

Bloodline

by

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*May god bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh,
remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.*

James Agee

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

Prelude

We wake up early on Memorial Day, my mother and I, and put on shorts and t-shirts and get into the car, start to drive. It's hot, even though it's early—the sun shining in our eyes as we take the twists and turns that will lead us to my grandfather's house. I turn the radio up and lean my head against the window, because I am not a morning person, and in silence we follow the road.

When we reach the house on Stone Road, I unbuckle and climb into the backseat to make room for my grandfather. Mom gets out of the car to go knock on the door. I watch my grandfather make his way slowly down the concrete steps. My mother walks next to him, but he doesn't lean on her. She has both her hands clasped behind her back. I can see that they are talking, but I can't hear them through the glass. Once we are all in the car I hear that she has adopted the thick southern lilt she only uses when talking to my grandfather, loud and slow; his voice is gruff and deliberate, and together they speak of what was on sale at the Kroger's this week.

Our first stop is Woodlawn Cemetery, where we buried my grandmother seven years ago this December. She died on the first day of winter break my freshman year of high school, and I got picked up by a friend's mom who told me my grandmother was sick. It was only in the evening, after my mother came to get me, that I learned she had died early in the afternoon. I don't remember when my mother told me that her mother had died in her arms, saying "Don't let them take me," as the EMTs rushed in her front door.

The first time I ever saw a dead body was at the Receiving of Friends. My mother wanted my grandmother's wedding ring, and walked around asking each of

her children in turn if we could retrieve it from my grandmother's hand, but none of us could bear to take it from her cold fingers. We clustered together, my grandfather, my mother, and her children. Finally my brother turned his back on us and walked to the casket and brought the ring back to my mother and no one could speak. All I could think of was the way my grandmother used to stroke my hair and tell me it was beautiful. I don't remember if it was cloudy on the day we buried her, but it seemed cloudy, and all of us cried and none of us could touch each other. My grandfather visits her grave every day, but today the three of us go there together.

Woodlawn Cemetery seems vast, with its rolling hills and winding paths and hundreds and hundreds of stone markers of memory. My grandmother's stone is on the side of a small knoll near the back, a double stone, two granite hearts entwined, one side where my grandmother lies and another which waits for my grandfather. We bring red roses to decorate her stone, because those are the flowers she always loved best.

Next we drive over the river to the Veterans' Cemetery, where my grandfather's brother is buried. His name was Sam Houston Walker, but everyone called him Newt and he died in 1969. I walk ahead, unable to school my legs to step as slowly as my grandfather's. My mother walks beside him. This cemetery is uniform, a thousand small white markers in straight rows, with tiny American flags in front of each one. I go around and straighten ones that have fallen over, just because it seems like someone ought to, and this cemetery full of soldiers is empty even though it is Memorial Day. Once my mother and grandfather have made it to Newt's grave, we only stay for a few minutes. I never met this man, but my mother told me

that he fought in WWII, and that he wrote poetry, and that he abused both alcohol and his wife. When I ask how he died, no one quite remembers.

Meredian Cemetery is back across the river and far down Sevierville Pike. As we ride, I slouch in the back seat, sleepy from the sun and the heavy air, and listen to my grandfather speak. He talks about people who did things a long time ago—his cousins and uncles and where they used to walk around the city—and I want to remember everything he is saying but I know I won't. This graveyard, too, is on a hill, surrounded by a silver-chain link fence with a sign that says not to leave flowers because of the mowers. Meredian Baptist Church used to stand here, but now it's moved up onto to Chapman Highway, miles away, and left its dead behind.

Our people are in the back, over the crest of the hill. Here lies Elizabeth Josephine Giffin, my grandfather's mother, and Alberta Walker Lee, his favorite sister who died in childbirth while he was stationed in Belgium in WWII, and many of his aunts and uncles and cousins, some of whom he remembers and some of whom he doesn't. There is a small headstone that stands alone, decorated with a lamb. It just says "June," though it's a little hard to read. The stonecutter made a mistake the first time he carved the stone, and cut an 'a' instead of a 'u.' The two letters are enmeshed with each other, and it's hard to make out which one is meant to be correct; if you didn't know to whom the stone belonged, you might think she was "Jane." This was my grandfather's daughter, but never my mother's sister, who died of pneumonia when she was just five months old, who took her last breath as my grandmother held her. As we stand here I imagine my grandmother standing here crying, sixty years ago, weeping for her little girl lost, and I imagine my grandfather standing next to her

and holding her hand and not saying anything. I wonder if my grandmother ever regretted choosing not to be buried here, ever worried that the child she lost would be alone forever.

Seven minutes further up the road and to the left is New Hopewell Baptist Church cemetery. Here we visit the graves of people none of us have ever met. There is Julia Ethel Newman Conatser, my grandmother's mother, who died when my grandmother was only eight. My mother named my sister after her. Next to Julia is her father, Pleas Newman, who outlived his daughter by two years and who, I now realize, must have stood like my grandparents next to the grave of his daughter. The stones in this graveyard are dirty and ill-kept, and many of them have fallen over, and no one has cared to pick them up again, even though I can see cars in this church parking lot so I know the church is still in use. There is a small thicket of trees to one side of the graveyard, where earth claims the memory of the buried as grave markers are lost underneath vines and dirt.

There's only one stop left on our trip, and it's a good thing, because I can see that my grandfather is growing tired. New Prospect Presbyterian Church is back the way we came, back up Sevierville Pike, on the way to taking my grandfather back to Stone Road. Next to the Cemetery is the burned out foundation of the old church; it caught fire seven years ago and they re-built it across the street. It's getting late, it's two o'clock, and so we visit my grandfather's grandparents, Samuel Anderson Walker and Catherine Cunningham Walker, only briefly. As we start to leave, my mother points out to me a very old stone, from 1881, the resting place of Sinai Giffin Walker, my grandfather's great-grandmother, my mother's great-great-grandmother,

my great-great-great-grandmother. It's hard to make out the words in the afternoon shadows, and my grandfather doesn't stop to look with us. We get back into the car and drive him home, say goodbye. My mother starts the thirty-minute drive back to our house and it's the first time all day that I say anything at all, asking what's for dinner or if she can drive me to the bookstore later in the afternoon. We don't talk about where we've been. I know we'll be back next year, because we go every year, and every year our route is the same. It is a promise we keep—our tribute to the neglected dead.

The House on Davenport

I didn't grow up in Knoxville. I was born in a Knoxville hospital, and then taken to live with my family in Louisville, the next county over. When my parents got divorced, my mother moved to Maryville, a small city twenty minutes south of Knoxville, because the schools were better, and that was my home until I left for college. I didn't go to school in Knoxville, or walk its neighborhoods as a child. It was always nearby, a place I visited, but never a place where I lived. It was only when I was older, just about to leave high school, that my mother began to speak of all her ancestors who lived in and died in the city—her parents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, and on through the generations. I didn't grow up in Knoxville, but they did, and somehow that makes the city mine.

Tennessee touches eight states, three of them in the Deep South—Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama—two Mid-Western states—Kentucky and Missouri—two states whose regional identity is disputed among its residents—Arkansas and Virginia—and finally North Carolina, on the East side, which is Southern without being part of the Deep South. It's kind of like Tennessee in that way. Often, when people I know leave home, determined to make it out of East Tennessee at last, they only ever make it just over the mountains to Asheville. These mountains form the main topographical identity of the Eastern side of the state; Middle Tennessee has the Cumberland Plateau and West Tennessee is a river basin. The three largest cities in Tennessee are Memphis, with nearly 680,000 people, Nashville, with just over 600,000 people, and Knoxville, home to 185,000 residents.

Historically, there are four regions of the city of Knoxville—East, West, North, and South. East Knoxville runs out of downtown along Magnolia Avenue, and it's the part of the city that has the most crime, at least until you make it out to Holston Hills, out to the suburbs. My grandfather says, "This part of town used to be nice, but in the 1950's all the blacks moved in and the businesses moved out. I guess that's just the way things go." West Knoxville is where the big houses are, spread out along Kingston Pike, made of stone, with big windows, turrets, columns, winding driveways and yards that back up to the banks of the Tennessee River. The neighborhoods have big iron gates that lock. North Knoxville feels far away, all the way down Broadway to Fountain City, to North Hills, and I don't know anyone who lives there. Each of these three regions was once its own city, until they were all annexed by the greater City of Knoxville in the 1890's. Trolley lines used to connect them all, running day and night, bringing people and taking them away, across the city, wherever they needed to go. South Knoxville is on the other side of the Tennessee River, which today cuts through the city but once marked its edge; there was no bridge until 1898, and even then there was only one bridge. It wasn't annexed into the city until 1917, over twenty years after the other regions of the city. The South side of Knoxville reaches out towards the mountains, and it's got spots of tangled woods that line the roads, and old houses falling down.

In 1836, William Walker, my maternal great-great-great grandfather, moved from Virginia to Tennessee and bought two-hundred acres of the land that would one day be known as South Knoxville. When he died, it was split up among his children and grandchildren, and it's hard to account now for the entire plot of land, to know

whose hands each acre ended up in. It got cut up and rationed out, deeds of land changed hands and it becomes hard to trace the path of ownership. But there are some things we think we know, things that are almost remembered by grandfather, things he thinks he heard when he was young. His recollection is that two of William Walker's grandchildren, Mary Ann and Thomas, sold their shares to Henry Davenport, who sold the land to Thomas Baker, who sold the land to Marshall A. Walker, William Walker's son.

To try and fill in the gaps I once went with my mother to the Knox County Archives, where we browsed thick binders filled with old records, painstakingly typed out by volunteers from hand-written ledgers. We didn't find any family connections in the most intriguingly labeled binders—crimes, court cases, divorce—but eventually found William Walker and Marshall Walker listed in the registry of wills. We asked nervously at the desk for the specified microform reels that would unlock the past, and my mother stood behind me as I turned the knob past pages full of the wishes of dead men. She had never used a microform machine before.

I was surprised to find how accurately my grandfather's memory held true for events that took place seventy years before his birth. It was also strange to find the facts that had slipped through the sifter of history, memories siphoned off as the years went by. William Walker did indeed will his land (and all other worldly possessions) to his children, Samuel, Marshall, and Thomas, and his grandchildren Mary Anne, Thomas, and James. He skipped over his daughter Nancy entirely, choosing instead to name her three children as heirs. His son Charles was written off brusquely: "To my son Charles, in consequence of his ungrateful conduct towards me, I will bequeath the

sum of one dollar.” The 1859 will of William Walker is terse, all he possessed apportioned to his relations in less than 250 words. The 1908 will of his son Marshall is much more complicated, with no fewer than ten sections and eleven different heirs. To be fair, it seems as though he had a lot more property to distribute. While in the Archives my mother and I also found records of land transfers, and between the years of 1877 and 1906 Marshall A. Walker was part of 28 transactions. There are records not only of his purchase from C. Baker, but also of business dealings with his nieces, nephews, and cousins. By the time of his death in 1913, Marshall seems to have bought back the acreage of his father’s land and then some. Many of these land plots are described in his will: “house and lot on the Old Sevierville Road...having a frontage of fifty feet and a depth of one hundred and ninety feet, and being improved with a five room house on the front, and a barn in the rear,” “lot No. 5...having a frontage of fifty-feet on the Sevierville Pike and a depth of about one hundred and forty five feet,” “the certain six room house fronting on the Sevierville Pike...and bounded on the West by a street.” His property was split up upon his death, and it’s hard to keep track of what stayed in the family and what was sold. I do know that in 1922, nine years after Marshall’s death, my grandfather was born in a South Knoxville house given to my great-grandfather by his uncle Marshall. He lost the house a couple of years later; whatever legacy of land ownership that had been granted to him had been lost or squandered, and it was the same for his brothers, sisters, and cousins.

But still Walkers bloomed like weeds in the hills across the river, and we know that the house that my grandfather was born in is on the land that Marshall A.

Walker once owned, and that this tract of land became Boggs Street, and my mother remembers that when she was a child her aunts and uncles and cousins filled the houses up and down South Knoxville streets, renting houses on land that their grandparents used to own.

I live now in a house that was once a part of Marshall's land too, or at least my mother thinks that it might have been. The house lies, oddly enough, on Davenport Road, named for Henry Davenport, who bought the land from William Walker's grandchildren. Davenport Road intersects with Baker Street just a few feet down from our driveway, named for Caleb Baker, who sold the land back to Marshall Walker. For all that the land has come full circle down through the years, there's not so much as a rock named after anyone in our family.

The house on Davenport sits on a small hill, and has a driveway that circles all the way around. There's a wide concrete porch and a car port, and the house is covered in wood paneling that someone painted red long ago. The paint is peeling now. Inside the house the ceilings are low, and there is only one floor. There is a door that leads to a sun porch, which must have once been a nice place to sit and let the sun stream in through screened windows. Now the screens are all broken, hanging crookedly from the windows they once covered, and the floor is covered in dust. From the sun porch there are stairs that lead down into a kind of cellar, a rough room hewn out of the earth with dirt floors and walls. The house has the feeling of a place that has fallen behind, a building that sat down, weary, to take a rest while the rest of time goes hurtling forward. It is a quiet place.

My grandfather, John Harvey Walker, bought the house from a church in 1981, planning to stay there during the 1982 World's Fair, which was taking place in Knoxville. He'd hoped to rent out his house on Stone Road to fair-goers, and had purchased this new one as both an investment and a place to stay until the fair was over. But even though the event drew 11 million visitors to Knoxville during the six months it operated downtown, his business plan never really panned out, and soon my grandmother wanted to move back to her real home. So they moved away from the house on Davenport, but my grandfather still owns it, and it's seen a steady stream of residents over the past thirty years.

After my grandparents moved back to Stone Road in 1982—also in South Knoxville—my mother moved into the house on Davenport with James and Kerry, my half-brother and sister. My mother got married at nineteen and divorced at thirty-one, and she wanted to move out of the small house on Gertrude Avenue, just a few streets away. This was a house her father also owned—like his grandfather before him, he bought property when he was able—but was the place where her husband had left his family, the door that had slammed in her face. The house on Davenport was big and waiting to be filled with memories, better ones, for just \$100 a month. James was twelve and nothing fazed him and he liked the new house because it had more room for games, more room for friends. Kerry was nine and she slept on James' floor for months, even though for the first time in her life she had her own room. Together these children were wild.

My mother has always said that her children were all rambunctuous. When Kerry and James were small they played rough and rowdy, a pair of happy savages.

There was a time when a neighbor boy came over to play at the house on Gertrude, and James had taken down a backyard swing and he and Kerry were whipping it around in the air. He accidentally caught his friend in the side of the head, and the child promptly began to bleed everywhere; my brother says they didn't have many friends when they were kids. Another time, caterpillars were hatching by the thousands in the backyard, so they covered Kerry in them, covered her skin until every inch was wriggling with fuzzy insects tickling with tiny legs. Then Kerry walked inside the house to greet their baby sitter. They also once brought their baby sitter a dead rabbit they had found, and another time enacted an elaborate stabbing hoax which involved James running for a knife and Kerry, covered in ketchup, writhing in the hallway.

Sometimes I see my childhood with my sister Julia as a mirror of James' and Kerry's. My mother had two bouts of raising kids, one that began when she was nineteen and a second that began the year she turned forty. Each time: a pair of children, a husband, a divorce, a move. Still, for all the similarities between these two times in my mother's life, between my brother's childhood and my own, we are separated by time and age. By the time James and Kerry were grown my mother was still young, but my mother felt old in her bones before Julia and I ever moved out. When James and Kerry were teenagers my grandparents were the age my mother is now.

In the summers while my mother was at work Kerry and James would ride around with my grandfather in his work truck, and in time James grew to work alongside my grandfather. They'd call each other Best Buddy. James says:

We did that a lot, just driving around, we would drive around and visit his different work sites, because he would have to check on them to make sure they were going right and the employees weren't goofing off and complaining. So we did that a lot. You know lots of little projects come to mind. To be working on cars when he needed something worked on. He had trouble with instructions, so I would always help with the instructions and we made a good team. We'd come back from working and eat with Nan, all of us together.

But my grandfather retired in 1992, and my grandmother took to her bed in 1990, the year I was born. James moved away to Missouri, and Kerry served her time as a lost soul ("I don't want you to know me," she says exasperated, once late at night). Even my mother moved away from Knoxville when she married my father, and her exile lasted twenty-two years. The thing about mirror images is that one of the two things is always real, and the other is always just reflection.

The longer Kerry and James lived in the house on Davenport, the more things seemed to change. My brother lived wild and young in the woods and streets of South Knoxville, running around with his best friend Patrick, laughing and playing Dungeons and Dragons and climbing fences and going out late at night to the old graveyard that sits sheltered in the woods across the street from his house. I can see him tall and lean, with a big grin and a quick laugh—but only in flashes. He is running through the trees in a red and white jacket that I've seen in a photo, and he doesn't stop, not for anything. I can't see Kerry as clearly; it's a time that no one wants to talk about. I know that she was sad, and that there were beer and cigarettes

and boys. I know that often she wouldn't come home until late at night, and that my mother would drive to pick her up in strange places. Sometimes my mother called the police to help look for her wayward daughter.

Once, in January of 1986, Kerry never came home; she ran away, eight hundred and thirty miles, all the way to Florida. My mom and my brother worried and put up fliers, thought she was dead. They even consulted a psychic, who said that Kerry had gone south and was smoking a lot, which turned out to be true. They hired a private detective, they ran a story in the paper, and she was nowhere. After three months Kerry called and said she was in Naples, Florida, and my mother used her entire tax return to fly with James down there, and I don't know what that plane ride must have been like. When they finally made it to Naples, had found Kerry again, when she was safe in backseat, Kerry said, "Wait." She said she had to say goodbye to someone. My mother stopped the car and Kerry ran away again. I see her with lanky hair and downcast eyes, in a green shirt with white stripes on the shoulders, a shirt that I also saw in a photo. She stands still with shoulders hunched. She's my sister and she's young in a way that isn't freeing but sad, both knowing too much and not understanding. I want to see her laughing. I wish she hadn't run away from the car where my mother and James were waiting, happy to see her at last, loving her even though she couldn't feel it.

