linda on Saturday night. It was crazy for anybody to be out, but I jumped in the car and took off and went from here in Whittier to up there to Glenville, about thirty-five miles.

She come to the door, and she said, "What are you doing here?"

I says, "I just thought I'd see if I could make it up here, since we had a date tonight, and, well, I made it. Got to go now."

Then, I turned around, come back to the house. The car wadn't a four-wheel drive. I believe it was the orange yellow '58 Mercury. It was loud!

We didn't have phones and stuff at the time, so couldn't call her and cancel. They all thought I was crazy. Linda definitely thought I was, and maybe I *was* just a tad bit crazy.

Back then, I'd go up and get her and go to a movie. Her little brother James would pile in the car with us. I think sometimes he rode in between us coming down the road. He was twelve, fourteen, sixteen, something… No, he didn't have a license, so he was twelve or fourteen, and he was a pest, Lord a mercy. He was a good youngin, and he was a pest. James had to go everywhere we went, but we didn't mind. That was my little brother, too.

Her other brother Tillmon was old enough to get out and loafer around town, but James wadn't. So, we took him with us a lot. We never refused him when he wanted to go with us. Thank goodness her momma would be home some weekends so we didn't have to take him. We was just youngins ourself. Bunch of crazy hillbilly kids.

Popping the Question

Linda

I was eighteen when we started dating.
Would've been nineteen in April,
Got engaged September 21st,
got married March the 21st,
and Jeff was born on May the
21st the next year.

I don't remember *how* he
done it. I really don't.
Do you remember how you
proposed to me, Paul?
He didn't get down on one
knee! Lord no.
He probably said, "Hey, you
want to get hitched?
Here's you a ring!"

And look at my finger now.
That bone in there, it is sore.
I can't wear a ring no more.

Gave my rings to my daughter.

She gave them to my granddaughter.

Paul told her, “If you get hard up

for money, pawn ‘em.”

“Papa!” she scolded him.

I taught that girl well.

Groundhog Trouble

Paul

Linda's little brother James found a baby groundhog one day, still had its eyes closed and was all alone. So, James picked it up and brought it in to Linda's momma, and Granny Moody loved that thing. You could tell 'cause that groundhog was about yea big around from all the stuff she'd feed it. She'd get some light bread and applesauce and put together a sandwich for it, growed it off of them. And from the time the groundhog got home, Granny Moody would pick it up and hold it like a year-old baby up on her chest.

We didn't know if it liked anyone else though, because nobody else had the nerve to pick the thing up, wouldn't touch it. They had a canhouse underneath the front porch of Granny Moody's house, and they'd built a tater bin and shelves in there to set their canned stuff on, and it was solid dirt floor. The groundhog dug him some holes in the walls and would winter up down there, hibernate. Things stayed about the same temperature year-round, 'cause it was underground, you know.

That groundhog made holes in the dirt walls of the canhouse, and Granny Moody would leave the door open so it could travel freely and come upstairs and see her. One day, me and Linda were up there visiting and eating supper with Granny Moody, and Linda did not like that groundhog, wasn't an animal person. Her momma told her to go down to the basement and get some taters for supper, and she drug me down there with her, scared to death.

She says to me, "Paul, go down here in the basement with me and watch for that groundhog while I get some taters."

Well, I went down there with her, and the groundhog, he had dug two holes in the wall. The hole that was fresh was the one I was watching. The one that was old was right there at her feet, beside the tater bin, and I thought he'd be over there in that new hole. First thing I know, she squalled out and over the tater bin she went. The groundhog had got her by the ankle. If she went in that canhouse right now, some fifty years later, she'd still be watching for groundhogs.

Couple years later, the groundhog got too big for Granny Moody to handle any more. We took it up on Pine Creek in Glenville and set it out. It was going to the neighbors, going in the houses, and everyone was griping and complaining

They'd say, "Come and get your groundhog!"

First Born Son

Paul

Granny Moody gave Jeff a BB gun that she had got from Dickie Jennings or somebody, and I brought it home and loaded it for Jeff, like any good country dad would do. I would go out with him whenever he went out to shoot it. One day, I was going to let him go out and shoot it, but I was slow about getting out of the house. Well, he took the BB gun, and he went ahead and went on out.

Glenn Mathis had a ’67 Chevelle Impala, two-door hardtop, black one, beautiful little car, big car back then. I was still in the house, and Jeff went over to Glenn and Tiny’s, and knocks on the door and wants Tammie, their little girl, to come out and play with him. She was his cousin, and she was three or four years older than Jeff, I reckon. She came to the door but didn’t want to play, and hit Jeff, smacked him across the face. He started back to the house and turned around, and he shot the car, shot the back window out. And guess who had to pay for a new back window? So, that ended the BB gun.