After losing Kerry for the second time, my mother and James waited around in Florida for a couple of days, but she did not come back. They walked in the sand and collected shells, and James told my mother that all kids leave home, and Kerry had just done it sooner than most. They flew back home, and a week later got another

call from Kerry, and this time they were able to bring the prodigal daughter home again.

There is another part to this story that my mother adds when, and if, she tells it. When Kerry ran away, just fifteen, she hitchhiked out of town, part of the way with a trucker who was passing through. That same weekend another girl went missing, and her mother called mine after the article about Kerry ran in the paper. Together they talked about missing children and it must have been a relief for them both, because I imagine that until that moment they had yet to encounter another person who understood what it was to have your child lost in the big wide world. Years later they found the body of the other girl in Middle Tennessee, dead since the winter of '86, murdered by a trucker she hitched a ride with. When my mother showed the article to Kerry, Kerry said, "It sounds like...that's...I think I rode with that man. I must have been lucky or something."

It wasn't always so dramatic; sometimes they just lived together, the three of them, in the weird little way that families do. My mom was still living in the house on Davenport when she met my father, one night at a bar with some friends after work—he had brown eyes and a Texan accent, and he asked her to dance. For one of their first dates she invited him over to the house on Davenport, and she made dinner for him (roast beef and noodles). He brought his daughter Lisa, only a toddler then, to dinner; maybe she played on the floor. My mother remembers talking with my father on the couch (I hope they laughed) while James worked on building a three-tiered chess board in the corner. My mother and father got married not too much later, and she and Kerry moved into my dad's house on the lake. James, now in his last year in

college, lived in the house on Davenport for a few more months, but then he moved out and, for a time, the house was silent.

The Tennessee River cuts off South Knoxville from the rest of the city, and more than one bridge washed away before the two shores of Knoxville could be reliably traveled between. The water of the river has always kept South Knoxville separate, slightly wild, but for people on both sides the river ran like life blood through the community—for fishing, for washing, for travel, for trade. And then, early in the twentieth century, the river would be singled out for a different purpose.

The Tennessee Valley Authority was established in 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, by a congressional charter. It was part of the New Deal, part of Roosevelt's plan to revitalize a nation that was gasping for breath. As in many areas of the U.S. during the Depression, life was hard in the valley below the mountains—people were poor, and the soil was tired, dried up and crumbling. TVA promised a new era, to tame the waters of the Tennessee River and bring electrical power to people who had never seen it before. The President himself gave the charge:

It is clear that [current developments are] but a small part of the potential public usefulness of the entire Tennessee River. Such use, if envisioned in its entirety, transcends mere power development; it enters the wide fields of flood control, soil erosion, reforestation, elimination from agricultural use of marginal lands, and distribution and diversification of industry...It touches and gives life to all forms of human concerns.

I, therefore, suggest to the Congress legislation to create a Tennessee Valley Authority, a cooperation clothes with the power of Government by possessed of the flexibility and initiative of a private enterprise. It should be charged with the broadest duty of planning for the proper use, conservation and development of the natural resources of the Tennessee River drainage basin and its adjoining territory for the general social and economic welfare of the Nation.¹

TVA built dams to generate cheap, hydroelectric power, and it worked.

Although the urban centers of Tennessee, like Memphis and Knoxville, had electric power, most rural areas, even those just outside the city, didn't; TVA brought them running water, refrigerators, washing machines. The organization became completely independent of the government in 1999, and today TVA has twenty-nine hydroelectric dams, eleven coal-powered plants, fourteen cycle gas plants, and three nuclear power plants. It serves an 80,000 mile region and provides electricity to over 9 million homes. Every year since the mid-1940's, Tennessee has generated more electricity than it consumed.² Today TVA's website boasts of pursuing improved environmental stewardship, air quality, and energy efficiency.

But there is a part of the story that TVA plays down, that is left off the "History" page of their website. There are now twenty-three lakes in Tennessee, but only one of them is natural—Reelfoot Lake, in West Tennessee, formed by a fault line in 1812. The rest are areas flooded by TVA. Close to 50,000 people were forced to relocate to make room for hydro-powered dams, forced to leave the land that they had known for generations.³ Their farms and churches have been rotting underneath

the water for nearly eight decades, but for some the wound is still raw. In 1933, as the water came rushing in, tumbling over homes and graves, light bulbs came on in three and a half million houses.

Along with electricity TVA brought new jobs, and new people to fill them. In 1937, one of these people was a lawyer from Rhode Island named Charles Joseph McCarthy, who brought with him his wife Gladys and his two children, four-year old Charles Jr. and seven-year old Jackie. Gladys and Charles stayed in Knoxville, had four more children there, and Charles Jr. grew up, changed his name, and became one of the most acclaimed novelists of his time. The McCarthy family rented homes around Knoxville until 1941, when they bought a house in South Knoxville, on Martin Mill Pike, and this is the house where Cormac McCarthy grew up.

Cormac attended Knoxville Catholic High School in West Knoxville, across the river, and in 1951 enrolled at the University of Tennessee. He would never graduate, but the next decade would bring many changes to McCarthy's life. He got divorced, remarried, moved from place to place (though returning always to East Tennessee), was awarded grants from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Rockefeller Foundation, and won both a Faulkner Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1969 Cormac moved to Louisville, Tennessee, a town in Blount County, which is in the next county over from Knoxville. He lived with his wife in a barn on Light Pink Road, and together they transformed the barn into a house. There is a rumor that they used bricks salvaged from James Agee's Knoxville house, which had been demolished in 1962. In the late seventies he moved out West.

My father lives in Louisville, and his house on the lake is where I lived until I was seven years old. We lived on Wonderland Drive, in a house by a lake, surrounded by woods. My father is a transplant; he moved there from Texas after college to work in the Nuclear Power Plant in nearby Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He once told me there was nothing special in particular about Tennessee, but that this was where his work was, and that he loved the water. The drive out to my father's house is long—when I was young, he always said it was “out in the boonies.” It's long roads past miles and miles of woods and open fields, although nowadays the neighborhood is building up more and more, and I don't like to think about the day when the drive to Wonderland Drive passes through miles and miles of suburbs.

To get to my father's house from Knoxville you must drive past the turn onto Light Pink Road, right off of Louisville Road. Once when I was younger my sister Julia was driving us out to visit Dad and I said to her, “Let's turn here,” and pointed at Light Pink Road. She asked me why, and I said I just wanted to see where it went. I had ridden by Light Pink Road hundreds of times in my life, but I had never been down it before. The sun was out, shining softly, and the wind was blowing in the grass, and wild flowers were swaying by the side of the road. We rolled down the windows and the sky was blue. She turned.

The world down Light Pink Road was beautiful and quiet. There were no other cars, no other voices. There were a few houses and sometimes you could see the lake glittering in the distance. I don't remember seeing a house that looked like it might have once been a barn, but it wouldn't have mattered to me then. Julia and I wondered where the road got its name. We laughed when we passed Light Pink

Baptist Church, its steeple painted white. We looked for a place to turn around, to set us back on our familiar path, but never found it. After a few twists and turns it didn't matter, because somehow we came back out again on Louisville Road. "See," I said, "Wasn't that fun?"

"Weirdo," answers my sister.

Cormac McCarthy's first four novels are set in East Tennessee, but it wasn't until the mid-1990's, long after critics were singing his praises, and after the publication of McCarthy's first commercial hit *All the Pretty Horses* that Knoxville began to take notice of its literary celebrity. He'd had devotees as early as the mid-1970s, but it took almost twenty years for people to start mentioning that they'd met him once, that he'd been into their store, or their bar, that they'd remembered him from back when he lived in Knoxville. McCarthy had moved away, mostly for good, in 1976, although he came back again briefly in the early 1980's, living anonymously in a West Knoxville hotel. Today the University of Tennessee holds conferences honoring his work and plaques bearing his quotations dot Downtown Knoxville. He has become a local hero, and though many McCarthy buffs point to *The Road* or *Old Country For Old Men* as his best works, Knoxvilleans mostly concern themselves with a different one: *Suttree*.

The novel opens in Knoxville in 1951. Its protagonist is Cornelius Suttree, who lives in a houseboat on the river, and spends most of his time in the city's seedy underground—dive bars, brothels, and jail houses. There is no driving plot. Rather, the narrative follows Suttree through several years of his life: working odd jobs, burying his son, befriending wandering preachers and fishermen, serving time in a

workhouse, living with a prostitute, selling his fish to vendors in Market Square, drinking homemade whiskey and trying to stay warm in the winter. It is not a story, but an immersion in a time and place.

The reception of *Suttree* at its publication was lukewarm, but as Cormac McCarthy's literary clout has grown, so has the attention paid to his earlier works, *Suttree* among them. I went looking for what critics had to say about the novel. Terri Witek points out McCarthy's insistence on the impermanence of domestic spaces, suggesting that in *Suttree*'s world, physical abodes are secondary to the space of community and interdependence. The only permanent dwellings are the geographical features of the land—the caves, the hills, the river.⁴ It is telling that *Suttree* lives on the river, in a contraption that is part boat and part house, but never really home. The houseboat can go anywhere the river flows. It can sway gently in the water. It can sink.

There aren't very many novels about Knoxville, and as I read the opinions of Witck and others, I noticed in myself a strange sense of skepticism that colored every sentence. These people were not from Knoxville—what could they possibly know about my home? I can recognize this reaction as illogical, unfair even. After all, I would bristle at the accusation that I was unable to understand the intricacies of place in a book about New York, or California. It was a strange sense of literary possessiveness that I had never felt before.

To me the book is steeped in home. Its allusions are to places that I know. Gay Street. Market Square. WNOX. Woodlawn Cemetery. The people speak like my neighbors speak. *Some people ain't worth a shit rich or poor and that's all you can*

*say about em.*⁵ The moments of beauty are things I've seen. *Drifting downriver in the lovely dusk, the river chattering in the rips and bats going to and back over the darkening water. Rocking down black glides and slicks, the gravel bars going past and little islands of rock and tufted grass.*⁶ And the moments of darkness are things I know too. *He was unscrewing the bottlecap, taking a drink. His eyes closed and opened slowly in the gloom.*⁷ At the end of the book Suttree leaves the city, but I don't want him to. *Behind him the city lay smoking, the sad purlieus of the dead immured with the bones of friends and forebears.*⁸ For all of the sickness and death and pain he has seen, I want him to stay. It's a feeling I think is shared by many of those from Knoxville who read this book. For years, starting in the late nineties, fans organized The Suttree Stagger, a seven hour pub crawl with stops along the way to re-enact passages from the book. A bar opened downtown last summer: Suttree's High Gravity Tavern. A local bookstore celebrated Cormac McCarthy's 78th birthday in 2011 with public readings from the novel. Attendees clutched well worn first editions and eyes misted over as the reading came to a close.

In January of 2009, Cormac McCarthy's childhood home at 5501 Martin Mill Pike caught fire and burned to the ground. Investigators were unable to determine the cause of the blaze. The house had been vacant for years, owned by some unknown out-of-towner who owed taxes to the city and couldn't be reached for comment. Just the year before the house had been listed by the Knox Heritage Society as the most endangered historic structure in Knoxville. They called it "a senseless loss." A *Knoxville News Sentinel* article points out that as of the 2009 fire, Knoxville has failed to protect the childhood homes of both its Pulitzer Prize winning authors,

Cormac McCarthy and James Agee. The house that burned makes an appearance in McCarthy's prize winning novel, *The Road*, and that in McCarthy's book the house survives the apocalypse still standing, when in real life it was felled by on rainy Tuesday afternoon. *The Road* follows a father and his son as they traverse a devastated post-apocalyptic world. Early on, they pass by an area recognizable as the desolated Knoxville, abandoned by all but the dead.

*Some few miles south of the city at a bend in the road and half lost in the dead
brambles they came upon an old frame house with chimneys and gables and a
stone wall. The man stopped. Then he pushed the cart up the drive.*

What is this place, Papa?

It's the house where I grew up.⁹

Once inside the man runs his hand across the mantle where he used to hang his Christmas stocking, back before the end of the world.

After a few years of sporadic renters my grandfather put the Davenport house on the market, and it even sold, but then the couple that bought it went bankrupt and the ownership reverted back to him. Some things are harder to get rid of than you expect. After that there was a span of years where tenants paid rent and didn't make a fuss, and I never heard of the house until I was seventeen. By then my parents had gotten divorced, and my brother had moved away from Tennessee, to St. Louis. I lived with my mother and my sister Julia in a house in Maryville, about twenty minutes from Knoxville. Kerry lived in the basement of the Maryville house with her husband; they were supposed to pay rent but they never did. My mother started

bringing up the house in conversation because, for the first time in years, it was empty. The most recent renters had lived there for less than a year, and when they left they had stripped all the pipes in the basement of their copper casings. They left cigarette butts on the window sills and porn magazines in the basement.

It made me angry. My grandfather has never been a harsh landlord. I don't think he has ever kicked anyone out of a property in his life, despite the fact that it seems like renters in South Knoxville can almost never pay their rent. He voted for Nixon and he voted for Reagan but he never evicted anyone, even if they were alcoholics or on drugs or, God forbid, liberals. If you asked him, I don't think he would ever say why, but he grew up during the Great Depression, and maybe that's it. Born in 1922, he was young when Black Friday hit, but he remembers what it was like to have nothing. My mother wasn't angry, when she told me about the theft. Or maybe she was originally, but there was something else, too—the beginning of an idea and the resurfacing of a memory. I didn't see it then though.

The years went by, and my sister Julia went away to college, and I went away to college, and my mother lived alone in the house in Maryville, alone even though Kerry had moved with her husband into my mother's basement. They didn't pay rent and they played music loudly and they were toxic to each other. Together they drank too much. They yelled and hit and broke things. They kept my mother up at night, and she would call me. A thousand miles from home I listened to my mother cry into the phone. "I don't know what to do," she said.

When I came home for Christmas break my sophomore year, and I noticed that some items were conspicuously missing from our house. I didn't think much of

it, even when my mother told me she hoped to be moved in to the house on Davenport by the time I came home for the summer. She told me, “This is the unhappiest I have ever been,” and she told me that she couldn’t take living in the house in Maryville anymore—that it cost too much, that the situation with Kerry and her husband was driving her crazy, that she wanted to be closer to her father. We could sell the Maryville house, she said, make some money, maybe for the first time in such a long time have some extra money. Sometimes she would forget all the logical reasons she wanted to move. She would tell me that when she used to live there, back in the eighties when James and Kerry were younger than they are now, that she used to believe she could do anything, used to have hope.

While I had been away that Fall, my mother had been squirreling small items at the house on Davenport, any little thing she could easily fit into the car if she happened to be making a trip to Knoxville. The items were varied, and usually things not immediately missed: our tool kit, the broom, a flashlight, a box of sewing supplies. And yet it seemed to me that she had somehow managed to move only items that I invariably ended up needing.

“Really, the wrapping paper? It. Is. Christmas.”

The move escalated quickly. When I came home for Spring Break just a couple of months later, my mother had already moved out of the Maryville house. James had visited one weekend, and together they had moved everything she needed to live into the house on Davenport. I think her most impressive feat was the transportation of our twelve cats, which my mother had undertaken in the week after my brother went home to Indiana. Two by two she brought them, in ratty old cat

carriers we'd had for years. Two by two she left them in the nearly empty house on Davenport. She moved eleven cats in one day, driving over and over the forty minute round trip from Maryville to Knoxville and back again, up and down the road that is called Old Knoxville Highway in Maryville and Maryville Pike in Knoxville. The only cat she didn't bring that day was Patches, who hid and wouldn't be found.

My mother seemed excited and happy, and I hated the house. It was built around 1900, four bedrooms, living room, kitchen; all laid out on one floor. There's a sun porch that's got stairs leading down to the basement—cold stones that descend into a hollow cut out of the earth, dirt floors and walls. It used to be nice, but since my mother had lived there in the eighties it had gotten so old. Doors creaked, faucets spewed, the paint was peeling, the pipes were rusted, and there was never, ever enough hot water to run a bath. All of our stuff was in boxes, but the house was littered with the things left behind by the strangers who had lived there before. A scent of smoke and mildew and mothballs hung over everything. But the worst thing was that the house was always dark. The electricity was old—it flickered even in the day time—and most rooms didn't have overhead lights. Night falls early in Tennessee in March. We didn't have lamps for every room, and after the sun set the whole house seemed dim. Some rooms turned completely black.

For a while my mother and I slept in the same bed, because after we had dismantled the loft bed from my old room in Maryville, we couldn't figure out how to put it back together again. I roamed the new house anxiously, taking in its musty smell and strange walls. I told my mother that I hated it, over and over and over again. I hated that I couldn't find my things, and that no space in this house was mine

yet, and that it was unfamiliar, and that it was old. That night when I took a shower I cried because the water was cold, the walls were moldy—because the running water created a strange draft that blew the shower curtain in towards my body, and for some reason I just couldn't stand that thin plastic brushing up against my skin.

I try not to mind as much anymore, when I go back on breaks, even though all my things are still in boxes and the house is still so dark after the sun has gone down. If my mother, now that my sister and I have gone away to school, must live in a house alone, it might as well be the house she chose herself, one where she remembers being happy. I picked James' room to stay in, because I wanted the one that had been his. The first winter my mother stayed there he came to visit, and I went trekking out with him into the woods he had once known so well. We were looking for a graveyard, the one he used to visit with Patrick. The woods are all overgrown now, and there is not a path, but he could find his way, although he was surprised that no one had kept up the way to the cemetery. I walked behind him, battling through vines and branches, for what seemed like an hour until he finally declared that we had arrived. The gravestones were all tipped over, the names they bore lost in the snowy dirt. Before we left we used his smart phone to make a GPS point of the graveyard so we could find it again, but we haven't been back since.

When my mother moved to the house on Davenport, I complained, "I don't know how to get anywhere." It wasn't just the house itself that depressed me, with its flickering lights and dusty smell. It was the fact that I couldn't leave it. My mother embraced with vigor the task of educating me in the lore of South Knoxville back

roads. “It’s simple!” she said as she turned down a nearly hidden road that emerged somehow onto Chapman Highway after a series of disorienting twists and turns.

“This neighborhood is where I grew up.” In her zeal to show me just how simple it was to get around in South Knoxville, she never actually took the same route twice. I despaired.

In the years since my mother’s move I have slowly learned my routes, the ones that I will not deviate from. My mother grew up in Knoxville, and I did not. For her the city spans in its full glory, and she can go anywhere she wants. For me it is a single vein of roads I cannot leave; I know my routes, but not their larger context in the space of Knoxville. If a friend is driving me home and they miss a turn, I must tell them sheepishly that I don’t know where we are. I never know the names of roads and I often get lost. There are only two ways that I will go. If I am going to downtown, I turn right out of the driveway of the house on Davenport. I follow the road to its end, turn left onto Sevier Avenue, and then right onto the Gay Street Bridge. The Gay Street Bridge becomes Gay Street, which is usually the only place downtown I need to go. If I need to get onto Kingston Pike I will turn left onto Cumberland Avenue, which turns into Kingston past the University of Tennessee Campus. I will not turn onto any of the other eight roads that diverge from Gay Street. There are faster ways to get from Davenport to downtown Knoxville, but I will not take them, because the speed limit is too fast and the cars too many.

If I turn left out of the Davenport driveway, I can get back to Maryville and to Louisville, where my father lives. For both I drive to a road called Martin Mill Pike. To get to Louisville I follow the road the whole way, then merge onto the highway,

fists clenched white on the wheel as I watch for my turn. I resent that it is much more difficult to get to Louisville from Knoxville than it is from Maryville. If I turn off of Martin Mill at Avenue A, in just a few turns I can be on Maryville Pike, headed back to my old city and my old neighborhood and my old house that stands empty and covered in vines. It's that house, now, that smells strange and unlived in when I stop in to move more boxes to the house on Davenport. But there is the mark on the wall where my mother marked my height, there is my bedroom window sill where my soccer trophies used to sit. There and there and there again.

Whichever way I turn on Martin Mill, and whether I am headed out from the house on Davenport or back to it again, each of these routes is a series of trials I count down in my head. After this turn I must merge, turn, light, turn. After this merge I must turn, light, turn. After this turn I must light, turn. After this light I must turn. After this turn I'm home-free.

My mother and I wage a constant, unspoken war: she will insist on calling the house on Davenport "home," while I will insist on calling it "the house." I'm not sure if she's conscious that she is doing it, but every time, when we are out at the store, and I will say, "Let's just go back to the house," she answers, "Yes, let's go home." Even though she's been living there now for almost two years, I still forget the address sometimes. Now when someone asks me my address it takes me a moment to know what to say. If I'm picking up a prescription in Connecticut I must remember to tell my pharmacist that my address is 103 Comanche Trail in Maryville, Tennessee, since we haven't been able to sell our old house, and still must pay the mortgage every month. If I'm trying to file a complaint about the delivery of one of my

magazine subscriptions, my address is 45 Wyllys Avenue in Middletown, Connecticut. If I'm calling the bank I have to tell them that my billing address is 3124 Davenport Road, Knoxville, Tennessee.

There is one thing that I have come to appreciate about my mother's move to the house on Davenport, and that is seeing her return to the land where she grew up. When my mother was a young girl, she used to live in a house on Sevier Avenue, just down the street from Davenport Road, and she used to walk all around South Knoxville. I walk with my mother now, in the summer evenings. When we walk, the sun is just beginning to lower in the sky. We turn left out of the driveway, and right onto Baker Avenue just a minute later. Each house we pass is nestled in the trees, as if the builders had just enough energy to carve out a foundation, and a small front yard, before yielding to the superior forces of nature. There are wooded areas, tiny valleys falling down from the roads, with tall trees and thick vines. My mother tells me that when she was a little girl, she liked nothing better than to peer in among the branches, and pretend that she was not on the south side of the city of Knoxville, but rather in a dense forest, far away.

Further down the road is the building where my mother went to high school, an old brick building with broken windows and rubble strewn about inside. There's a sign out front where all the lettering has worn away, but I know that it used to say South High School, and I know my mother went there from the 7th to the 12th grade. We circle the building and she points to where she had Home Ec, English, gym. She shows me the window into the hallway where she remembers walking, remembers

walking by two boys, remembers hearing, “Yeah, that Ruth is smart, but I wouldn’t want her face!” She shows me the sidewalk where she was standing when she found out JFK had been shot. We turn a corner, and see that the back side of the building has been turned into offices. We peer in through the glass doors and see the lockers still lining the hallway. My mother wonders if we could go in, and I say we should probably wait until business hours, since now the sun is setting. We try the door; it doesn’t give. We say that we’ll be back.

In 1967 my mother graduated Valedictorian from this high school, and the next year she got married and had a baby. She wanted to go to college, but was afraid to ask her father for the money, fearing they didn’t have enough. He later said, after she was grown, that they would have managed somehow. My mother never left East Tennessee, and has worked as a secretary for over thirty years. She doesn’t make much. The only reason I was able to attend Wesleyan was because the university offered me almost a full ride on need-blind financial aid, based on my mother’s income. Being poor kept my mother in Knoxville, and it’s also what enabled me to leave. She once told me that she wanted to be a writer, when she was young.

Whenever I walk by the school, or drive, I have the desperate urge to go inside, as if I would be taken back to the mid-1960’s, and could roam the halls with everyone else in their thick rimmed glasses and carefully coiffed hair. For some reason I imagine that something of my mother’s past is inside there, something I could understand better if I could just get in. I’d walk the halls with her, I’d tell her that she was smart and pretty, and that she was going to go far, and that she was too good for that Jimmy Rice. I’d change the past for her, if I could just get in. But the

old part of the building is condemned, and when I asked my friend Zach if he'd sneak in with me, one evening not too late, he was afraid. "Someone's probably got their stash hidden in there, and you'll probably get shot." I guess I could get into the part of the school that's been changed into offices easily enough, but that feels wrong. As if I'd put on my thick-rimmed glasses and walk through the door, and heads would peer out of open doors as I stroll down the hallway, giving each other quizzical looks. I try each locker, and someone finally asks me, "Are you lost?"

Sometimes we walk a different way, the other direction down Baker Avenue, take a left, and make a big circle. As we walk, my mother tells me that she walked some of these roads to high school every morning. But before going to school, she would get up and walk around for exercise, up and down hills in the gray haze of early morning. These are the same streets she walked when Kerry was missing all those years ago, putting up flyers and hoping. We walk these streets when our cat Sam goes missing too, and tell all the people we see that we miss him and please call us and hand them the flyers with his picture on it. He never does come home.

Evenings when I walk with my mother we get home just as it turns really dark outside. My mother yawns, and says goodnight, and goes to bed. I stand in the dark house on Davenport Road, and I feel an odd sort of peace. I go to the room that used to be my brother's and go to sleep.

Names to Look for

I'm always amazed at the way your relatives multiply the further you go back on your family tree. Each person has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and on and on.

Ruth Edna Walker (1949—, Knoxville, Tennessee)
Wilfred Curtis Jordan (1954—, Schnectady, New York)

John Harvey Walker (1922—, Knoxville, Tennessee)
Ruth Edna Conatser (1919—2005, Knoxville, Tennessee)
Margaret Virginia Winship (1932—, Nueces, Texas)
William Curtis Jordan (1929—, Corpus Christi, Texas)
Samuel A. Walker (1883-1955, Knoxville, Tennessee)

Elizabeth Josephine Giffin (1882-1965, Knoxville, Tennessee)
Pink E. Conatser (1889-1966, Sevier County, Tennessee)
Julia Ethel Newman (1890-1927, Sevier County, Tennessee)
John R. Jordan Sr. (1897-1978, Angelina County, Texas)
Mildred Mae Rainey (1901-1952, Trinity, Texas)
Wilfred La Delle Winship (1908-1996, Lincoln, Nebraska)
Emeline M. Magahey (1907-1986, Arkansas)

Someone once told me that this pattern of generations can be expressed in a mathematical equation, 2^n , where n equals the number of generations back. Your parents are one generation back, so $2^1=2$ genetic ancestors, your grandparents are two generations back, so $2^2=4$ genetic ancestors, and so on, all the way back. Once you hit thirty generations, about 600 years ago, the total number of genetic ancestors is a billion. The world's population didn't hit a billion until the nineteenth century, which means that it is impossible for any person to not have some degree of inbreeding. You don't even have to go that far back. Turns out, Layton Romines, born in 1766, is both my great-great-great-great-great grandfather and my great-great-great-great grandfather.

Samuel A. Walker
 Catherine S. Cunningham
 John Harvey Giffin
 Sarah S. Goolsby
 Samuel Conatser
 Sarah E. Romines
 Pleasant Newman
 Elizabeth Thomas
 James Marion Jordan
 Lucy Ethel Whitaker
 Stephen M. Rainey
 Emily E. Josserand
 Loyd Anson Winship
 Ethel Briggie
 Daniel Magahay
 Emma

William Walker
 Sinai Giffin
 Paul Cunningham
 Mary Ford
 Amasa Conatser
 Sarah Loveday
 John Romines
 Rebecca Jane Newman
 James Newman

Mary Ellen Thurman
 Vineyard B. Thomas
 Rebecca Jane Romines
 Layton Romines
 Mary E. (Cherokee Indian)
 Jonathan Thomas
 Zuba
 Mary Ann Blevins
 Nicholas A. Conatser
 William Giffin
 Nancy C. King
 George W. Romines
 Sarah Sally Richards
 William Henry Jordan
 Elizabeth Pate
 Valentine C. Whitaker
 Lucinda Ann Finley
 Reuban M. Rainey
 Edna Dorah Peacock
 Peter Josserand
 Fidella Louisa Stowe
 Dougald C. Winship
 Elvira S. Brion
 Ira Briggie
 Ella Abbott

It's called a "family tree," but it always seemed more like a web to me, twisting and spreading, bridging the gaps. You could never hold this web all within your vision, if you tried to map it out. Even if you make it into a list, the names go on and on. The further you go back, the more names you have to look for. The further you go back, the harder these names are to find. How many you can find depends on where your ancestors are from and how well records were kept there. Or maybe how rich they were, and whether or not anyone thought their names were important enough to write down.

Richard Blevins
 Hannah Ausborn
 Catherine Cooper
 John N. Conatser
 Hannah Jordan
 John Twin Giffin
 Peter Romines Jr.
 Susanna Romines
 William Abbott
 Martha L. Ingalls
 Sylvester T. Winship
 Sally E. Hayes
 John George Brion
 Sarah Raker
 Pierre Josserand
 Jeanne Bonaparte
 John W. Stowe
 Elizabeth
 Thomas F. Rainey
 Mary Dwight Collins
 Gideon Peacock
 Eleanor Thompson
 Benjamin B. Whitaker
 Sarah Sallie Sebastian
 Charles H. Finley
 Nancy A. Broughton
 William Henry Jordan
 Frances H. Parritt
 Peyton J. Pate
 Martha Ann Varner

Daniel Blevins
 Sarah Belcher
 Stephen Osbourne
 George C. Conatser
 Anna M. Upp
 Andrew Giffin
 Peter Romine
 Rachel Layton
 Nehemiah Winship
 Mary Stones
 Lewis Hayes
 Patty P. Reynolds
 Ferdinand W. Stowe
 Elizabeth Kirkland

Reuban M. Rainey
 Catherine T. Cleaton
 Stephen Collins
 Robert Peacock
 Wealthy Howell
 Mary Polly Summers
 Joseph Sebastian
 Mark Whitaker
 Catherine Boone
 William Finley
 Mary Sharpe
 William Broughton
 Nancy Akins
 Radford Jordan
 Elizabeth Hogg
 William Hayden
 Stephen A. Pate
 Mary Polly Draper
 John Varner
 Elizabeth C. Cooper

Daniel Blevins
 Ephraim Osbourne
 Elizabeth Howard
 Johann Baltasar-
 Knoerzer
 Christoffel J. Romeyn
 Greitje Wykoff
 Thomas Layton
 Lydia
 Richard Winship Jr.
 Sally Torell
 James Hayes III
 Elizabeth Smith
 Frederick Rainey Sr.
 Mary Anne Wright
 Simon Peacock
 Zilpha Pitman
 Benjamin Howell
 American Ballard
 Isaac Sebastian
 Martha Dorris
 James Whitaker
 Prudence
 Mary Hawkins

Jesse Broughton
 John Akins
 Mary
 Sarah Middleton
 James Hogg
 Anthony Pate
 Millie
 John Cooper
 Zilphia Williams

Cornelius J. Howard
 Joanna O'Carroll
 Killian Knoerzer
 Eva Barbara
 Hanns G. Meyer
 Maria D. Zwick
 Jan Romeyn
 Lysbeth
 Peter Claeson Wyckoff
 Margrietje VanNess
 Richard Winship, Sr.
 Prudence Estabrook
 James Hayes, Jr.
 Rhonda Hayt
 Francis Rainey
 Mary Ann Rottenbury
 Wright
 Mary Ann
 John Peacock
 Patience Radford
 William Dorris
 Mary Williams
 Stephen Sebastian
 Sarah Isaac
 Mark Whitaker Sr.
 Elizabeth Emerson
 Fleet Cooper
 Maurgerite Coore
 John Williams

Cornelius Howard
 Mary K. Hammond
 Anthony O'Carroll
 Elizabeth O'Carroll
 Andreas Knoerzer

Anna K Schaeffer	Claes Romeyn	Mary Scullard
Hans Meyer	William Cutter	Edward Winship Sr.
Barbara Metz	Rebecca Rolfe	Elizabeth Park
Jan Claeszen	Rebeckah Barsham	
Leysebet Jans	Edward Winship Jr.	Mathys Meyer
Hannah Cutter	Thomas Allen	Catharina
Ephraim Winship	Mary	Giacomo deFerentino
James Hayes, Sr.	William Rayne	Isabella DeRuchan
Mary Allen	John Williamson	Samuel Cutter
Roger Rayne	William Peacock	Elizabeth Leatherhead
John Rottenbury	Katharine Kindred	Robert Williams
Susannah Williamson		Elizabeth Stalham
Samuel Peacock	John Gorsuch	Lionel Winship
Mary	Anne Lovelace	
James Emerson	Endris Knoerzer	Richard Leatherhead
	Ulrich Meyer	Elizabeth Wilkerson
Cornelius Howard	Magdalena Dietrich	Stephen Williams
Elizabeth Gorsuch	Peter DeRomeyn	Margaret Cooke
Jacob Knoerzer	DeLeicester	John Stalham
Christina Horlaker	Richard Cutter	Alice Gibson
Christen Meyer	Elizabeth Williams	
Barbara Blatter	John Rolfe	

Thomas Ledrede (1530-?, Northumberland, England)
 Robert Williams (1554-1609, Norfolk, England)
 Jane Shepherd (1560-1625, Oxfordshire, England)
 James Gibson (1549-1581, Lancashire, England)
 Margaret Park (1549-1611, Lancashire, England)

Eventually the names run out.

Jessica Jordan (1990—, Knoxville, Tennessee)

Sevierville Pike

If you go straight down Davenport Road away from the city, make a right onto Sevier Avenue, and then turn left once you reach the four-way stop at the old ice cream parlor, you'll be on Sevierville Pike. This road winds and winds for miles; there are sharp curves with steep drop-offs, and streetlights spaced far apart that flicker and dim as you drive beneath them. There aren't very many houses on Sevierville Pike, mostly just dense thickets of trees. It runs parallel to the highway, but it twists and turns and it's really only safe for one car to drive at a time, although there are two lanes. Sometimes I don't like driving it even on the clearest days, when the sky is blue and the sun is shining. I always worry that I'll veer off the edge and tumble fifty feet down the side of the road into the cedar trees; my last thoughts will be, "I should have taken Chapman Highway instead." The highway is faster anyway, to get from one part of South Knoxville to the other.

Once you turn onto Sevierville Pike there is a long stretch where there are no places to turn off or turn around; you have no choice but to follow the road. I wonder who laid it out, this hard-won path through the hills. Perhaps its curves were meant to accommodate every house, every farm that used to lie in these hills. My grandmother's family lived on this road, and my grandfather's too, back when it wasn't really part of the city at all, just farms and woods where country folk lived. And it's no wonder, since the terrain is so rough and irregular. You'd never get a trolley car out here. Even now it feels like a space outside the city, where the sounds of other cars and buildings fade out, and it feels quite lonely unless you happen upon

another car winding around a bend in the road, slowly making its way. Perhaps the men who built the road bent their will to the lay of the land, instead of the other way around.

The road is called Sevierville Pike, even though it doesn't go to Sevierville anymore. Now it just opens up onto Chapman Highway. My grandmother's family, the Conatsers and the Newmans, were all from Sevierville originally. I don't know what their lives were like there; everyone who could have told me what they remembered, or what they remembered their parents remembering, is gone. I imagine them clearing out small wooden houses, wrapping their children in rough blankets, settling down in carriages, and heading off down Sevierville Pike towards Knoxville. They rode until they reached the area where now I grip my steering wheel, and that's when they decided to stop. They had gone far enough. Then again, I don't even know if my great-great-grandparents would have had a carriage to take—maybe they went by horseback. It seems like riding a horse all the way from Sevierville would have been difficult if they had much to move, but maybe they didn't have many belongings to carry with them. All I know is that from 1790 to 1890 my ancestors on my grandmother's side lived and died in Sevierville, Tennessee, and in 1919 my grandmother was born in Knox County.

My grandmother's family slowly made their way down, down to the South of Knoxville, perhaps down that same winding road that's still there. Sevierville Pike connects the house on Davenport to my sister Julia's home on Centroak Drive, and so my mother and I drive it often. As we go, she tells me stories of our family that

used to live there. On our left, right as the road begins to wind, there is a big white house, and my great-grandfather, my grandfather's father, Samuel A. Walker, was born in it. When he grew up he married a girl named Josephine, who lived a little further up the road, on the right, in an area that was once called the Sugar Holler and isn't called anything now. When the two would fight, both hill-country stubborn, as my mother would say, Samuel would grow furious and yell, "I never should have fetched you out of Sugar Holler!" I once looked him up in an old Knoxville City Directory, tried to trace him back through the thirties, the twenties, the teens. He worked as a gardener, a dairy man, a night guard. My grandfather will only say that his father could talk your ear off. My mother whispers that he drank. My grandfather doesn't hear her.