That was the only trouble Jeff ever caused. Except for the time he ran away. He was three or four at the time and had his running shoes on. He run away from us, thought it’d be funny, and he went up to Ms. Plemons’s and out that little road there where we picked berries. He come out through there, and I went to get him. I seen Jeff come back down the road, and I was going to whip him to start with. But he run back down and hid in the front of that fiberglass red and white boat we had, and I couldn’t find him; he was hiding from me. When I final found him, I was so glad to see him I don’t even think I whooped him.

Back when Jeff was little, Linda and Valerie got to stay at home a lot, and I came home and got Jeff and took him down and signed him for football. Without Linda's knowledge, and that made her real mad. She said Jeff was just a little boy and little boys weren't supposed to be playing football yet. But he wanted to play.

In a couple more years, when Jeff was probably about six or seven, I bought him a minibike. I rode him around the yard on it, and then he was wanting to ride it by himself. So, we go out to the end of the trailer in Waynesville, and we had a rail fence around the house. Well, I told him what to do, what not to do, like you turn the handle on a motorcycle to make it go. But the youngin took off, and, when he give it the gas, he went back. As he went back, he was holding on for dear life, and he opened it up and that minibike went up on the back wheel.

Here he went, down through the pasture there at the side of the house on that bike. Well, when it come down, he came down a hitting that rail fence. The handlebar went in here in his stomach. It's a wonder it didn't kill him, but he lived through it and we didn't have to take him to the doctor or nothing.

A Daughter was Born

Linda

I went down to my sister Bobbie's with Jeff, who was only about two years old at the time, because you couldn't take kids to the hospital. Your husband couldn't come in the room either; the waiting room was as far as Paul would get to go. But I was going to have to drive myself to the hospital. It wadn't but a hop and a jump, and I could've made it.

But he finally got there to Bobbie's house, and me and Bobbie gave him a good chewing out for taking his sweet time. Finally, Paul drove me to the hospital, they took me back, and, next thing I knew, Valerie was born, and I don't know how she got here. They knocked me out. They had to, because I don't remember nothing. There wadn't no doctor around, because I was trying to find a doctor to sign her birth certificate. Nobody didn't do it, so I just got one of them doctors in the hospital to sign it so she'd have a doctor on her birth certificate. That was the only thing I knew to do. Paul says that she might be ours or she might be not, but she's mine. I don't know about him, but I'll take her, even though she looks a lot like him and his side.

Jeff was sick missing his momma, so Paul brought him over to the hospital to see me and baby Valerie. Oh, he was so sick. You see, I'd never left him, and he did not get by too good. He sure did love his momma, was homesick for me. Paul brought him over, and they were sitting in the waiting room 'til they could come back to the room. Jeff wanted some Life Savers, so Paul got up to get him some from the vending machine down there. When he started to get them, some man sitting over there took a fit.

He said to Ward, "Don't you give him that!"

"What's the matter?" Paul asked him.

The man told him his throat was messed up because one of those Life Savers got hung in his throat when he was little. So, we never bought Jeff Life Savers again. But anyway, all that to say that Valerie was a good youngin, even though Paul wadn't around to help me.

Paul Ward did not change not one diaper or feed the kids or anything with those two children. He'd bring candy, especially for Valerie. He'd bring her Mounds bars when she was so little that I'd have to pinch it off with my fingers and put it in her mouth, just to watch her gag and spit it out. He thought that was funny.

TROUT POND

Bait the line with a chubby worm
Until its inside pop around the hook,
Sliding through membrane until secure.
Flip the reel and hold the line,
Cast into the shadows and the rocks,
And wait patiently for the bobber to
Be drug down beneath the ripples.
Jerk the line to snag ahold, and reel
until the scales shine in the daylight.
Take a hand and smooth its fins back.
Pry its lip from the barb.
Toss it back and watch it scurry away,
Dorsal tail slapping against the water,
Or keep it and filet it here, knife and
Table at the ready. A circle of life, either way,
For all trout will die one day, but are
Best buried in cornmeal, salt, and pepper.

One Fish, Two Fish, Lots of Fish

Paul

I didn't have no fish in the pond. We went down to Stecoah, where the hatchery was at, and I was going to buy me a hundred dollars' worth of fish, just, you know, probably fifty fish for a hundred dollars' worth. And so when I got to talking to the two brothers who owned the place, they started asking about what I already got in the pond.

I says, "There ain't a thing in it."

They says, "Well, why don't you raise your own?"

I can do that, I thought. I told them to bring me a hundred dollars' worth. Well, I bought me a bag of feed to go with it. Day or two later, they brought my fish, and they dumped them in out there, little, tiny things.

I says, "Well how many fish you figure I've got?"

They both laughed. They said, "Oh, about a thousand."

Well, it was November then, and I'd go out there, and I'd throw that feed out on the pond, just a handful. It was kind of like flakes. I'd just throw it out off the dock there, and it'd hit the water and just go like that, you know, it'd just spread out. Nothing had come up and hit it; nothing wouldn't eat. I'd come out there every day. I'd throw a handful out – nothing.

It was like that all winter long, and then about March or April it had prettied up – it was nice. I'd go out there, and I'd throw a handful out. Oh, the pond just boiled. It come alive. It got warm enough that they come up to eat. And so then, I didn't know how much to feed them, so I'd go out there and I'd throw it out 'til they kind of quit eating. I didn't know it then, but you ain't supposed to do fish that way, 'cause they eat all the time

Then as they growed, I started getting the bigger feed for them, and so Linda, one day, she says, “You’re gonna have to do something. We can’t afford this.” She says, “It’s costing us fifty dollars or more a month feed bill for them trout.”

I told her, “We’ll open it up to fishing.”

She says, “You’ll never sell enough fish to pay the feed bill.”

Well, after about two or three years, I fixed me a little sign down there on the side of the highway, the side of the road there, and them people working down here at the furniture factory, they’s a couple of them stopped by and fished. Everything I had in that there pond was two and a half to four and a half pound. They was monstrous fish.

They’d take that big fish off and show it to people, and then others would find out where they caught it at, so somebody else would come. Word of mouth built my business. And seven, eight years after we closed down, there was still people calling, wanting to come here and go fishing.

We could’ve still been in business with the trout pond if we had’ve wanted to, but it got to where it was a pain. Linda and me neither one couldn’t keep dealing with it. People wouldn’t watch their kids, and I had to drag two kids out and two or three grown people. There was a man and woman come in. They had three kids, and they’s out there about where that little stick’s sticking on the side of the pond right yonder.

But I explained to them, I says, “You’ve got to watch your children.” I says, “My banks are straight off and I’m eighteen foot deep. Watch your kids.”

“Oh, we watch our children. There’s one fell in the pool the other day; we don’t have to worry about watching them around water again.”

Well, I's talking, and then, in a minute, I counted heads and there wadn't enough there. I looked around, and I had one a-laying out yonder. He was already stretched out.

I said, "Oh my Lord, you've got one in the pond."

I hit the water. When I got out there to it, it had done turnt; it was laying flat of its back out like this. It had turned and it had started down, and I'd grabbed it, got it before it got far, and I drug it back to the bank. But the bank's straight down, so I couldn't get out with it. They kept standing up there, and they didn't even move to help or nothing. Finally, I turned him around to face me. I just give him a shove and throwed him up on the bank. When he hit on his bottom, it jarred the water out of him, and he went to crying. He was just a little feller, hadn't been put in school. Probably two or three.

Then, in November, the same year that kid fell in, there's two old men come one day, and they wanted to fish. And so they's fishing, and this oldest one, he caught one right down there and he's reeling it in, and it was a big one too. When he got up nearly to the bank, he starts backing up with it. Then, he grabs the line, and he slides the fish out on the bank. When he slid it out on the bank, he throws his pole down and he makes a run to grab it. It's wet. It's wintertime. His feet flew out from under him. Pew, into the pond he went.

So, I got him out and asked him, I said, "You got any dry clothes with you?"

"No, they're all up at this man's house," he said, pointing to his buddy.

I says, "Well, come on up here. I think you can wear mine. We got to get you some dry clothes on, get you a hot shower," because, you know, it was cold.

I brought him up here and helped him get his shirt off and got the shower going, and Linda hunted him out some clothes, and I went back down there to the pond.

I said to the other guy, "Man, I hate he fell in the water."

He says, “I ain’t worried about him falling in the water. He just got out of the hospital with open heart surgery.”

Oh my Lord. In a minute, he got out of the shower and come down there.

He says, “Boy, I hate I missed that big fish.”

I said, “I’m just glad you’re alright.”

As they started to leave, he says, “I’ll bring your clothes back.”

“Don’t worry about,” I says. “You can have them. I’m just glad you’re alright.”

The next day when I come in from work, he had them dried and folded up and setting out there on the table. They were gone, but my clothes was there.

Then one year it got real hot, and the fish quit biting, so we’d closed it up. I had a gate across out there, and I closed the gate and everything. And so I told Linda, I says, “I’ve got to go down to the ice plant in Bryson.”

Anyway, I was walking around the pond one morning, and right out yonder where you come up from the building at the gate out there, here layed a Bowie knife about yea long, and it was a nice one. The sheath was laying there, and it was laying on top of the sheath. I think to myself, ‘Somebody fished me last night.’ And you could see it was kind of wore down, and they was some rocks a laying there, too. They had three or four rocks there where they could throw them at a man ‘til they could get away.