Further on up the road is the Cedar Thicket, a dense cluster of trees looming above a steep drop off. We say that here is where my mother's mother's father, Ples Newman, short for Pleasant, was waylaid by bandits on his way home one night. His horse came home without him and everyone thought that he was dead. They went out with torches into the night and found him by the side of the road, brought him home and put him to bed.

For years and years our kin lived along these roads, up until the time when my mother was a teenager. There is one story she tells, but only when my grandfather is not around, of being eleven, of driving to her Aunt Sally's house to install insulation with her father. They rode in a big work truck, the one my grandfather used for his insulation business after he came back from the war. In the middle of the ride (perhaps it was that bumpy road), for the first time ever my mother got her period.

She said it was the most embarrassing moment of her life, to be in that car with her father, that she didn't know what to say, and that she had to wait until she got to Aunt Sally's house to do anything about it. I think she tells this story to make me feel better when I am embarrassed about things, to show that nothing is as bad as riding in a truck with your father, bleeding and silent and scared. But what I think of is how, such a short time ago, there was a big family here, all along Sevierville Pike—uncles, cousins, aunts, people who visited each other and joked with each other and did favors for each other. Now that James has moved away there are only five of us left in South Knoxville: my grandfather, my mother, Kerry, Julia, and me. And it feels like we're the last, the survivors of a history that is winding down and fading fast. Soon we'll all be gone, and there'll be no one left to drive by and point out the window and say, "This is where we used to live."

Most of Sevier County is in the mountains. A lot of it used to be just houses in the hills, with no one around for miles and miles. Some of it still is, but now the mountains have also become East Tennessee's main draw for tourists—the Great Smoky Mountain National Park drew 11 million visitors in 2003. The park wasn't created until 1940, and before that it was another world entirely.

Like most of the land around here, these mountains used to belong to the Cherokee Indians, who first arrived in East Tennessee around 1,500 years ago. They lived prosperously on the resources of the land—there were rivers and streams to provide water and fish, a countryside full of deer, elk, and bear to hunt, and vast swaths of woodlands that provided building materials, firewood, and useful plants.

Once on an elementary school field trip to the mountains, a Park Ranger told my class that there are more kinds of trees in the Smoky Mountains than there are in all of Europe. The world must have seemed so wide, when as far as you could walk, even if you walked for a day, or two, or ten, there was only this land, these unceasing trees. For a time the Cherokee were powerful, controlling land in East Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina, but white settlements began forming further north in the seventeenth century, the original thirteen colonies, and it wouldn't be long before the settlers set their sights on the Southeast and Cherokee land. There were a hundred years of treaties and smallpox epidemics and bloody battles, and in 1828 gold was discovered on Cherokee territory in Georgia. In 1830 President Andrew Jackson, a Tennessee native, signed the Indian Removal Act, forcing the Cherokee and other tribes off of their homelands and into forced relocation to the designated "Indian Territory" of Oklahoma.¹⁰

When I was in school learning Tennessee history we never lingered on the Trail of Tears, the fact that Tennessee's first major foray into national politics resulted in the exploitation of an entire people. Whenever the class reached this point in history the lesson always transitioned into a lecture about Sequoyah, the Cherokee man who invented the tribe's first system of writing. They called his syllabary "Talking Leaves." My teachers would smile and show us a slide of strange markings that corresponded to the sounds of the Cherokee language. He was living in Alabama when he created his alphabet, but he was born near Knoxville, and so we've made him ours, despite the fact that he spent the later years of his life working to undo the harm of Indian Removal that is also our legacy.

The real story of Sequoyah is more complex than the one that was delivered in my fourth grade classroom. He had seen the power that written language had given the settlers that were moving onto Cherokee land, the power to gain control of lands without bloodshed, to bind the Cherokee Nation through treaties and laws. The only basis he had for how to develop writing was the barest understanding of how to speak and write English, and it took him ten years to develop a system of symbols to correspond to the sounds of his native tongue. During the years he worked he was looked upon with ridicule; an 1837 interview with Sequoyah reports: “He was laughed at by all who knew him and was earnestly besought by every member of his family to abandon a project which was occupying and diverting so much of his time from the important and essential duties which he owed his family.”¹¹ Other members of his tribe were convinced that he was crazy, since he spent most of his time alone in the woods, using a stick to make marks in the dirt before rubbing them out again.

Still, Sequoyah persevered, and in 1821 he unveiled his invention to the Cherokee Nation. He was awarded a medal by the Cherokee National Council that he wore almost every day for the rest of his life. The adoption of the syllabary was rapid and widespread. Sequoyah had given his people something that the white settlers had taken for granted for thousands of years: the power to write. A collected anthology of Cherokee social documents contains letters home from Cherokee soldiers during the Civil War, menus, love poems, medicinal remedies, song lyrics, myth fragments, and more.¹² Sequoyah gave his people the ability to record their history, culture, and beliefs; the power to send a message to a loved one who was far away, to bring legal suits against those who wronged them. I would not say that it was too little, but it was

too late. Although the syllabary was quickly adopted and put into use by the Cherokee Nation, and though Sequoyah worked desperately to combat the loss of the Cherokee homelands, he was unable to prevent the Trail of Tears. I always imagine a dirt path through the trees, dust rising up from footprints, wet splotches on the ground where heavy tear drops fell. Today most people in the Knoxville area will claim Native American blood, whether or not they can back it up. My mother says we've got it too, somewhere back there. I found a notation in our family tree, an anonymous mention that my great-great-great-great-great grandmother, Mary Elizabeth, married to Layton Romines, was a Cherokee Indian. The proof seems slim; all we've got to back it up are my dark eyes and my grandfather's still-dark hair.

I've never met anyone outside of Tennessee who knows John Sevier's name, but he was our first governor, in 1796, and today we cling to his name like a badge of honor, Tennessee's own George Washington that no one else has ever heard of. In local history, John Sevier has even managed to outshine the man Knoxville is named for: Henry Knox, Chief Artillery Officer of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. I had never heard of Henry Knox until long after I left school. Perhaps even more insulting to his memory, it had never occurred to me to wonder how Knoxville got its name. Henry Knox is detached from local memory in a way that John Sevier is not. In the greater Knoxville area there is not only Sevierville Pike, but also Sevier Avenue, John Sevier Highway, Sevierville Road, John Sevier Elementary School, John Sevier Hunter Education Center, John Sevier Baptist Church, John Sevier Animal Clinic, Sevier County, and, of course, the city of

Sevierville, where mountain farmers used to live and which now boasts a thriving, tacky tourist economy initiated by the opening of Dollywood in 1986. Dolly Parton may be the only country music star tasteless enough to name a theme park named after herself, but she's also the only one who can boast that she is her hometown's largest employer, boasting a payroll of 3,000,¹³ an impressive feat in a city where in 2009 18.8% of the population was living below the poverty line.¹⁴

The first European settlement in the Sevierville area was established in 1783. This settlement was small—just a tavern, farm, and trading post—but a recent ceasefire that had been established between the settlers and the Indians ensured that it grew quickly. By 1785 the Cherokee in the area had signed away all the rights to the land that is now Sevier County, and by 1795 the city of Sevierville was established, named for Tennessee frontiersman John Sevier.

John Sevier was born in 1745 in Virginia, and in 1773 he moved with his family into the territory that would become Tennessee. It seems as though his main occupation in his first years here was fighting Indians. Appalachia could have almost been another country before the Revolutionary War—just days after the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia, as the colonies in the North were waiting for the outbreak of war with England, the settlement where John Sevier was living was invaded by the Cherokee. The pioneers fled to nearby Fort Caswell for protection, but one woman, Catherine Sherrill, didn't make it to the gates before they were locked against the invading force. They say that John Sevier single-handedly pulled her over the wall of the fort to safety. There have been many spirited depictions of this incident in regional art over the years, usually featuring Sevier bent

double over the pointed wooden piers of Fort Caswell's surrounding wall with a pistol in one hand and Catherine Sherrill in the other, facing down oncoming Indian warriors bearing tomahawks. The siege lasted for two weeks before the settlers drove the Cherokee away. In 1780 Sevier married Catherine, and she's famous in East Tennessee too. She's known as Bonny Kate.

Not that the troubles of the Revolution evaded John Sevier entirely. In the second half of the Revolutionary War he led a charge of soldiers at the Battle of King's Mountain in North Carolina to a decisive victory over American Loyalists—a turning point for the Patriots. But before the War for Independence was over he was back to fighting Indians again, and by 1793 most of the violent Cherokee uprisings in the region were quelled for good. Tennessee is my home—the mountains and the woods and the river all feel like they belong to me. But Tennessee was not John Sevier's home. These were not his wooded paths and craggy peaks; he didn't have his roots deep down in the mountain earth. He must have had other reasons to fight. But he did settle there, eventually, and I wonder how he came to love the land. I can see him in the woods, breathing in air thick with smoke and gunpowder, looking out at the East Tennessee hills.

John Sevier's prowess in battle was paralleled by his prominent role in the politics of the era. He first served on the North Carolina state senate, but just long enough to help write legislation to cede the land that would become Tennessee to the Federal Government, making it eligible to become a state. He was then elected the first governor of Tennessee in 1796, and he moved to Knoxville the next year to a house he named Marble Springs, located on land that would one day become part of

South Knoxville. It lies off of John Sevier highway, down a path marked with an old wooden sign. He's buried on the lawn of the Knox County Courthouse. I've heard that he had eighteen children and a feud with Andrew Jackson. His exploits captured the imagination of writers long after his death—a 1927 adventure novel about Sevier's life, *Nolichucky Jack*, colorfully imagined his exploits. The novel ends with a description of John Sevier's tombstone standing on the lawn of the Knox County Courthouse. In *Nolichucky Jack*, the tombstone reads: "Nolichucky Jack: Indian Fighter." Sevier's tombstone does indeed sit in front of the courthouse, but in actuality it reads: "Nolichucky Jack: Pioneer, Soldier, Statesman, and one of the Founders of the Republic."

In 1856 the Sevier County Courthouse burned the ground, along with the entire archive of public records that was housed inside it. It's hard now, almost impossible, to trace the lives of the people who lived in Sevierville in its early years. At some point on the family tree my mother has put together for herself, the long path of generations sputters out, culminating in names without clues. For instance, I know a man called Jonathan Thomas, my great-great-great grandfather on my maternal grandmother's side, married a woman called Zuba in 1830, but her maiden name has been lost, and there is no way to find out who her parents were. And more than that, even with the world's information at my fingertips I cannot understand why a woman living in East Tennessee in the early nineteenth century would have a name like "Zuba." It's not popular now; it wasn't popular then. The internet's best guess is that it is a Biblical name, from the Hebrew "Azubah." Maybe her parents heard it at

church one day and thought it sounded like music. Maybe it's an African name and she was a slave. I will never know, because all that's left is a crooked scrawl in a crumbling register, a faint recollection of a story once heard, the heartbeats of their children's children's children's children.

But even though the courthouse burned, a few things have been saved and remembered. Andrew Conatser is just about the earliest ancestor I can locate from the days when my family lived in the Sevierville area—he lived there back before it was even named after John Sevier at all. His parents were from Rowan County, North Carolina, but Andrew was born in Sevier County in 1790 and he died there in 1862, and he is my great-great-great-great grandfather. Andrew was a preacher by profession, and in 1819 he helped form the Bethel Baptist Church in Sevierville, a congregation that survives today. He later became a deacon at this same church, and was apparently a remarkable enough man to warrant a place in J.J. Burnett's *Tennessee's Pioneer Baptist Preachers*, published in 1919. Burnett notes that Andrew was “particularly gifted in exhortation and prayer” and “rawboned, muscular and sinewy, a man of rare physical strength and endurance.” The book recounts the tale of how a group of Andrew's companions tried to force him to drink—a violation of his pious life. After attempting to decline his friends graciously, “with his good fist he landed blows on the cheeks of about seven of his assailants, knocking them down as fast as they approached him.” And apparently no one ever asked him if he wanted a drink again.

I imagine Andrew looking something like the pictures I've seen of my great-great-grandfather Pink Conatser—tall, lean, but not too thin, with big hands, a long

nose, brown eyes, and hair that curls just the slightest bit. Assaulting seven men who want you to partake of a glass of moonshine isn't the kind of thing I would have expected from someone in my family. We seem more likely, now, to walk out in a cold silence, or, some of us, to take the drink. But I like the story. It makes me feel like Andrew was really there, really lived: two big fists and a temper, passionate and muscular, angry and young. I can hear his heavy breathing as he turns his back on the men he left lying in the road, the thick Spring Tennessee air around him and the cicadas chirping into the night.

Burnett concludes his commentary on Andrew's life by noting that the preacher lived most of his days in an old fort that had been used during conflicts with the local Indians. Along the side of the structure there were round openings, akin to the portholes of a ship, through which the pioneers could stick their guns and shoot any oncoming Indians.

And so through bloodshed coupled with the perseverance of early pioneers, the mountains of East Tennessee came to us, and we dug in our heels. The white people moved in and built small houses, tended the land. I've heard it was this hard life, this rocky earth, that caused most East Tennesseans to support the Union during the Civil War—you can't build a plantation on the side of a mountain. After Tennessee seceded from the Union, East Tennessee tried to secede from the state, but the Confederate soldiers came down from Nashville and occupied Knoxville. There is a story about those who resisted, Appalachian men who made a deal with the Union Army, pledging to burn railroad bridges that the Confederate army relied on for

supplies. In exchange the Union Army would come down from Kentucky and free East Tennessee from Confederate hands. These guerilla fighters burned five of nine targeted bridges before they were caught and hanged. The Union Army never came.

On the front lawn of the Blount County courthouse in Maryville there is a Civil War memorial, and on elementary school trips they point to columns of names, Blount County men, half who fought for the South and half who fought for the North. It was much the same in Knoxville and Sevier County. Sometimes members of the same family took different sides, brother staring down brother on a bloody field filled with smoke. It's a gamble for those who wish to trace their lines, to find where their family's loyalties lay. I've got ancestors on both sides: Marshall Walker, Amasa Conatser, and John Romines all fought for the Union, but Vineyard Thomas fought for the Confederacy, although my mother says he might have been conscripted. I was relieved when I found out that most of my ancestors donned the Blue instead of the Gray. It seems like some kind of personal redemption for the way the world sees the South—as racist and hateful and always on the wrong side of history. Although today, more often than not, East Tennesseans hope to discover that their forefathers were Confederates, and the Confederate Flag was waved in support of the school's football team every Friday night when I was in high school. It is hard to reconcile my love for the place where I'm from with the grievous perpetuation of prejudice I sometimes see there. Perhaps there's no redemption after all.

After the Civil War things settled down again for the people of the mountains. They went back to farming and making crafts, and it stayed that way for a long time. I once read that up until the 1930's, when the area became increasingly industrialized

because of a boom in logging business, the region was so geographically isolated that the dialect spoken there was akin to the vernacular spoken by the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Scholars would travel to East Tennessee and listen to people speak. One of those scholars was Joseph Sargent Hall, who took recordings and phonetic dictations from mountain people between 1937 and 1940. In the introduction of his book, Hall explains his reasons for conducting his study:

[A] reason for undertaking the study was the belief that in this speech, which has so long been removed from the main currents of American culture, there would remain vestiges of earlier stages in the growth of the English language. The work of Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell in recording many specimens of old British songs, which have survived the Southern Appalachians, inspired the hope that the people of the region might also have preserved out-moded features of speech. It was of course suspected that such might be the case, in view of all that has been written upon the survival of ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ ‘Chaucerian,’ and ‘Elizabethan’ speech in the Southern Mountains. Such dialectical remnants as *spend* (*express*) one’s opinion, *swinge* for *singe*, and *use* for *dwell* may still be heard and also numerous other sixteenth and seventeenth century expressions.¹⁵

In the years since then much of the old mountain dialect has been lost, dying out as the modern world closed in, but the way East Tennesseans speak, not with a twang but with a particular drawl, is looked upon with amusement or scorn by other areas of the country. I like the way Hall’s study makes the way East Tennesseans talk seem important. I like that that it says something about mountain speech other than

that it's uneducated. For him the fact that many mountain people didn't receive much schooling was something intriguing rather than scorn worthy: "It was significant to find a speech which does not show the deep impress of the schoolmaster's influence. Here is a vernacular...which shows how a language may develop when removed from the conservative forces that restrict its growth."¹⁶ But as the logging industry in the Smokies continued to prosper, the dialects that fascinated Hall were disappearing, as were the centuries-old forests pillaged for their wood.

In 1934 the Great Smoky Mountains National Park was established across parts of Sevier, Blount, and Cocke counties. At 522,419 acres¹⁷ was about 20% of the forest that used to be in East Tennessee.¹⁸ Though lobbyists for the park initially promised that those living in the mountains would not be forced off of their land, the state government claimed the right of eminent domain. Farmers who had lived on this land for generations were forced to sell at below-market prices before being thrust out into the wide world during the midst of the Great Depression.¹⁹ Those living in Cades Cove put up the most resistance, sending threats to the Park Commissioner and posting a sign at the entrance to the cove warning "LET THE COVE PEOPLE ALONE. GET OUT. GET GONE."²⁰ The farmers of the Cove continually fought for their right to continue living on their family land from the announcement of the Park's creation in 1926 until long after its official 1934 establishment. Twelve families who refused to leave were eventually allowed to remain on a yearly lease on their land, but the community they had loved was broken. Upon their deaths these homes, too, were absorbed into the Park.²¹ On hiking trails you still pass by empty houses and old churches and small graveyards that they left behind.

Those are the mountains that have come down to me, the National Park with its old abandoned houses and designated trails. The times when my family lived there are long gone, although once my mother took me on a drive up into Pigeon Forge, past the tacky mini-golf places and flashing neon lights advertising souvenir stores, to visit the grave of some family member who died long ago. We turned off of the one road that everything is on, Parkway, and were in the mountains. In stark contrast to the busy road behind us, there was the hill country. There were winding dirt roads and old barns spotting the countryside. It was silent and empty and peaceful. We didn't find the cemetery where my mother expects, but eventually stumbled upon it as we are just about to leave. It was a simple place, no church, just a lonely plot of land in the middle of the field. We got out and looked around until we came upon the grave my mother had been hoping to see. I don't remember the name of the person now, though she might, if I asked her. I do remember standing in the middle of that field on a windy day, my mother's eyes shining with accomplishment as we looked down at the grey tombstone.