Right dumb like, I just pitched the rocks in the pond and picked the knife up. I brought it on to the house and told Linda what I’d found, and then I got to thinking about it.

I says, “I’ve got to go down to get some ice.” I says, “You keep an eye out. Ever who done that will come back a looking for that knife.”

Going into Bryson City, where Kirkland's Creek's at, there used to be a building right there, and it was an ice plant; they made ice blocks. They was about so big a square and about yea long. They was probably about 300 pounders. Anyway, the pond water got so hot the fish quit biting, so I'd go down there and buy three and four blocks of ice, bring it up here, and slide it off in the pond to cool the water off so my fish wouldn't die on me for a couple three weeks there 'til they'd go back to biting.

Well, I took off and went and got the ice at that plant. I come back and I dumped it in, and I closed the gate and come on to the house. I went in there and started to eat me some supper. 'Bout that time I looked, and there was a man had on a pair of overalls, a t-shirt with the sleeves out, tattoos all up here on his neck, all over him, a big old ugly feller. He probably weighed 300 pound or better, and I had to look up at him. But here he was out there, walking around a hunting that knife. I just grabbed my pistol, and I stuck it down the back of my pants.

I told Linda, I says, "There's our man."

I took off. I started out through there. I got about halfway out there to him, and he seen me coming and then he took off and he come a-meeting me.

I said, "What can I do for you?"

He said, "Well I've got some youngins. I want to bring them fishing." He says, "I was just checking it out."

I says to him, "Well, we're closed. Don't know when we'll be open."

"Alright, then. I'll go," and he turned and started back.

And I just walked out through there following him. The fish house used to set on the left side of the driveway there, just the other side of the little wellhouse that's there now. I had a fish house there where I weighed the fish up and everything. I walked out there and watched him, and

he went right out down the front of the building, right down by the old barn of daddy's, and he had a van sitting down there. And JD Hensley's brother, I forget his name now, but he was setting in the van, and when I looked at him, boy, he wheeled that head around to keep me from seeing his face, but I already seen who it was. But he died here a while back. The guy he's with must've been some of his friends, I don't know, but I ain't never seen none of them since, but I've still got that Bowie knife.

To spruce up the pond a bit and give fishing customers a place to use the bathroom, I built a two-seater outhouse, and it was real nice. Oh law, everybody, people would come, they'd have to use the bathroom. That's were I'd send them to. And it was down there about where the front of the building where the barn used to be. But people would come back up there to the pond and brag on that outhouse, how nice to was and everything. One day, I had some people from New York, and they was a wanting to use the bathroom. I told them right down there. Well, they went down there. Aw man, you talk about throwing a fit. They didn't want to use that bathroom. Refused to use it. The woman went around behind it back there and just squatted down on the ground. She said the outhouse ought to be illegal.

I says, "Lady, I paid high dollar just to get it permit to do that." I said, "It's clean. I clean it every day."

I told them I said, "Well, that's it. Either that or nothing."

But everybody except them, everybody if they had to go down there and use, if they commented on it, it was always something good. We even had a catalog from Sears and Roebuck hanging in it. Of course, we had the toilet paper in there, but that's what old people used to use is the catalogs for wiping purposes.

You didn't have nothing else, and back then the old catalogs, the paper in it was soft. I tied a couple corn cobs up and let them hang in there and then that Sears and Roebuck Catalog. Everybody got a kick out of them.

A Stinky Situation

Paul

I'd set out traps and catch coons, and I'd call Jeff Nations. He'd come out here and get them, and I'd tell him that he could have the coon but don't turn it loose on this side of the river. You take it somewhere else to run your dogs or whatever or eat it, but don't turn it back loose, don't want it back out here to dig up the yard. One day, I go over there to check on my traps, and I've got a skunk. I didn't know how to go about getting it out of the trap and it alive. Well, old dumb me got my gun, and I shot it.

I think to myself, "Okay, I'll go on back to the house and come on over here in a few minutes to dump it out."

I do that and come back out of the house, and, Lord a mercy, this whole holler stunk, 'cause that skunk, when I killed it, it released. So, for a week or two or three, everything stunk around here, even the cages.

Not too long ago, we was trying to catch a groundhog that had been tearing up our flower beds, so I set me out another live trap. A skunk got in there again, and it was pretty, white with a little black strip about that wide down his back. This time, I took a piece of black plastic and laid it over the cage, and then I reached down there and unsnapped the cage, dropped the lid down, and walked off. Well, I waited ten or fifteen minutes, and that skunk didn't offer to come out. I went over and got the tarp and took it with me. When I was well enough away, I looked back, and he was laying in there asleep. It finally woke up and left, but he was at home in there.

Old dumb me, I let the live trap sit out the next night, and it caught another one, must've been the white one's brother or sister one. It was all black, except a little white strip down the

sides, beautiful skunks. We decided they was eating all the worms and grubs out the yards. You could see where the yard was full of little holes, but we'll see if those skunks will hang around with me now, after getting into the trap.