But even though our family doesn't live there anymore, the mountains still seem to have a strong hold over us. When I was a little kid I was always taking hiking trips with my family, although now that I think back on it I don't actually remember my father being there, just my mother, James, Julia, and me. I see us in our 90's outdoor gear, fanny packs and bandannas, flannel shirts and high-waisted jeans. Julia would always plough ahead, wanting to be first at our destination, and I would lag behind.

My mother tells me that once when I was very small I fell on the way back down the trail and pouted, “No more nature today.” I remember that one time, after we had made it to our destination (some waterfall, although I don’t remember which one), my brother carved Julia and me walking sticks from branches we had found on the trail. Julia asked for a unicorn on top of her walking stick; I wanted a bear on top of mine. He complied, laughing, and for many years it was one of my prized possessions—a genuine walking stick, carved with my spirit animal. I always thought of it as a work of art. Years later when I took it out I could see its crude lines, the only vaguely bear-like form my brother had coaxed from the wood. I remember my brother sitting beside the waterfall and teasing the wood with his pocket knife.

There were school trips, too, to learn our heritage. Of these, I mostly just remember being told that I wasn’t allowed to take anything out of the park, and stuffing my pockets with flowers and rocks as we walked back to the school bus anyway. I was afraid, but my fear wasn’t as great as my desire to take the beauty of bright petals and smooth contours home with me. I hope my mother smiled when she emptied my pockets before she washed my jeans.

My mother once told me of a school trip that she went on in the 9th grade, probably up to visit one of the historical houses the park keeps up. She says she doesn’t remember anything about it, except for that it was while she was on this trip that the boy she had a crush on held hands some other little girl the whole time. Besides school trips, my mother didn’t go to the mountains often; it wasn’t really the type of thing my grandparents were interested in. The family would only go to the mountains when my grandfather’s brother Jack was visiting from Florida, in between

evenings at home remembering days gone by. Jack had worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps during the New Deal, and he enjoyed revisiting the places where he had toiled under the sun. My grandfather had been in the CCC too, but had requested to be sent away from Tennessee to work, and served his time in Oregon. He'll say, "I did a lot of stupid things back then." It's hard for me to imagine what my grandfather means by this. I have always known him to be steadfast and stoic, rooted to his home and his family. I cannot see him being reckless or foolhardy, but, then again, back when he joined the CCC it was before the War, and before then my grandfather had never really been away from home. Maybe he wondered what was in the wide world. Turns out, it wasn't to his liking.

Despite seldom visiting them when she was a child, my mother developed a deep love for the mountains. When Kerry and James were young they both became members of the same Boy Scout troop—a fact that always shocked me as a child—and together they all took many trips into the mountains. James probably led the way and Kerry never wanted to come and my mother, I think, was probably just happy to have everyone together. They carried tents on their backs and cooked food over a fire; everyone likes to tell the story of when James carried an iron skillet up a mountain. Almost all of the pictures I've seen of any of them from this time are from trips into the mountains, as if these trips were always special enough to warrant the rare use of a camera. My mother has saved relics from this time, hiking maps, old sleeping bags, and a stack of typed yellowing pages, laid to rest in her cedar chest years ago for safekeeping.

The pages bear the title, “Kidnapped for a Good Cause,” and contain a story Kerry wrote when she was taking a course at a local community college, reminiscing about a trip she took to the mountains as a young teenager. It’s a side of her that says more than the stories about her running away, or drinking, or staying out late. Kerry tells of a time she was forced to go on a camping trip with James and his Boy Scout troop. She wanted to prove that she was just as good, just as strong, as her brother. She wanted to make it up the mountain, and she did. My favorite part is when she talks about Mom:

I had so many questions, but not enough breath to ask them. One thing I did notice that left a lasting impression, was the way my mother looked. She was walking slower than anyone, and she was obviously struggling with her pack, but she looked so beautiful. My mother is beautiful in any situation, but she looked...so happy. She was smiling and laughing. With no make-up and long, straight hair blowing in the wind, she looked like an angel. It was as if she belonged there. This was a very different picture than the one of me with smeared eye make-up running down my face, and permed hair pulled down into a hard glump of hair spray. She looked so natural and healthy. I had never seen my mother look this way.

My Mom and I slept in the same tent. This was the first time we had slept together since birth, I imagine. And it had to be purely coincidence that I woke up in her arms.

In “Kidnapped for a Good Cause,” the silence of the woods unnerves Kerry: “There was mud, and mosquitoes, and worst of all, it was silent! The only sound I

heard was my own heavy breathing. ‘Why would anybody want to go where it was silent?’” But James always thought about the woods a little differently. For him they were bigger, deeper, closer. If you ask, he’ll say that one story encapsulates the way he feels about the mountains. He speaks as if looking far away. He was a young teenager, on a hike with his Boy Scout troop.

We had been backpacking all day and we were sitting at camp. And all this group could do was complain and gripe about who was gonna do what and they just argued all the time. And I was just thinking, I was looking off into the woods and I was overcome with the strongest desire to just walk into the woods and be away from them and be gone. Be completely isolated. And it was just a feeling of escape from them and from everything. Because I remember looking off into the woods, and it wasn’t even a rational thought...It just felt like the woods were calling, were pulling, were saying, “Come,” and obviously I didn’t, because I needed to stay with my group. That’s the only part of that day I even remember. Just standing alone. Everyone bickering behind me, and looking off into the woods and just having the strongest desire just to leave, everything, everybody and just be in the woods.

I once went hiking in the winter with James and my mother, and the mountains were covered in snow, thick and white across the skeleton trees and rocky ground. My brother’s favorite time to hike is in the winter—he had once hiked this same trail in snow up to his waist. We were going to Rainbow Falls. James had moved away by this time, to St. Louis, and I’m sure that he had missed the woods and their strange serenity. My mother and I had missed my brother, and we just wanted to

be where he was. We started out together, laughing and talking at the beginning of the trail. James salvaged walking sticks for us from the side of the trail. As we went on the periods of silence became longer and longer. Our breaths came out in puffs like smoke. No one had gone before us and no one was coming behind.

My brother pulled ahead, hiking fast up the side of the mountain. My mother fell behind, slowly walking and feeling the ache in her bones, but happy that we were here together. I was in the middle, and I couldn't see either of them. It was cold and beautiful. I remember pausing on a steep incline. To my left was the solid rock wall of the mountain, to the right was a drop-off. For as far as I could see it was the tops of trees and open grey sky. The silence was everywhere. I stood still and heard nothing. The world was a white blanket and it covered only me. It felt like I would never see them again. Like the rest of time was this hill and the boundless quiet of the mountain. Eventually we came together again, made it all the way up to the Falls, frozen into ice, and back down again. I don't think we spoke much on the car ride home.

When I was a child my mother was determined to reproduce the family bonding trips she had taken with James and Kerry when they were young. To this effect, she convinced us that we should all take a backpacking trip. We dug through our basement and found all of our camping supplies that had been high-tech in the eighties. My mother, a woman who stands 5'3", loaded herself down with an enormous pack, containing everything heavy and our tent. Julia carried the bed-rolls. I wore a Winnie-the-Pooh backpack and carried my teddy bear under my arm.

As we drove along the road that would lead us to our trailhead, we encountered a sign that said a portion of the road was closed because of flooding. This did not deter my mom, who merely parked in a nearby parking lot and informed Julia and me that we would forge ahead. And forge ahead we did. It was six miles to the place where the trail actually started, and two more to the campsite my mother had picked out for us. There is a classic family photo of me, sitting on a rock clutching my teddy bear and glaring at the camera, about four miles into the trip. At the time it felt like the hardest thing in the world, and I can't really say why my mother wanted to go through with it so badly—I can't imagine her doing so now, but then again, the fourteen years that have passed since we took this trip have been long ones. We finally made it to our campsite after several hours. Julia and I played in the stream and I found a rusted horseshoe. I remember nothing of the hike back the next day.

Something in my mother wanted to return to her past, especially after she divorced my father, and so once again she took her two children up into the mountains. Here, once you step into the trees, time is suspended. There is only the hill in front of you, and your feet on dirt, and the thirst in the back of your throat from climbing. It feels like an eternity and like no time is passing. The world only resumes itself once you step out again into the parking lot, after you have lost hours and you don't know where they went. When I was in the eighth grade I wrote a poem that said that time moves faster-slower in the mountains, like you can feel the hours passing but you don't notice when they've gone, not until you get back into the car and start driving back towards the lights of the city.

Barbara Allen

When I was a child, my mother used to sing old songs to me, to put me to sleep at night. She would sit on the edge of my bed, or hold me in her arms and rock, back and forth, back and forth. My favorite song was “Barbara Allen.” It sounded like the sadness of the night and the whole world. Everything else was quiet.

*In Scarlett town where I was born
There was a fair maid dwellin’
Made all the youths cry well-a-day
And her name was Barbara Allen.*

*’twas in the Merry month of May
The green buds, they were swellin’
Sweet William on his death bed lay
For love of Barbara Allen.*

East Tennessee has a strong tradition of folk music, tunes played on fiddles and banjos, songs you learn from your parents and not from the radio. Many of these songs were traditional seventeenth-century Scottish or English ballads, carried over by immigrants when they settled in Appalachia. East Tennessee voices kept the songs alive down through the years.

*So he sent his man unto her then
To the town where she was dwellin’
You must come to my master, dear
If your name be Barbara Allen.*

*So slowly, slowly she came up,
And slowly she came nigh him
And all she said when there she came,
“Young man I think you’re dyin’”*

The first references to “Barbara Allen” appeared in the mid-seventeenth century, and in the nearly three-hundred and fifty years since the first broadsheets of the song were printed, it’s had a pretty good run. “Barbara Allen” has long been a

staple of Appalachian folk repertoires, played and passed down not just in East Tennessee, but also in other regions of the South-Eastern United States. During the folk-revival movement of the 1960s, the song enjoyed a popular resurgence.

*He turned his face unto the wall,
And death was drawing nigh him
“Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,
Be kind to Barbara Allen.”*

*As she was walking through the fields
She heard the death bell tollin’
And every toll there seemed to say
“Hard hearted Barbara Allen.”*

The iTunes store currently offers eighty-four versions of the song for sale, including versions by Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Colin Meloy, Doris Day, Art Garfunkel, and the Everly Brothers.

*“Oh, mother, mother make my bed
Oh, make it long and narrow,
Sweet William died for love of me,
And I shall die of sorrow.”*

*“Beware,” she said, “ye virgins all,
And shun the fault I fell in,
Take warning by the fall
Of cruel Barbara Allen.”*

*“Oh, father, father, dig my grave
Oh, dig it long and narrow
Sweet William died for love today,
And I shall die tomorrow.”*

My mother doesn’t remember where she learned the song. As I got older, she would ask me to sing it to her, in the evenings when we were the only ones in a darkening house, or sometimes in the car when the radio didn’t work, to pass the time. “Sing with me, like you used to,” I say. “Oh no,” she says. “Your voice is much

prettier than mine ever was. I'm not much good at singing. Plus, who even knows if I would remember the words anymore?" But sometimes she sings with me anyway.

*Sweet William was buried in the old churchyard
And Barbara there beside him
And from his grave grew a red, red rose
And from her grave, a briar.*

*They grew to top the old church tower
They could not grow no higher
And there they twined in a true lover's knot
The red rose round the briar.*

Everything else was quiet.

Chilhowee Park

There was a time when my family lived on the other side of the river, a brief exodus from South Knoxville in the late twenties which lasted until the mid-fifties. My great-grandparents on both sides of my mother's family moved away from South Knoxville, where their great-grandparents had lived, looking for work. One day their children, my Nan and Gan, would move back across the river, but I don't know if they knew that then. Before they moved from South Knoxville both families actually lived quite near each other, although I don't think they ever met. My grandfather's family first moved to North Knoxville, and later to East Knoxville. My grandmother's family moved to East Knoxville, and that's where they stayed.

There are not very many places to spend leisure time in East Knoxville, and even fewer where you can really get some fresh air. Its streets are filled primarily with houses fit closely together, and churches, and little grocery stores. In the 1940s it was much the same. Then, as now, there is really only one place to go: Chilhowee Park, eighty acres of open space, with walking trails, a big lake in the middle, and, nowadays, exhibition buildings and a science museum. An iron arch stands above its entrance. It is not ornate; in simple white capitals it spells out the name of the park, which dates back to the time when East Knoxville was its own city, before it was annexed in 1917. When the land was purchased by Professor Fernando Cortes Bateman in 1875 it was a dairy farm, and in the 1880s he converted it into a park. Though the origins of the name 'Chilhowee' are almost certainly Cherokee, the meaning of the word has been lost.

Chilhowee Park first made headlines in 1910, when it hosted East Tennessee's first ever Appalachian Exposition, a fair-like event that lasted for a month and drew the likes of President Teddy Roosevelt, who declared it "bully." The purpose of the exhibition was to demonstrate the idea of the "New South" as a place of progress and industry, a region that was catching up with the more modernized North and closing a divide that had existed since the end of the Civil War. Additionally, the fair was meant to promote the conservation of regional natural resources. Thus, naturally, its opening day brochure boasted of events like "High Wire Performance by Do Bell across the Lake" and "The Two Whitakers' Dare-devil Ride for Life into a Tank of Fire." To be fair, there was also a conference on educational work and a lecture on good roads. All in all, it was an extravaganza the likes of which the entire region of Southern Appalachia had never seen before, a confluence of spectacle, progressive thinking, and bright, turn-of-the century hope for what the next hundred years might bring to the city. The event was so successful that it was repeated in 1911, this time hosting President Taft, and in 1913 Chilhowee Park was the site of the National Conservation Exposition. This tradition of expositions morphed into the Tennessee Valley Fair, held on the grounds of Chilhowee Park every year since 1916, and it likely inspired Knoxville's bid for the 1982 World's Fair. My grandparents met in Chilhowee Park in 1946.

My maternal grandmother, Ruth Edna Conatser, was born in 1919 while her parents were living on Sevierville Pike in South Knoxville, and her father, Pink Elbert Conatser, worked as a furniture refinisher downtown. Her mother's name was Julia Ethel, and together they lived in a little house in the South Knoxville woods. I

like to think that they were happy there. By 1926 they had moved to another area of South Knoxville, to Davenport Road itself, number 404. Nan used to tell the story of walking down to Parker and Crisp on nearby Sevier Avenue, a small grocery store in a red brick building. Her Uncle Decatur worked there, and he would sometimes give her candy from behind the counter. Many years later, when she was grown, her husband's insulation business would stand on the lot next to where Parker and Crisp used to be.

My grandfather, John Harvey Walker, was born in 1922 on Boggs Street, just two houses down from where Boggs intersects Davenport Road. My mother has taught me to point out this house as we drive by it. When I'm home on breaks, riding in the car with high school friends, people I haven't seen in years, and the silence grows longer between us, I will point out the passenger side. "See that second house down the row? The white one with the flag? My grandfather was born there." It's not much, but my words fill the space long enough for us to forget again that things aren't like they used to be. We all grew up in Maryville, but my friends live in Knoxville now, going to the University of Tennessee, and I go to school far away, up North. Each day they wake up and step out their doors into the city. They pound their feet on Knoxville pavement and drink beer in Knoxville bars. They breathe Knoxville air on cool spring evenings. I sit in a room in Connecticut, with snow still on the ground outside my window, and write a memory of when my grandparents walked and drank and breathed the life of a Southern city.

Gan was the youngest of six children, but only one was near his age: Jack, born in 1917. His mother's name was Josephine; his father, Samuel A. Walker,

descendent of the William Walker who had owned all that land in South Knoxville in the early 1800s, worked a number of different jobs over the course of Gan's childhood: night watchman, dairy man, ditch-digger, anything he could get. Gan once told me that his father used to say, "I'm just an old work steer." Wherever there was work, he went. In 1925 he was working as a shipping clerk.

During the Great Depression no one stayed in the same place for very long, at least not in my family, and by 1927 both of my grandparents' families had moved away from South Knoxville. The Walkers lived in at least six North Knoxville addresses in between 1927 and 1942. He never liked school, but he attended Oakwood Elementary, which was always just a few streets down from wherever he was living. The school opened in 1914, and stayed open as a facility for various educational purposes until 2001. It sat vacant for ten years, and began to crumble. In 2011 the building was slated for demolition, and the mayor of Knoxville called for proposals to save it, giving it a month reprieve from destruction. None came. But some sort of hope must have held out, either in the mayor or in the inhabitants of the North Knoxville neighborhood in which the school stands, because it wasn't torn down, and in March of 2012 it was announced that the building would be converted into an assisted living facility.

I don't think my grandfather was ever aware that the school was in danger, but I think he would be sad to find it gone. Sometimes I go driving with him and my mother, and we cruise through the old neighborhoods, trying to find things that used to be there—the schools, the houses, the stores—but most of the time they are long gone, replaced by apartments or even by empty lots, covered in vines. "It's all

changed now,” my grandfather says, as he looks out the window and tries to recognize the places he used to live. I guess it’s not surprising, since it’s edging up on ninety years since he lived there. But I can tell it makes him sad, and it makes us all melancholy to know that we’ll never see again the house where my mother celebrated her first birthday, or the building where my great-grandfather had his furniture workshop, or the house where my grandfather lived when he was young. When we pass the Oakwood School, which has been standing at 232 E. Churchwell Avenue for a hundred years, my grandfather smiles.

He’ll tell you that the only part of school he liked was recess, and about his brother Jack’s dog who used to walk him home from school. The dog’s name was also Jack, and he would wait outside the Oakwood School for my grandfather when the kindergarten got out early in the day, and return to the school later to pick up Jack when the older children were released later in the afternoon. My grandfather’s school days were short lived; he was already going out to work with his father at the age of eight, and had dropped out of school completely before he finished the eighth grade. He worked at Lowe Brother Insulation until Pearl Harbor, when he enlisted in the United States Army at age 19. He says, “You started [work] when you was 8 or 9 years old. In other words you worked all your life and wasn’t no end between.”