One time, me and my uncle up here, Joe Ward, we caught two baby skunks. We was sitting on the porch out there at daddy's, and the momma skunk was going down to the river and had four or five babies tagging along behind her. In about thirty minutes, she came back up from the water and come back up this way, and she just had three with her, probably left the rest of them at their home. So, me and Joe, we decided we were going to catch us a couple of them and take them, have them fixed.

We took off over there and went up through the cornfield after her, and she was a-running away. We run two of them down, and we catch them. As you go across there from Walmart, as you go down the hill, a vet used to be there on the right. I took them up there, and he was supposed to get the glands out for me. Well, I call him that evening or the next day one.

"Oh, they both died on the table," he says to me.

I should've went up there and said, 'I want my bodies,' but I didn't. He had fixed them and sold them to somebody, because that was high dollar stuff back then. But anyway, I ain't never took nothing back to that old vet.

GRANNY AND PAPA AND ME

Cane poles grow in Appalachia,

Not bamboo.

River cane is also acceptable terminology.

Comparable to kudzu, they overtake

The land, rising from the ground in little spires

And growing ten feet in ten days.

Huddling near the water, they provide

Shade and ticks and beauty,

A wonderfully annoying plant.

Canes make great forests to run through,

Makeshift cups when cut correctly,

Swords to fight with when they first grow,

And a useful fishing pole when

Hook and line are added.

What a dream of childhood to have

Cane poles and a pond.

Adventures with Granny and Papa

Linda

"It's too cold to be sitting outside in February. Come on in and we'll get a bite to eat and talk," I tell Faith.

"Sorry I'm so late, Granny. I meant to be here by four, but I got to grading papers," she says, laying her purse on the table and grabbing a handful of animal crackers to snack on.

"Don't worry about that, baby girl. We ain't going anywhere today."

"Well, I was wondering if you could tell me about some of the places you took me when I was little," she says in between bites, "when you kept me during the summer."

"Me and your Papa used to take you on all kinds of adventures, Faith. You might have a long recording for these stories."

~

One of your favorite places was the Sliding Rock in Cashiers. You was just little when you first jumped in that water, and you loved to swim. We were worried to death about you sliding down those rocks or jumping in that deep hole in the middle, but, that first time we was there, we met this lifeguard from South Carolina, who was there with his kids that day. 'Cause I was not going to let you go in there.

I told you, I said, "No!"

We went over there and asked him if we let our granddaughter go out there and you wanted to jump in that hole if he'd stand over there in case you needed some help getting out. He told us he wouldn't mind at all to do that, so we let you go. You went over there and slid off into the hole and come back up by yourself. You didn't need his help. You did good! We was okay

with it then, but you used to have a time up there. Paul stood at the bottom where the big swimming area was, I stood at top where you'd slide down, and that lifeguard man watched you when you slid off into that big old hole in the middle. But all these years my family lived up there, we didn't know about the Sliding Rock 'til you were in elementary school. I guess my brother Tillmon finally told us it existed. Now they're charging you to go up there. Somebody's trying to make a killing off a doing that.

One time, Faith, you slid down that first side of the rock and got a bit too close to the edge. There was this rock sticking up just a tad, and your outside leg hit that and you were bruised up for weeks. But you still kept on playing that day. You made some friends with two little girls from out of state, and, oh, you had a big time. We loved taking you up there, and we got to see some of the old places we used to visit.

One of them was the old Cashier's schoolhouse. They was a moving it somewhere down the road so they could build where it was at, and we got to see it picked up and put on the trailer. Ain't been back to see where they put it, but they was moving it over there and we had to sit and watch them. The guy that was over the Asheville News, he wanted to talk to me.

I said, "Nope, I don't want to talk to you."

I just couldn't talk to a weatherman or a man who done stuff over the tv. Could you see me up there trying to do something like that? The weatherman wanted to know where I was from, and I told him that I was born and raised right up here in Glenville.

He said, "Oh, well you can tell me all this stuff!"

"Nope."

I've seen people on the news who really just made a butt out of theirself, and I said I didn't want to be like them, so we just set there and watched and watched and watched. They

couldn't get the old schoolhouse under the powerlines that went across the road. They had to hold them up and everything. And remember, it was the old Cashier's school from a hundred years ago, and they jacked it up and put it on a rollback trailer and was moving it somewhere down through there, close to where we was at Sliding Rock.

~

"We'll all go one day, give us an excuse to loafer around again."