My grandfather is like a locked box. His answers to questions are short and direct, without elaboration. I once asked him what his wedding day was like, what he remembered about it. Gan answered, “Well, it was just...everything was quiet.” And he said no more. But if you get in the car and take a ride with him, drive him past places he used to know, he will begin to talk about what he remembers. Sometimes

he tells me things I never thought to ask about. On weekend mornings my mother likes to go for drives, and so we leave from the house on Davenport to pick up my grandfather on Stone Road. My mother drives, my grandfather sits in the passenger seat, and I am in the back, looking out the window, and listening. Sometimes we just drive around near home, stopping occasionally at thrift stores or the discount super market, but sometimes we cross the river and drive to North Knoxville. The neighborhoods are unfamiliar to me and my mother, but my grandfather remembers this labyrinth of streets.

“Where’s the turn?” asks my mother, hunched forward and peering anxiously out the windshield.

“Turn left here, I think,” says Gan. “Yeah, it’s here.”

And my grandfather begins to speak.

He remembers once trying to buy secondhand shoes at a store when he was a young child, and the proprietor threw him out of the store because he only had forty-nine cents when the shoes cost fifty cents. He told us of a time he was hit by a car when he was five years old, playing in the street because no one could be bothered to watch him. His left arm was broken in three places, and that he had to be in a cast that extended across his chest for a long time. My mother told me later that she had never heard that story before, that she had never realized how alone her father was as a child.

Gan remembers that his father worked a number of different jobs, sometimes bringing along his children to help out; he remembers that his mother was depressed, sitting in the closet for hours on end while her children ran around the house. He

won't talk much about this either, except to say that it was sad, and to attribute it to her going through menopause, or "The Change." He liked to listen to the radio; sometimes they had one at home and sometimes they didn't. If he could he listened to Roy Acuff or Hank Williams. Like many people who grew up during the Great Depression, my grandfather was desperately poor, and he doesn't like to reminisce about it. He'll cut you off. "You can't imagine poor people back in those days, that anybody could be that destitute. It don't seem like now that it could have been, but it was."

Gan was a truck driver in the Army, and spent time in Iceland, Belgium, France, and Germany. He was there when the concentration camps were liberated, and, like many other soldiers, it was only then that he realized the atrocities he had been fighting against. I wasn't there, and I don't have words for that kind of horror, so it makes sense that my grandfather won't speak of it to anyone. Around that time one of his jobs was guarding German POW's, and all he'll say is that he was angry with them. When he returned in September of 1945, his parents had moved again, to Riverside Drive in East Knoxville. "That's where I came home to, so to speak." He was living in this house when he met my grandmother, in 1946.

Nan's family also moved around quite a bit after leaving South Knoxville, mostly in East Knoxville, wherever her father, Pink Conatser, could get work in the furniture business. In 1927, my grandmother's younger sister Dorothy was born, and that same year, when Nan was just eight years old, her mother died of a vitamin deficiency. She and Dorothy were shunted off to relatives for a while, but her father quickly remarried, likely feeling that he was incapable of caring for two small

daughters and making a living at the same time. Pink married Mamie Ball, and like a wicked stepmother from a fairy tale, she was never kind to my grandmother. Nan always remembered that Mamie lavished attention on her three younger half siblings, and would make only Nan do chores around the house. There were hints of abuse in the stories she used to tell my mother. Mamie's own children remembered her differently, as a kind woman who did everything she could for her family. Now Mamie is dead, and my grandmother is dead, and her father is dead, and her siblings and half-siblings are dead, save one who is fourteen years younger than Nan, too young to remember the way things were between Nan and Mamie.

Nan's childhood remains now only in my mother's recollection of stories her mother used to tell her. I know that my grandmother became gravely ill from a leg infection when she was in the fifth grade. She had to be hospitalized, and part of her treatment included putting maggots in her leg to eat the diseased part of the bone. Even after that she was on crutches for nearly a year, and had recurring infections after my mother was born, over twenty years later. Perhaps because of this infection, my grandmother never got more than a fifth-grade education, and spent her time doing chores like ironing for her relatives instead. For ten years Nan moved around Knoxville, but in the late 1930s her family moved to Skyline Drive in East Knoxville. In the back of the house her father had a workshop where he would refinish furniture. Nan liked to help him, and picked up some practical skills; she refinished the dining room set that still stands in my grandfather's living room.

Skyline Drive is a long road, barely wide enough for two cars. It was built across a line of small hills, and every few feet the road rises and falls again. As we

drive we come across a woman walking home from church. Her hair is carefully tucked up under a fur pillbox hat, and she wears a long tan coat and white gloves. She is walking very deliberately. She is African American. As she passes, my grandfather glances out the window and says, “Them’s all that lives around here, now. Didn’t used to be like that, but now it is. I reckon things have changed. They always do.” The way he says it isn’t mean, or bitter. Rather, he speaks acknowledging that the world is a different place from the one he used to know. I don’t think my grandfather ever much cared what race anyone was, as long as they worked, but I do think he is surprised at how the world has changed since he was young. My mother and I say nothing.

During the Second World War my grandmother did her part for the country, taking a job at a textile factory, Standard Knitting Mills. The factory was four miles further East than Skyline Drive, an area which today is on the outskirts of the city, and back then must have been in the middle of nowhere. There is only one building remaining in the factory complex, which was once massive—this one lingering structure alone comes in at 400,000 square feet. The building is made of brick and covered on almost every face by windows filled with opaque white glass, many of them broken. It has an imposing presence, sitting alongside Interstate 40 heading East, towards Asheville; a crumbling behemoth watching cars come in and out of the city. Standard Knitting Mills opened in 1901, and by the 1940s the factory had over 4,000 employees and produced a million garments every week. Along with the 19 other textile factories in Knoxville, the factory helped the city earn the nickname “Underwear Capitol of the World.” Until the factories began to close in the 1950s,

that is. Most of the Standard Mills complex was destroyed in the 1990s, but local preservationists hope that a buyer can be found for the remaining portion. This is the place where my grandmother spent her days for five years, working with hundreds of other girls in a hot, crowded room. In the evenings she would return home to her parents' house on Skyline Drive. I know she was living in this house when she met my grandfather, the summer after World War Two ended.

In June of 1946 my grandfather had been back from the war for nine months. He had come back to the job he had been working since leaving school, at Lowe Brothers Insulation. On this particular summer afternoon, he was walking in Chilhowee Park with his friend Lou Riggs. Earlier that same day, my grandmother had been riding in the car with her brother John when he asked her to move to the back seat so his girlfriend could sit up front. This slight irritated her, and she told him he could just drop her off at Chilhowee Park instead. She was sitting on a bench next to the lake stewing when she saw my grandfather strolling towards her. She always said it was love at first sight. His recollection is slightly less romantic: "Well, she was sitting down at the park on a bench down there, and I went down and started talking to her, striking up a conversation." He asked her to go for a ride, and even though he was a stranger, and she was un-chaperoned, and she knew her father wouldn't like it, she said yes. They got married three months later, on September 12, 1946, when he was twenty-four and she was twenty-seven. They eloped to Dalton, Georgia, just twenty miles over the state line, because it was cheaper to get married

there, and faster. They were married by a Justice of the Peace, and Nan's father was none too pleased.

When they returned as newlyweds they lived with Gan's mother in her house on Riverside Drive. This is where they lived when their first child, June, was born in 1947, and this is where they lived when she died just a few months later. Soon after June's death Nan's father allowed them to build a house in the back lot of his Skyline Drive home, beyond his furniture workshop. For a time they lived here, in a tiny house they had built together. March of 1949 brought brighter days; as my grandfather says, "I just remember I was fixin' to have a baby." And that's when my mother, Ruth Edna Walker, was born.

We drove down Skyline Drive the other day, trying to find my great-grandfather's house, and after cruising up and down the street three times, there it was: a small, one-floor house with peeling white paint and a wide front porch. We sat in the road for a few minutes, heedless of the cars that pulled up behind us and eventually had to go around. "It's funny," said my mother, "I didn't recognize it before. But now I see it exactly. The yard used to seem so big. I once fell off that porch, and then ran around yelling, "I'm killed, I'm killed!" "Yep, that's it," said my grandfather, "Don't look like nobody lives there now." It looked like the house had been empty for a very long time. There was no way to see behind the house from the street, but we wanted to know if Pink's shop was still there, or the little house my grandparents had built, so we drove around to the street parallel to Skyline Drive, peering into the houses' backyards. All we could make out was a tangle of weeds.

Just as my mother was about to start school, my grandparents moved to North Knoxville, to a house next to the New Gray Cemetery. The cemetery has been there since 1892, but its importance pales next to that of the Old Gray Cemetery in the next lot over, which opened in 1850 and where notable Knoxville families like the Mabrys and the McClungs are buried. In any case, my mother only lived in that house for a short time, just long enough to start the first grade but not finish it. If we happen to drive by the graveyard, she mentions how she remembers peeking through the ivy in the graveyard wall. A strange mist of history sits everywhere over Knoxville, brushing the lives of its residents, sometimes settling down to be commented upon, like the weather, and sometimes fading out unnoticed into the past.

My grandparents moved with my mother to Virginia in 1954, following the hope of a job that never panned out, and lived there for a year. Relatives from Knoxville visited as often as they could—my grandfather says that while they lived in Virginia they were lonely for their kin, which is why there was always someone there, an aunt, uncle, cousin, niece, or nephew. I think my mother misses it now, when it seems like there is almost no one left to visit or come visiting, but she never says it out loud. After months of not getting paid for work he was doing, my grandfather moved his family back home.

Once they made it back to Knoxville, they moved back to the house on Riverside Drive to live with Gan's mother. My grandfather was still working in insulation, and it was around this time that he started his own business, Walker

Insulation Company. He worked for himself until he retired in 1992, fulfilling contracts all over Knoxville.

The day my mother, my grandfather, and I cruised Skyline Drive we also drove down Riverside Drive, since we were in the East Knoxville area. Turns out, the house where Gan's parents used to live, and where my mother lived after coming back from Virginia, is gone now, too. It's just a vacant lot; the house burnt down years ago. But my mother pointed out to me where she used to stand and wait for the bus, on the corner of Wilder and Riverside, and where her best friend used to live—that house was still there. In fact, it seemed that only my grandparents' house was missing from the area of Riverside Drive where they had lived in the mid-1950s. We also looked for my mother's elementary school, which must have been nearby, but she couldn't quite remember where it was. She did remember what it was called: Mountain View Elementary School, which would become a focus in the fight against segregation just a couple of years after my mother left.

Brown v. Board of Education ruled in favor of desegregation in 1954, but adoption of the new national standards was slow in Knoxville until 1959. Civil Action No. 3984 was filed at a local district court requesting that Knox County comply with the Fourteenth Amendment. In particular, the petition requested permission for black students to register at three schools: East High School, Park Junior High, and Mountain View Elementary, all in East Knoxville. Albert Winton was nine years old and lived within walking distance of Mountain View Elementary, where he wasn't allowed to enroll. His family first took their case to the superintendent at the Board of Education, who told them that Knoxville wasn't quite

ready for desegregation, but that the board was working on it. That's when the Winton family joined the petition first filed by Josephine Goss, who hadn't been allowed to enroll at East High School. By the time the petition was tried in district court, there were seventeen plaintiffs who had added their complaints. It became a landmark case for the city of Knoxville, the first to successfully challenge the city's resistance to change. The plaintiffs won their case, and desegregation was set to begin in Knoxville the following school year, but the process of change was slow. Knox County Schools wasn't recognized by the state as a district free of racial discrimination until 1974.

The period of social turbulence that was the Civil Rights Movement fell right in the middle of my mother's childhood and adolescence, and yet it is strangely absent from her memories of that time. She must have attended Mountain View Elementary from 1956 to 1958, just before Albert Winton's family brought his case to court. By 1959 her family was in South Knoxville again, an area more removed from racial conflict because few African Americans lived there. She graduated from South High School in 1967, and at that time there was not a single black student at the school, which housed 7th-12th grades. There was one black teacher, though—Herman Jackson, who taught math. In the early 1960s sit-ins and protests were already taking place downtown, just across the Gay Street Bridge, and in 1958 the high school in nearby Clinton, TN was bombed by opponents of integration. Six hundred members of the National Guard were called in to restore order. No arrests were ever made.

My mother was naïve, vaguely aware of the Civil Rights movement, but not enough to have any kind of opinion on it, and by the time it was in full force in the South in the late 1960s, she was married with a baby. She says, “I guess I had my mind on other things. I regret it now, that I missed it. I wish I had been more ‘there,’ if you know what I mean.” She seems ashamed. “I could have done so much more.”

My mother warned me not to ask my grandfather about his memories of the Civil Rights movement, saying that like a lot of people around here, he had probably opposed it while it was happening, but feels guilty about it now. I worked up enough courage to ask him if he had ever had any black friends, hoping to delicately probe the topic for information without making him feel uncomfortable. He merely paused for a moment before answering, “Not that I can think of, right off.” I don’t think that my grandparents moved away from East Knoxville because black people were moving in during the 1950s, buying houses in old white neighborhoods and sending their children to white schools. I think that my grandfather, like his father before him, followed the work. But I can’t be sure.

Before the Civil War slavery was uncommon in East Tennessee, but this was a matter of economics rather than a matter of moral objection to the practice.

Northern author J.T. Trowbridge toured the many areas of the South after the end of the Civil War, including Knoxville. Of his visit he wrote:

East Tennesseans, though opposed to slavery and secession, do not like niggers. There is at this day more prejudice against color among the middle and poorer classes—the ‘Union’ men, of the South, who

owned few or no slaves—than among the planters who owned them by scores or hundreds.²²

But Knoxville hoped to reinvent itself as a city of the New South during Restoration, and spent years cultivating its image as a city where African Americans could live prosperous lives, largely free from extreme prejudice present in other areas of the South. The foundation for this image had been laid by the region's Union leanings during the Civil War, and this foundation was built upon by the success of early Knoxville freedmen like Cal Johnson, who was born a slave and went on to become a successful businessman and Knoxville's first millionaire.²³ In fact, success stories in the early years after the Civil War are many. Isaac Gammon became the first black man to be elected to public office in Knoxville in 1869, when he was elected to the Board of Aldermen, and African Americans continued to be elected to public positions in following years. Black men and women could be found in skilled professions as doctors, lawyers, judges, and teachers. It is certain that black people in Knoxville after the Civil War had to endure terrible hardships and prejudice. But it seems that, for a time, Knoxville offered opportunities for them that were hard to come by in other areas of the South.

The idea of Knoxville as a city of the New South persisted into the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1918, Charles W. Cansler, the son of former slaves and a prominent Knoxville educator, stated that, "In no place in the world can there be found better relations existing between the races than here in our own county of Knox. No race riots have ever disgraced our city and no mob has ever vented its fury here upon any negro victim."²⁴ But these conditions would soon

change. During the First World War, as the nation's economy began to fail, the attitudes of poor white men towards the African Americans who were competing with them for jobs became more and more hostile. Resentment was growing on both sides of the racial divide. In August of 1919, that resentment would boil over.

On August 29, 1919, a white woman named Bertie Lindsey was murdered in her bed. Bertie had worked at Standard Knitting Mills, like my grandmother, and she lived in North Knoxville. Lindsey's cousin Ora Smyth had been in the same room with Bertie when the murder occurred, and told the police that Bertie had been murdered by a black man. Patrolman Andy White, the first policeman at the scene of the crime, immediately suspected Maurice Mays, a well-off dandy of mixed race, known for attracting women of all colors and rumored to be the illegitimate son of the Mayor of Knoxville. Mays was pulled from his bed a few blocks away, and though there was no evidence that he had committed murder, was arrested after Ora Smyth identified him as the killer under the dim glow of streetlamps. She barely gave him a second glance. As news of Bertie's murder and Mays' arrest spread through Knoxville the next day, a white mob began to form in downtown Knoxville. The Sheriff quickly arranged for Mays to be transferred to Chattanooga for his own safety, but this did not prevent violence from breaking out on the streets of Knoxville.

Angry white men continued to gather near the city jail, demanding that Mays be handed over to them. Multiple times small groups of men were led through the jailhouse by the police to prove that Mays was not there, in the desperate hope that the mob would break up, but the crowd could not be satisfied, and eventually they

stormed the jail. The men cut the locks off of the cells of white prisoners, including murderers, and consumed much of the confiscated liquor kept in the jail. The African American prisoners were not harmed, but only because one deputy refused to move from in front of their cell block. His pistol drawn, he vowed to shoot anyone that approached. Thousands of dollars worth of property was damaged at the jailhouse, and still the mob raged on. The Knoxville Police force called in the Tennessee Infantry for reinforcements.

Meanwhile, African Americans in Knoxville had been growing anxious as reports of the mob's growth were reported around town. Some of them shut themselves up in their homes and hoped that everything would blow over. Others chose to arm themselves and set up a barricade between Vine and Central Avenues downtown, the center of the black community. They were prepared to shoot any white man who came near. It is unclear what caused the first shot to be fired, or whether it was fired by black men or white, but by 11:30 p.m. gunfire was being exchanged downtown. Remnants of the mob at the jailhouse heard the shots and ran to join the fray. The Tennessee Infantry followed, armed with Army-grade artillery and still attempting to restore peace. As they approached the heart of the riot, a charge of black men began coming towards them, and someone gave the order to open fire. The fighting lasted for hours. Later, one member of the National Guard was reported to have said that the battlefields in France were preferable to the streets of Knoxville that night.

When official reports of the incident were filed later in the week, only two deaths would be reported—one of a black man and one of a white. But eyewitness

accounts of the event told a different story, one that estimated a death toll between forty and a hundred men. For days afterward, black citizens were roughly accosted in the streets, held under suspicion, and searched for weapons. Many African Americans chose to leave the city, and they never came back. Though day-to-day life in the city remained much the same for African Americans after the dust of the riot had cleared—businesses owned by blacks were not boycotted, Knoxville College remained open and running, and Knoxville continued to produce African American leaders like Federal Judge William Hastie—something had changed.