My Life in the Canebrake

Faith

Back in my middle school summers, I hadn't always carried an axe with me to the canebrake, but it turned out to be handy. I tossed it back and forth from hand to hand, standing at the edge of my little forest behind Granny and Papa's pond, just past the fence and over the bank. Its weight felt heavy yet natural in my grip, and the curved metal gleamed in the afternoon sunlight, the bright hours after a lunch of banana and Dorito sandwiches, a strange concoction Papa and myself had made. The axe was maybe two foot long in total, with a curved blade with two crisp points attached to the side, thanks to Papa sharpening and cleaning it for me. Peering out into the canes, I saw a scraggly pole that had crept up in the middle of the trailhead I'd worked hard to maintain. Gripping the axe in my dirt covered, chubby ten-year-old hands, I squared up, hefted the axe over my shoulder, and swung.

Canes were easy to chop down, yet annoying at the same time. They'd split in every direction, or a spike would be left to trip over if you didn't cut them down to the dirt. Granny knew the way around that – an electric saw cut those things like butter compared to my axe. Technically, it wasn't *butter*, considering it would jar your teeth out 'til the cane toppled over, but the cut was smoother, making it perfect for creating cups. Ringed sections travel up the cane, visible from the outside and spaced about a foot a part on the typical ones, and these create an inside layer that fully separates the cane into sections. Granny would cut the bigger ones into pieces, right at the base of the partition and trim it off about six inches above those lines, making the perfect cups for my play kitchen. I'd serve creek water to Granny in those cups, but she

didn't seem to mind playing pretend, making me more cups when mine inevitably cracked and peeled. By the end of my second-grade summer, I had a collection.

To match my cups, Papa fashioned me a couple fishing poles out of cane. For this, he'd search the cane break for a thin cane that was about my height at the time, a little under five foot, and he'd make sure the limbs were stripped from the sides, taking a knife and slicing the tiny limbs that branched off from the trunk. At the smaller end of the pole, Papa would drill a tiny hole and thread fishing line through, tie it taut at the top, and trim off the excess. The finishing touch was to attach a red and white bobber near the bottom, with a sinker and a barbed hook below that. I'd cast my line out from the creaky dock and look across the pond towards the cane break, waiting for a bite. The bobber would float on the water for a minute, a little pill that didn't melt, and then I'd see it out the corner of my eye. First, it would only be a ripple sent out over the water, and then whoosh. The bobber was gone, a crappie or a bluegill falling for the impaled earth worm or mushy piece of bread that caked the points of the hook. With all my might, I'd pull the monster in, more like lift it up since cane fishing poles don't have a reel, and steady the line with my left hand. Papa would leave his station at the back on the dock, leaving the red, metal rocking chair swaying freely back and forth with the water under the dock's old boards. He'd take hold of the cane for me and remind me to smooth down the fish's back fins before grabbing hold of it. It'd flop around on that line, but I finally got a grip, its scales reflecting the late afternoon light. As gently as I could, I popped the hook out of the fish's lip, looked it over one last time, about lost my hold, and quickly chucked it back in the water, forgetting the gentleness I had once strived for. With a chuckle, Papa would wedge the hook into one of the cane's rings, and we'd walk over to the shed to lay my rod on top of the tin roof for the night.

In my teenage years, I forgot how much I loved the cane break. Instead, I chose to lounge around in at Granny and Papa's after Dad dropped me off after school, watching tv and eating popcorn. Propped up in their back bedroom, volume blaring *Dr. Who*, I failed to notice the flames coming from the other cane break across the creek, the one my wooden playhouse sat in. The door creaked open to the room, and I paused my show for Granny to tell me the news. While she hurried back outside to wait for the fire trucks, I pushed the off button on the remote and slowly walked to the French doors attached to the far wall of room, leading out to the deck. Pulling back the curtains, I saw flames climbing steadily up the rungs of the canes like they were ladders and reaching fiery hands towards the thick canopy of leaves.

The firefighters arrived, and they did the same as me – watched it burn. There was nothing to do for the canes except keep the fire contained to them and my little playhouse, too. My cup collection and a wooden table Papa made, my Native princess clock that was once home to one of the biggest spiders known to man, all of that was gone faster than I expected. I always thought the cane break would be there, cuddled up to my childhood playhouse, waiting for me to grow up and come back home. There was my other cane break, the one with the crooked pathways, but I had always had the two together, two sides of the same coin. Teenage me didn't realize how lucky I was, two cane breaks to play in and two grandparents to love me. That cane break never grew back, but, years later, I stand with my grandparents in the spot where it once was, chopping wood for their wood stove, no longer waiting in the house for life to happen without me.

Pond Water

Faith

My granny and papa's pond always seemed like a world of its own, with a scraggly old Christmas tree sunk down beside the right end of the dock, a rock nestled in the bank that was perfect to jump from, and snapping turtles buried in the mud at the bottom. When I was little, they'd fasten a faded blue life jacket on me, and I'd pull it down with a grumpy tug, never caring for the chafing my armpits and neck had to endure with it on. I'd start wading out at the front side of the pond, toes sinking into the soft mud and making a slurping sound when lifted for my next steps. I'd finally make it out to 'open water' and make my rounds over to the main dock, and then the little one on the other shore.