There was no proof that Maurice Mays had committed the murder of Bertie Lindsey besides Ora Smyth's hasty identification. The Judge refused to allow the testimony of three women who had been assaulted since Mays' arrest. The jury was all white, and Mays was sentenced to death. He lost his appeal, despite the fact that a number of people, both black and white, desperately fought for him to be granted clemency. He was executed in the electric chair on March 15, 1922. He maintained his innocence until the end. "I am as innocent as the sun that shines." The last words of Maurice Mays. Three subsequent attempts to clear his name posthumously have failed.

I didn't know that the South was known for being racist while I was growing up. When we were taught about the Civil War in elementary school, racism was the worst thing that any of us had ever heard of; it didn't occur to me that people that I knew could be racist. Perhaps I was blind like my mother, shielded from the realities of racial inequality by my white skin and tender age. I grew up believing that all people, regardless of the color of their skin, were treated equally in my state. It was

only after I entered high school that I began to see that some prejudice still lingered, still lurked in the hearts of some people from East Tennessee. I worked a summer job helping secure summer jobs for underprivileged youths. One employer discreetly informed us that he wouldn't hire black students, and we not-so-discreetly dismissed that employer from the program. The Confederate flag appears on t-shirts, belt buckles, license plates. "My grandfather was in the Klan," said a boy in my government class, one day for no reason at all.

Nikki Giovanni was born in Knoxville in 1943, just a few years before my grandparents met. Her parents moved away soon afterwards, but Giovanni spent summers and holidays at her grandparents' house on 400 Mulvaney Street in East Knoxville, and eventually went to live with them after she turned 14. She grew up in the same city as my mother, except by this time my mother had moved with her family back to South Knoxville, and East Knoxville, as my grandfather would say, had become the black part of the city. Giovanni's childhood in Black Knoxville, as she calls it, was a happy one—she played in the parks, went to church picnics, and visited the mountains. When she grew older she was active in Knoxville's Civil Rights movement, working to integrate local establishments. Eventually, she moved away, off to the North, and she made a name for herself as a poet. Her grandparents still lived on 400 Mulvaney Street.

Giovanni was invited to speak at the University of Tennessee in the late 1990s, and while in town she tried to visit 400 Mulvaney Street, only to find that it didn't exist anymore. The house where her grandparents had lived for half a century,

where her mother had played as a baby, where her aunts and uncles had been born, where she had grown up, had been destroyed so that the city could build the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame. Giovanni said that her neighborhood had been "assassinated along with the old people who made it live."²⁵ She remembered helping her grandmother find a new Knoxville house to live in, one without memories or the feel of home, but she wasn't prepared to see Mulvaney Street wiped from the map to make way for a concrete monument to the sport of basketball. Her childhood home has been completely destroyed, but they put up a commemorative plaque dedicated to her in the middle of Hall of Fame Drive.

I remember our finding Grandmother the house on Linden Avenue and constantly reminding her it was every bit as good as if not better than the little old house [on Mulvaney Street]. A bigger backyard and no steps to climb. But I knew what Grandmother knew, what we all knew. There was no familiar smell in that house. No coal ashes from the fireplaces. Nowhere that you could touch and say, "Yolande threw her doll against this wall" or "Agnes fell down these steps." No smell or taste of biscuits Grampapa had eaten with the Alaga syrup he loved so much. No Sunday chicken....Linden Avenue was pretty but it had no life.²⁶

In 2007 Nikki Giovanni came to Knoxville again to speak inside the Tennessee Theater. My Girl Scout troop leader, always eager for her girls to experience strong women role models, loaded as many of us as would fit into her Volkswagon van and drove us from Maryville to the theater. Sitting inside the Tennessee Theater is always an exciting experience because it is so grand; it feels like traveling back in time, when going to the theater was an occasion for fancy

dress. That night with my Girl Scout troop we didn't have great seats, but they weren't terrible either, and we had no problem making out Giovanni on the stage. She didn't talk about Mulvaney Street that night, but rather about her mother who had recently died, about how no one can understand the enormity of that kind of pain, how nothing can make you feel better. How you just have to learn to live with this gaping hole in your heart. My grandmother had died about a year and a half before, and all I could think was, "I wish my mother was here to listen to this."

I never knew my grandmother, at least not in the way she would like to be known. The year that I was born she took to her bed, convinced that she was about to die, and spent the majority of the last fifteen years of her life in her bedroom. Perhaps beginning with the leg infection she developed when she was young, she was physically unwell for much of her life, and believed strongly that she would die young, just as her mother had. Ironically, she outlived all of her siblings except for one: Anna Lou, who was fourteen years my grandmother's junior, and eighty only this year. Soon after my mother was born she suffered a miscarriage and was never again able to conceive; she went through menopause in her thirties. She was often plagued by stomach problems and leg infections, and in her 60s developed arthritis and osteoporosis. By 1990, at the age of 71, she couldn't move without pain, and it was then that she went to bed.

I knew my grandmother as an old woman propped up against pillows, surrounded by stuffed animals, always with a smile on her face. Her hair was silver, and my mother used to sit next to her and weave it into a long braid. My grandfather

made her every meal and kept her company and a thousand other little things; I think that these fifteen years of small kindnesses are one of the greatest acts of love I've ever seen. The queen size bed took up most of the room, leaving only narrow aisles on either side, and these were cluttered, full of dusty photographs and stacks of old Reader's Digests. I would maneuver myself through these aisles, trying not to knock anything over, and make my way to the edge of the bed. My grandmother would reach out and take my hand, and I don't remember anything either of us ever said, except "I love you."

As my sister and I grew older, eleven and twelve, we didn't want to go with my mother anymore, as she went over to care for her mother each week. The house smelled old, and it was dark. My grandparents moved so slowly, and we never knew what to say. We would sit in the musty living room for an hour while our mother bathed her mother, and at that tender age we couldn't imagine anything more boring. We preferred, even, to wait in the car, though thankfully our mother would march us in to say, "hello," "goodbye," and "I love you." Now I can only think of what horrible children we were, so discomfited by old age. I wish that we had gone in every time, smiled and brought photos and talked about school. I wish we had worked harder to remind my grandmother that the outside world did not march on heartlessly without her, that we would forgo the sunshine for an hour to spend the time in her presence instead. It is a heavy kind of guilt. My mother says that Nan would have understood, though. To atone for my sins I pay attention to the stories of my mother.

My grandmother was quiet and kind. She loved nature and roses.

She only had a fifth grade education, but she loved to read; mostly children's books, which were easy for her to understand.

When my mother was in high school my grandmother made her clothes on a treadle sewing machine, neatly and painstakingly. My mother sewed holiday dresses for me when I was young, and when I got older she made me Halloween costumes. Now we sew together sometimes, mostly making dresses from old patterns and fabrics my mother keeps in storage boxes in the basement. Neither of us has much patience for it, but I like that we do it together.

Nan loved applestack cake at Christmas and talking about the old days. She loved going to church and visiting with relatives, and every Memorial Day she and Gan visited every single family grave—when she became too ill to go, she would send him with flowers.

She would rarely hear criticism against any person, her usual retort being either, "They're doing the best that they can," or, "They don't mean any harm." She was the best of us.

When my mother was a little girl Nan used to make paper dolls for her, carefully drawing characters from Tarzan and Bonanza so my mother could act out scenes from her favorite television programs. Nan even once created a jungle for Tarzan in an old fish tank. My mom keeps her old paper dolls in a cedar chest at the foot of her bed.

My grandmother loved to travel, although she didn't often get the chance, and had only once been on an airplane. Last summer I found her old luggage in my grandfather's basement. A matching set, suitcase and cosmetic tote. Light blue, hard

shell, 60s style. Still filled with vapor rub and stale packs of Juicy Fruit gum. “Can I have these?” I asked. “I reckon so,” answered Gan.

If ever my mother was ill, Nan cared for her tirelessly. Once when my mother was in her 30s she got so sick that she moved home for two weeks while her mother cared for her. Even in the last years of Nan’s life, as she was suffering from dementia, she would notice if my mother had a bruise or a cut, and ask if she was alright. It’s what my mother says she misses the most. “Nobody loves you like your Mama. Nobody will ever love me like that again,” she says to me, sometimes. “Don’t ever die,” I say.

My grandmother wrote poetry. In the last years of my grandmother’s life, my mother collected a dozen of Nan’s handwritten poems—composed on scrap paper and tucked away—and typed them on her computer. She had written about life, the stars, springtime, friendship, rainbows, God, love, and Christmas Eve. She wrote about standing as a little girl beside her mother’s grave.

*Oh, it’s such an awful memory
Something that I can’t forget
How they lowered her in the cold ground
I can almost see them yet.*

She wrote about the power of an inner light.

*When your night may be the darkest,
then your light may brighter be,
shining forth to guide another,
o’er life’s wild and stormy sea.*

*Ever let your light keep shining,
though it may be very small,
yet it shines far in the darkness*

when there's no other light at all.

She wrote about travelling back to her childhood home on Sevierville Pike.

*I visited today the home of my childhood,
the old farm that once was my home,
the same old house, the same old barn,
the same old woods through which I used to roam.*

*My family now has all scattered,
and some have left this world behind,
but the precious years we spent together
will always be fresh on my mind.*

A couple of weeks after my grandmother died I dreamt I was in a strange house, wandering the hallways, and suddenly, there she was, standing up straight, as I had never seen her. I ran to her crying, but I was smiling, too.

“We thought that you were dead!”

“No, no,” she said. “I’m all right now, honey.

And then there was an all-enveloping sense of peace.

The next morning I walked into the kitchen, where my mother and Kerry were talking, and I told them about my dream. My mother started to cry immediately. “It was her.”

Kerry thought for a moment before confessing her opinion. “She wouldn’t have come to you. You didn’t even know her.”

I find it odd that no one in my family has much visited Chilhowee Park since my grandparents met there. When I ask if he ever spent time there after he met my grandmother, my grandfather says, “Not really.” My mother remembers going there

a couple of times when the Knoxville Zoo used to be located in Chilhowee Park, back when it was just a few wild animals in dirty cages. It moved to its own location in the 1970s when Guy Smith, a Knoxville television executive, took on the role of Zoo Director at the salary of one dollar a year to make sure that his new pet lion, Joshua, would have an appropriate place to live. My mother only remembers that she felt bad for the animals, and that her mother must have shown her the bench where she was sitting when she met Gan. When I was small my father once took me to the Tennessee Valley Fair, but that's the only time I've ever been inside Chilhowee Park.

My grandparents moved back to South Knoxville just before my mother entered the fourth grade. They lived in a little house on Sevier Avenue, just across the Gay Street Bridge from Downtown. At first my grandfather ran his business out of the house, but as it became more successful he was able to buy a building further up the road, in lot next to where the Parker and Crisp used to be. They lived on Sevier Avenue until my mother got married and moved away, with the exception of one year when they lived in a house in North Knoxville before moving back to the same little house on Sevier Avenue. My mother likes to drive by it and say, "This is where I used to live."

Accents

I can't hear my mother's accent. I never knew she had one until she drove to Connecticut to pick me up from my freshman year of college. We packed up the car, and I showed her around campus, and one of my friends whispered to me, "Your mother sounds so southern!" My grandfather sounds southern. The woman who answers the phone at my Knoxville bank sounds southern. To me, my mother just sounds like my mom.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hi, Honey, just thought I'd call and see what you were up to."

"Just doing some homework. How are things back home?"

"Oh, things are fine, I guess. The cats are out of food, the roof is leaking. Julie won't answer the phone, you might want to call her. I think she's having a hard time. Have you thought any more about what you'll be doing this summer?"

I never realized that I didn't have an accent until I left home. I remember I once took a trip to visit my brother and his wife, Amy, in St. Louis, and my sister-in-law took me shopping. As we were checking out, chatting about something or another, the cashier said to her, "You don't sound like you're from around here." Amy replied, "No, I'm from Knoxville." "I knew it!" said the cashier. "But you," he said, and pointed to me, "must have been born here, because you don't have an accent at all."

“No. I need to find a job because of the health insurance.”

“I’d really love it if you came home.”

“I mean, I’d like to come home if I can. It just depends on where I can find work. I went to the Career Center, and they just don’t have resources to look for jobs in Tennessee. The woman seemed pretty embarrassed about it. We searched for jobs or alumni in a fifty-mile radius of Knoxville and there was just nothing.”

“I know, I know. You’re never coming home.”

“Don’t say it like that, Mom. I’m losing my insurance. I can’t not get a job.”

My father is from East Texas. He was worried when I went to school in Connecticut that I would find it hard to adjust to life in New England. “Don’t let things the other kids say get to you. They’re different up there. They’re not mean, but they’re just different. Like, they won’t always say ‘hi’ when you pass them in the street. But just remember that it’s just different there and don’t let it get to you.” He was concerned also that they would make fun of my accent. When he went to school at Texas A&M, he told me, they made fun of him for his hick accent. But when I got to school, no one mentioned it, and when I would say that I was from Tennessee, the response was always the same. “Oh, you don’t sound like you’re from the South.”

“I know, Honey, I—”

“You always make it sound like I just don’t want to come home, but it’s not like that. I can hear in the way you say it. I don’t want to stay here. I hate the North.

It's cold. I don't want to live in the city. I hate the city. What do you want me to do? I need a job. I don't know where to find one."

"I don't mean to make you feel bad, hon, you know, but it is sad. It's sad to know that you and Julie will never live at home again. Not like you used to, the three of us. It does make me sad. I just wish you could come home for the summer."

I started to hear, when I would come home from school on breaks, that people I had known my whole life had East Tennessean drawls. It was like music, that lilt. The longer I was home the less I heard it. When I went away again, back to school, I would stream local Knoxville radio stations into my dorm room, listen to the voices of home. "Why don't you sound like that?" my friends from college would ask me, over and over. "I don't know," was always my answer. "I think it might be because I used to listen to books on tape when I was falling asleep, as a little kid. Maybe that's why."

"I just don't know yet. I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know what to do."

"I know, I know. And you know, there's a part of me, a part that wants you to not come back. I mean. This is my home, but sometimes I see our politics, hear some of the things people say when they're from here, and I'm ashamed. I love the country. I love my mountains. But I also recognize that in some ways I don't belong."

I like it when authors are good at writing East Tennessee dialect. I think to be good at it, the dialect has to be internalized. You have to remember what it sounds like, to hear it when you close your eyes. To have once spoken that way. James Agee catches it, sometimes, though occasionally his prose is muddled by a refined 50s vernacular: “how perfectly extraordinary,” “just awfully sorry,” “I should think.” But sometimes he catches it just right.

*Swing low, sweet cherryut...comin for to care me home.*²⁷

Still, I think Cormac McCarthy’s best at it. I can hear it clearly, when he writes Knoxville voices.

Yessir, the storekeeper said. Yessir, now I believe I do recollect who tis. You some kin of hisn?

*No, the man said. No kin. Jest something I got to see him about.*²⁸

I wish that I could do it.

“I know, Mom.”

“Well, I guess I’ll let you go. Call your sister.”

“I will. Love you, Mama.”

“Love you, too, sweetheart.”

Gay Street

The only way to get from South Knoxville to the rest of the city is to cross the river, and for many years the only way to cross the river without a boat was the Gay Street Bridge. Over the years there have been four incarnations of this bridge. The first was a pontoon bridge built by Union soldiers during the Civil War, but it washed away in 1867. The people of Knoxville made do with ferry boats until 1874, when the city opened a new toll bridge with great fanfare. This superstructure of this bridge was blown away by a tornado in 1875, leaving only empty piers sticking out of the water. It was five years before the city tried again, this time constructing a wooden bridge with latticed sides that, because of unusual elevations on either side of the river, sagged in the middle. Because of the precarious nature of the bridge, a law was passed forbidding anyone to ride or drive across the bridge faster than a walking pace. Violators were assessed a \$5.00 fine—over \$100 today, if you account for inflation. Finally, in 1898, the city of Knoxville unveiled its masterwork, a modern bridge of steel that was engineered to lie in a flat span across the river.

That steel bridge still stands today, and it was the only bridge crossing the river until 1932. This is the bridge that brought South Knoxville into the city, the bridge that my Samuel Walker, my great-grandfather crossed every day to get to work. He had a tremendous fear of crossing the bridge, but walked across it every day, twice a day. It often took him several tries to make it all the way across. My mother believes that he may have been afraid that the bridge would wash away, like all those Gay Street Bridges before this one, or that he was troubled by the bridge's bloody history—when the Police Department expected a crowd for a hanging, they

would hold it on the Gay Street Bridge, so that people could watch from both sides. I think he was just afraid of heights. Sometimes I stand on the sidewalk on the downtown side of the bridge. The water of the Tennessee River runs murky far below my feet, and the wind picks up, with no buildings to block its blowing. I try to imagine what it feels like to fear this instead of love it. I wonder if my great-grandfather closed his eyes and held his breath as he set out to cross the bridge.

Gay Street itself is one of nine streets that remain from the original plotting of the city, when Knoxville was slated to be the capital of the Territory South of the River Ohio. Gay Street runs North to South, and long has been witness to historic events; here slaves marched in an impromptu parade in 1865 upon learning they had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation; here were installed Knoxville's first telephone wires, electric streetlamps, and trolley cars; here a Civil War reunion was held for both Union and Confederate soldiers in 1890. It has seen, too, some of Knoxville's greatest scandals, from the Mabry shootout in 1882, which took the lives of three prominent businessmen and was proclaimed by the *Knoxville Chronicle* as, "The bloodiest, most fatal and most lamentable tragedy that has stained the annals of East Tennessee's history,"²⁹ to the so-called Million Dollar Fire of 1897, which destroyed eight buildings full of wares and ended Gay Street's time as a center of wholesale distribution, but began the period when Gay Street was the primary retail destination in the city, with five-and-dimes, department stores, and theaters. It is a typical Main Street, like the kind you might see in television shows or in films: just two lanes, with streetlamps lining both sides of the street, marquees and storefronts as

far as you can see, city buses muddling down the street, and people moving about the city. They say you haven't been to Knoxville if you haven't been to Gay Street.