Frogs liked to lay their eggs around the docks and the water pipe, strings of slimy, shimmery eggs floating along. With a net in hand, I stalked around the pond, intent on finding the frogs who'd made them. I was good at being quiet when hunting for frogs, tiptoeing in the grass and leaving my shoes in the house, where a six-year-old Southern girl thought they belonged. Most of the time, the bull frogs would sense my approach, ribbit indignantly, and hop into the pond. Ker-plunk. When I was able to catch a frog, I'd place it in a five-gallon bucket for better inspection. I'd pick it up and hold it, look into its eyes, and pet it gently, telling it don't be afraid. In response, I would sometimes get peed on. I got smart and started holding them out and away.

Fish were easier to catch than frogs, especially in the pond with not much place for them to scurry away. I'd fish with my cane fishing pole and pull in some of the prettiest bluegill, plump from all the years of living in the pond. Their fins would stick up in defiance, and they

would stare at me, unblinking, even when Granny's camera flashed, documenting my catch of the day. When I was in second grade, about seven years old, Papa dared me to kiss a rather fat bluegill that I'd caught, saying maybe it'd turn in to a prince like frogs do, and he told me I wouldn't do it. Well, that was enough convincing for me. I scrunched my white-blonde eyebrows together, pursed my lips, closed my eyes, and kissed that fish right on the lips. He rolled with laughter and told me that it didn't work; I'd have to try again. I rolled my eyes and tossed the fish back into the pond, and then wiped my slimy hands on my shorts and rubbed my lips against the sleeve of my yard-sale t-shirt.

Sometimes, we had ducks around the pond, one of them being my pet duck named Daisy. She was a beautiful white duck with a yellow beak, but she was a mean mother duck. It was bad before the kids came along, but, with them, that was awful. Just like with the frogs, I'd try to pet Daisy, and she'd nip at me every time. My bad luck with ducks continued after Daisy was gone. Wanting a few new ducks for the pond, I asked Granny and Papa for two new ducklings from Tractor Supply, who would undoubtedly love me and the pond. I had on a mesh blue tank top, cloth shorts, and some flip flops the day they got them and brought them home, and those stupid ducks crapped all over me. Of course, they thought it was hilarious, but that was the end of asking for a pet duck.

The ducks weren't the only thing to paddle around on the pond. One day, Papa and Granny brought a paddle boat home. It was white and teal, and it had teal plastic seats and a white canopy that stretched over the top. 'Dolphin' was written on the side of it in flowy letters, and I thought the paddle boat was the coolest thing since sliced bread, as they say. Sometimes, I'd paddle around on it by myself, but, most of the time, Granny or Papa would get out there with

me. We'd paddle around on the pond, and I'd imagine it was Lake Glenville. At least, the pond seemed that big to me when I was six.

By eight, I thought I was grown and needed to have a grown-up form of water transportation. Papa had an old green jon boat leaned up against the fence running along the bank of the pond, and he had some wooden oars hung up in his building. So, he pulled the oars down and put the boat in the water, and Granny got us some cushions to sit on, because metal seats in a jon boat are not to be desired for long. We'd make circles around the pond, and sometimes we'd bring a fishing pole, too, fishing and talking and waiting on snack time to roll around, when we'd climb out of the pond and prop the boat back up against the fence.

Sadly, I couldn't swim in the pond once I turned ten. I asked Granny and Papa if I could go swimming like I used to, and they said no. Cows had been put in the pasture beside their house, right on top of the creek that fed into the pond. Yellow and white foam kept flowing out of the main pipe, the byproduct of cows using the creek as their personal outhouse. I'd sit on the porch and look longingly at the water, missing those itchy life jackets, the boats, the frog hunts, the duck watching, the things that made up my summers at the pond.

The Taste of Hominy

Faith

The old homestead nestled at the foot of the Great Smoky Mountains, looking like it had been untouched by time. Pigs rolled around in their muddy cage, and the smell wafted out over the farm. If you got far enough away, the smell wasn't gone, but it was masked by better things. Sugar cane was crushed by mules, and the earthy sweetness somewhat masked the stench from the pigsty. The mules made reparations for this though, paying homage to the pigs by leaving steaming presents around the mill, trampling through them on their next turn for good measure.

The apple cider station proved to be more helpful in this venture of escape, with the peeling and pressing of apples providing a layer of respite. With paper cone cups full of fresh cider, one could forget all about the pigs near the creek, but only for a second. The hot days of early fall relentlessly drug the pigs back to your memory, with a breeze a little too warm and a touch too odorous. The mountains watched a little girl scrunch her nose against the oncoming wind, and, with its hands of maple, pine, and locust, turned the breeze back towards the creek. She breathed a sigh of relief, finally taking air in through her nose again and downing a second cup of cider for celebration.

Holding onto her grandparents' hands, the little girl was led away from the apple station before she could have a third cup. They swung her back and forth between them once and continued to a place where other smells couldn't reach. A happy, plump lady mixed hominy over a large fire, fascinating the young girl. The woman wiped sweat from her forehead with the sleeve of her old timey dress, and the family stepped back another foot, the warmth of the cooking layering them like an armful of quilts. The lady's wooden paddle seemed lost in the cast

iron pot, reaching into clouds of steam and pools of hominy, and the little girl stood on her tip toes to see. Overhead, the mountain parted the poplar trees ever so slightly, allowing bright sunbeams to filter through the steam and bounce off the lenses of her grandparents' glasses.

"Granny, what's that stuff in there? It smells really good," the little girl asked, tugging at the hem of her grandma's purple t-shirt.

"That's hominy, baby girl," she replied. "The old timers used to make it this way, dry corn kernels soaked in lye, rinsed in water, and boiled over fire. My momma and your papa's momma made it that way when they were younger."

"Why don't we make hominy that way, Granny?"

"Well, it's a lot easier in the can, less sweaty that way, too. Bush brand tastes just as good as the original, even better when you cook it with butter. One day, I'll fix us some, and you can try it," she promised her granddaughter.

And so, they did just that. The mountains watched through the double-paned windows a week or two later, as the grandma placed butter in a frying pan and swirled it around. The whir of the can opener sung through the small kitchen, and the hominy sent a crackle through the home when it hit the hot pan. The little family, grandparents, parents, and granddaughter sat down to their supper of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans, and hominy. Eyeing the hominy warily, the little girl balanced four kernels on the spikes of her fork and brought them slowly to her mouth, chewing slowly and thinking intently.

Her grandpa chuckled a little and turned to his own daughter. "I don't think she likes it, just like you when you were her age."

"You can try it again when you're older, honey," her grandma told her with a smile, and the mountains smiled along with her.

The girl grew into teen years, and fall crested across the Smoky Mountains once more. The family gathered around the same dining room table, with one more member in tow. There was a little brother, now the age his sister had been when she first visited the homestead. The grandmother brought out the hominy once more and placed a small spoonful on each child's plate. The mountains leaned in closer, the leaves hushed their rustling, and birds snuggled into their nests for an early bedtime, even though the sun was just beginning to set. She brought the golden kernels once more to her lips, and the little boy did the same, trying it for the first time. His forehead scrunched and mouth puckered, as he quickly brought a napkin to his lips. The family chuckled, remembering how hominy had been an acquired taste for them all. Only the mountains were watching the girl now, chewing thoughtfully, and only they saw her take a second bite.

"Did you eat all of that hominy?" the grandma asked, peering over her glasses at the now empty corner of the white plate, edged neatly with blue and pink lines.

She nodded her head, dark blonde hair falling over her shoulders. "I think I like it now, Granny. Could you pass me some more, please?"

With a sigh, the mountains lulled themselves to sleep that evening with the babble of the creek and the rustling of the leaves as they swirled to the ground. It felt like it had dozed for years, as time passed quickly by, despite the careful, faithful watch it stood. Now, many years later, spring has arrived in the Carolinas, and the mountains rise from their winter nap to see a young woman making hominy in her home. The window is open, letting in the March breeze, and drifting out the sound of a ringing phone.

"Granny, how do you make your hominy again? I want to do it right," she says, eyeing the frying pan on the stove and the Bush can of hominy waiting patiently beside.

“Do you got a pen, baby girl? Things tend to be easier to remember if you write them down.”

Paul:

There's never been a
generation that's seen the
changes that we've seen.
See, we was born in the
forties, and come up with
the World War. There was very
few vehicles back in 1940s,
very few people owned a vehicle
in 1940. Grandpa Denton, Momma's
daddy, he had bought an old
A-model. That old man couldn't
drive a team of mules, but he give it
to Daddy to drive, and Daddy cut it
down and made a truck out of it. That
was the first vehicle that Daddy had.
We used to ride horses.
We didn't know no different.
Like an old man I knew
once said, 'Them that's got
it's got it to lose, and

them ain’t got it can’t lose.’

Linda:

If you look back at our age people,
that’s what they did. You went
to school and when you graduated,
you got married and started
a family. We was just kids.
I wasn’t but eighteen going on
nineteen when I got married.

This is what you should
Do either way: Be stubborn.
I always have. And travel while
You’re young, ‘cause you won’t
Be able to when you’re old.
That’s what my momma told me.

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