For over a hundred years it was the center of daily life around Knoxville; less now than it used to be, now that the city has grown and most everyone has cars. Both of my great-grandfathers earned their livings here, working odd jobs to carry their families through the Great Depression. It is a family rumor that my grandmother's grandfather even died on Gay Street while he was working distributing advertising fliers. His death certificate states blandly that he "fell dead." When my grandfather was a child left to his own devices downtown, probably while his father walked up and down Gay Street, talking the ears off an acquaintance he happened to pass, he used to go into the Andrew Johnson Hotel, which stands on the South end of Gay Street, just before you hit the bridge. It doesn't look like much—a tall brick building with some marble accents and the name of the building in silver letters. Until 1978 it was the tallest building in Knoxville; I guess it's remarkable now only because it is still around. My grandfather would ride the elevator up all the way to the roof, and walk around until someone told him he had to leave. The hotel was built in 1928, and in its time hosted Duke Ellington, Amelia Earhart, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Hank Williams Sr., who stayed there the night before he died. But the building is perhaps most remembered for its time hosting Tennessee's first radio station, WNOX, on its top floor.

Like many places in the South, Knoxville prides itself on being the birthplace of Country Music, a claim based largely on the existence of WNOX—when the station first started broadcasting in 1921, the airwaves were so clean that sometimes

the station could be heard as far away as New York City. Nashville didn't get its first radio station until 1922, and it didn't even broadcast Country Music—it played opera music to accompany the opening of the city's new River and Rail Terminal. Six days a week, beginning in 1936, WNOX broadcast the Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round, the radio show that made the station famous. At its peak, the show drew a thousand spectators into the Andrew Johnson Hotel, my grandparents and great-grandparents occasionally among them. A *Knoxville News-Sentinel* columnist remembers the hey-day of the show in a 1961 article:

These country music folk, straight from the briar patches and red gullies, sawed, picked, hummed, sang and joked on the top floor. They were a sight for tourists' eyes, and maybe they came in for a little cussin', as they strode through the hotel lobby to the elevator, dragging their bass fiddles and drums and jabbing folks, accidentally, of course, with their fiddle bows.³⁰

The Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round had local legends like Chet Atkins and Roy Acuff, who both went on to play at the Grand Ole Opry, as well as Archie Campbell, the Carter Family, Bill Monroe and other musicians whose names I know but whose music I've never really listened to. The broadcast eventually became so popular that the station was asked to vacate its space in the Andrew Johnson Hotel because of clogged elevators. Though WNOX endures still, the Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round went off the air in 1961. Now the frequency broadcasts conservative talk radio and the Andrew Johnson Hotel is office space.

There was a summer when I worked at a radio station on Gay Street, although this was on the far North end of Gay Street, in the opposite direction from the

Andrew Johnson Hotel. The frequency was “East Tennessee’s Own” WDVX. I started listening to the station when I was in college, a thousand miles away from East Tennessee, streaming it online during the cold Connecticut winter and wishing I was home. The station plays bluegrass, Americana, blues, western Swing, Celtic, and old-time country. Sometimes they even play songs that were recorded in tiny Gay Street studios back in the 1920’s. According to the WDVX website, its mission is “to promote the cultural heritage of East Tennessee and the Southern Appalachian region by entertaining and educating audiences globally with original programs showcasing live radio performance, under represented arts, and emerging and local talent.” I guess that’s what they say to get their grant money. To me, it feels like something different. The cars I see with WDVX bumper stickers are usually beat-up old pickup trucks with fading Bush/Cheney stickers on the bumpers. I think for most people around here, WDVX sounds like home.

Tony Lawson started WDVX in the 1990s, and until 2004 broadcast the station out of a camper on a hill in Clinton, Tennessee, about twenty minutes outside of Knoxville. In 2004 the station moved into the Knoxville Visitor’s Center, and that’s where it was when I walked in to work in the summer of 2011. I wasn’t particularly qualified for a job in radio, knowing nothing about how to work a sound board, or use sound editing software, or even much about the particular kind of music WDVX played. I would listen to it at school, not knowing any of the songs, just letting the radio play. I skipped Acting class to take my phone interview, and I remember breathlessly trying to convince Nick, who later became my supervisor, that the fact that I was a triple major in English, Classical Civilization, and Theater made

me a perfect prospect for a locally-based bluegrass radio station because I was interested in history, culture, and performance. I think he only agreed to hire me because I sounded desperate. Or maybe it was because I mentioned that my grandmother had seen the Louvin Brothers perform in a Knoxville living room when she was a young woman. That fact tends to impress people in certain circles.

The station is situated in a back corner of the visitor's center, the sound booth behind a little window below an "On Air" sign. On the wall outside the studio are at least a hundred commemorative blue plates with the WDVX logo, each featuring a photograph of a different musician, mementos of WDVX's signature show *The Blue Plate Special*, performed live six days a week. Like the Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round fifty years before, *The Blue Plate Special* features local talent, often with banjos and mandolins. It doesn't get anything close to a thousand spectators, although it occurs to me now that some of the audience members who resolutely attend every performance, old men and women who show up at 11:50 a.m. every day for the noon broadcast, may have also attended WNOX shows in their youth.

My first day at the station, I met Nick and soon fell more than a little bit in love with him. He was a sound editor by profession, and had worked with acts I loved like the Avett Brothers and Christabel and the Jons; he was probably in his late thirties, had an East Tennessee lilt to his voice. Nick resolutely attempted to show me how to set up the stage for *The Blue Plate Special*, but after I proved hopeless at it, he told me I could be a Syndication Intern instead. Still, every day he let me sit in the booth with him and the other summer intern, Corey (who actually knew his way around a sound board), while the *Blue Plate Special* was being recorded.

I spent the morning in the basement, splicing together old episodes of WDVX shows and creating profiles for them on a website, where we hoped they would get picked up nationally. I think I heard a couple of months after the summer ended that we had gotten three pick-ups by other national stations. At a quarter till noon I would climb the stairs to the main floor and take my place in the back of the sound booth, trying not to be in the way of the door as it opened and closed. When the show started the lights in the booth would go off, our faces illuminated only by the flashing red and green lights of the sound board. Sometimes the acts were amazing; sometimes they were glitzy-Nashville city-folk; sometimes they were boys from Michigan who put on country accents and played the fiddle badly; sometimes they were old friends of the station called in at the last minute when there was no one else to perform. These subtleties were not evident to me at the beginning of the summer. I was shocked to find that in the sound booth Nick and Corey would take off their headsets and mock the performers during the show, deriding their skill or legitimacy. I guess it's an industry hazard when it's part of your job to listen to amateur musicians perform on a daily basis. But by the end of the summer I could hear it too, the difference between performers whose music came from somewhere real and those who were putting it on for show. There is a high value placed on authenticity in East Tennessee. Knoxville may be the third largest city in the state, but it's less than half the size of the second largest, Nashville. This is not a place you can move to and pick-up as if you've always lived here; someone will be able to tell the difference. We hold our local heroes to the same standard—Dolly Parton may look more plastic than person these days, but she was born to a family of twelve children who lived with

their parents in a one-room log cabin in Sevierville, the daughter of a tobacco farmer. She's never pretended to be anything other than what she is. "It takes a lot of money to look this cheap," Dolly once said.

The host of the *Blue Plate Special* is Red Hickey, whom I had first met over the airwaves as the raspy, soothing voice that introduced each act. I met her in person that summer, and the woman that accompanied that voice was just as memorable: mid-50s, petite, tight jeans, rhinestone belts, tattoo sleeves on both arms, bright red hair, ornate cowboy boots. A local news station once did a story solely on her collection of boots. Each day she sat at a little table in front of the sound booth window, making small talk with the audience and performers, sometimes turning around and sticking her head through the sound booth window during a song to let us know what she thought of it. Some mornings there would be time to chat before the show started, and I remember her turning to Nick as he asked her if she was ready for a performance review by one of the station's grant providers. She replied that she had added Jack Daniels to her coffee that morning to prepare for it, and because it was a Monday. They then proceeded to discuss the best types of whiskey and the best times to drink them. I thought that these were the best people in the world.

The summer passed and on my last day Nick took me downstairs and let me pick anything I wanted from the backlog of promotional stuff the radio station had in its basement. I've got WDVX posters and mugs and t-shirts, all of which I intend to display proudly once I get the chance. Working there was a taste of another life, one in which I never moved away from home, offering a glimpse of a Knoxville that wasn't quite mine anymore. If I lived my whole life here these people might have

been my friends, but instead they were just my coworkers for a couple of weeks one summer. I still turn up the radio when I hear, “Hey ya’ll! Welcome to the *Blue Plate Special*. It’s real live music here, in beautiful downtown Knoxville, Tennessee.”

As a teenager, my mother would often walk from her home on Sevier Avenue in South Knoxville to frequent the shops on Gay Street. She met her first husband in one of them—Grant’s Department Store, in the record section. She had never seen him before, and he followed her home. It must have been quite flattering for a shy teenager with few friends. I’ve got one of my mother’s binders from high school, a dusty leopard print three-ring with old handwritten papers for English and French. One of the pages has hearts drawn all over it, with “Mrs. Jimmy Rice” written over and over again. It would almost be sweet, except that I know how it ends. I’ve tried to find a photograph of Gay Street from the mid-1960s, to try and see if I can locate Grant’s, see where this life altering moment took place. But none of them seem to be at the right angle, and my mother doesn’t remember exactly where it was, just somewhere on Gay Street. The closest I came was an internet forum where commenters were reminiscing about old Knoxville stores. Grant’s is mentioned, but all anyone seems to remember is that it was, indeed, there.

For my mother, Gay Street was the center of everything exciting in the city—movies, people, music, neon lights, and brand new clothes she couldn’t buy. Fifteen years later, when James and Kerry were small, the area had fallen into neglect. The storefronts were empty and the lights all dimmed. By the time she moved back to Knoxville when I was in college, the area had been restored, thanks to a downtown

revitalization project begun in the late 1990s. When we drive down the road together, she points out all the places she used to visit. “That’s where I first heard the Beatles.” “That’s where I used to buy my mother roses.” “That’s where my old favorite bookstore used to be.” Part of the reason I wanted to work on Gay Street is because I wanted to be in a place where my mother was young. I walked those same streets during my lunch breaks. I didn’t stop in stores, though, or talk to people on the street. I never saw anyone that I knew.

When she was fifteen or sixteen, my mother would wake up and put on her black coat and beret that she had made herself. She would slip out the door and walk all the way down Sevier Avenue and cross the Gay Street Bridge, a walk of nearly two miles. She would spend the day in and out of shops, looking at records and clothes, but usually not buying anything. When dusk began to fall she would start for home, back down Gay Street, back across the bridge. Sometimes I ask her if she wants to talk a walk downtown with me, from the house on Davenport to Gay Street. “No,” she says. “It’s too far.”

When I came home the summer after I had worked at WDVX, I worked on Gay Street again, this time at the East Tennessee Historical Society. I was returning from a semester studying abroad in Rome, and had been inspired by the endless artifact collections I had visited in Italy to find out what it was like to work in a museum. If I was to pursue this desire and return home for the summer, as my mother hoped that I might, the Historical Society was the only option.

The building sits a little less than half-way down Gay Street, if you're measuring from the bridge, at the corner where Clinch Street cuts across Gay. It is a regal structure, the second oldest in Knoxville, two stories hewn out of locally quarried marble. Sometimes referred to as Knoxville's "reward" from the U.S. Government for withstanding a Confederate siege during the Civil War, it was originally constructed in 1874 as the city's first federal building, a Post Office and Customs House. When a new Post Office was built in 1933, the building was vacated; it then provided offices for the Tennessee Valley Authority from 1936-1976. Soon after that the Knox County Archives moved in, and the McClung Historical Collection, a branch of the Knox County Public Library. The Historical Society moved in a decade later, but the Museum component of the Society didn't come into existence until 1993. It started out with only a couple of small exhibits every year, but when the building was remodeled in 2004, the society got to work on *Voices of the Land*, a permanent exhibit covering 250 years of East Tennessee History which opened in 2008. The museum has another gallery for travelling exhibits, which change two or three times a year.

Voices of the Land is impressive. It's designed to be travelled through chronologically, a winding pathway around a large room, artifacts on all sides. You begin with a few scant remains of Indian pottery and tools, and end with the World's Fair and a plaque commemorating the early version of the exhibit from before the Historical Society building was renovated. There are multimedia presentations, one inside a mountain cheese-making cabin they relocated inside the building after it was slated for destruction. I was most impressed with Davy Crockett's rifle, Betsy, and

one of Dolly Parton's dresses from the 1960s. I didn't get to spend too much time upstairs in the exhibit—most of my work was in the basement—but I did once have to clean all the description cards, and often I would walk around *Voices* in the mornings, if no one had arrived to let me downstairs yet.

The Society itself was founded in 1834 by J.G.M. Ramsey, who feared that history was being lost as early Tennessee pioneers died out. In addition to being a history enthusiast, he was also a staunch Confederate (he in fact kept the archives at his plantation), and had to flee Knoxville during the Union occupation of 1863. In the end, Ramsey lost both his war and his archives—while he was gone his home burned down, supposedly by an arsonist hired by one of his political enemies, and the archives were destroyed. The Historical Society remained essentially defunct until 1925, when it was restarted by a group of determined Knoxville locals.

I had been notified by email that I would assist in collections over the summer, helping to take down one exhibit and install another one. I had never been to the museum before my first day at work. When I arrived my first day I met Michelle, my supervisor, who led me through the building to the basement. We began in the lobby of the building, where there is a reception desk and gift store, and then proceeded down a long hallway culminating in an early 1900s Knoxville streetscape, complete with corner store, dentist's office, and even an old streetcar with shiny red paint and plush velvet seats. At the end of the hallway are two exhibition rooms, the larger one on the left hosting *Voices of the Land*, and a smaller one on the right for the travelling exhibits. Michelle explained to me that the current temporary exhibit was *East Tennessee Art and Artists*, a collection of little known local works. She took

me through the room at the right. We walked past paintings and wooden carvings to a door at the back of the gallery, which opened into a small corridor, where we went through another door and down the stairs to the basement.

The basement of the Historical Society was a jumble of odd things, crammed together in corners and closets, but somehow I got the distinct sense that nothing here could ever be lost, at least not as long as Michelle was around. She knew every shelf and artifact number, and was able to navigate the crowded concrete floors with ease. The basement of was filled with barrels and hand carved turn-of-the-century furniture, quilts from the 1800s, and all manner of historical odds and ends tucked away in dark corners and in the back of shelves. The feeling and look of the room, like history all stacked together in a place outside of time, was an odd one.

Through another door in the basement is the collections office. As we entered the office Michelle explained to me that the change of exhibits had been delayed until September, and that I would be working instead on a different project that summer. Her husband, Dan, had been an unofficial photographer of ETHS exhibits and events for many years, and he had a backlog of pictures on his computer that the Society wanted access to, except that the folders containing the pictures were so disorganized that it was almost impossible to find the one you were looking for. This would be my task for the summer: to impose order upon the hundreds of photos Dan had taken, while simultaneously creating a guide that would allow ETHS workers to easily find the ones they needed. It was about as exciting as it sounds.

Day after day I sat in front of the computer screen sorting images into folders. It made my eyes hurt, and, because the basement was climate controlled to protect the

various artifacts in storage, it was always uncomfortably cold—even though it was sweltering hot outside. But the people there were kind, inviting me every other Wednesday to lunch lectures about local history. Michelle, who seemed determined that I would get to experience some fun things over the summer, took me once with her on a day trip to the State Museum in Nashville, and also once to pick up new acquisitions from the Knoxville Museum of Art. Sometimes I would also get to process incoming items, which was exciting at first and mildly dull after the first few hours. It was interesting to see what kind of items the museum had acquired. One lot, from the attic of the house of an old Knoxville family that had finally died out, had all manner of wonders from the turn of the previous century—doorstops, an accounting machine, a baby book, doll house furniture. All just everyday items from people who lived their whole lives in this city. Another time we got an old stop light, and another some seats that had been torn out of a condemned theater. Each item exclaimed over, examined, labeled as being of good, fair, or poor quality, each flaw meticulously recorded, labeled with an artifact number, and put into storage.

If my previous internship at WDVX had shown me the people of East Tennessee, then my time at ETHS showed me their history, and not just the facts that I accumulated as I processed old photos of buildings or artifacts in the collection, but the way that we think about our past. Some of it sits in shiny display cases in a high-tech exhibit, things we are eager for people to see and know and understand about who we are. Some of it sits in basement storage, because we haven't got room for it, or it's a little bit broken, or we don't really think that anyone would be interested in seeing it. There is the staff that works tirelessly to preserve, to educate, to remember,

and then there is the fact that almost every day I was there that summer, the museum was totally empty.

One day at work I was helping move boxes of old display lights and paint cans, trying to clear out an old utility closet that needed renovation. As I carried boxes through the narrow hallways of the basement, I would pass, every now and then, an artifact leaning up against a wall because it hadn't fit in the storage rooms. Sometimes Adam, another employee, would explain the artifacts to me as we trudged past. Leaning up against the right side of one hallway was an old door, beige with cracked paint and a skeleton key hole. Across the hall there was a carved overmantle, made of dark wood, and covered in dust. These, he said, were salvaged from James Agee's Highland Avenue home before the residence was demolished.

James Agee was born in Knoxville on November 27, 1909, in a house at the corner of Highland Avenue and 15th Street. Back then his neighborhood was a suburb, but now it is in the middle of the city, about a mile from Gay Street and, these days, mostly full of housing for University of Tennessee students. Agee eventually moved away from Knoxville, away from Tennessee, to California and then New York City. In the 1940s he became an influential film critic and screenwriter, penning the screenplays for *The African Queen* and *Night of the Hunter*, and is also known for his work chronicling Alabama sharecroppers during the Great Depression, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

Some of his other best known works remember his home. Agee once said that he wrote his prose poem *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* in just ninety minutes. In 1947 Samuel Barber set the text of the poem to music, a piece for a soprano accompanied

by an orchestra. When I listened to it, it didn't sound a thing like home. The soprano was too high and charged and loud. It didn't sound to me like *Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose. Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes. Content, silver, like peeps of light, each cricket makes his comment over and over in the drowned grass...Parents on porches: rock and rock: From damp strings morning glories: hang their ancient faces. The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.*³¹ Barber's version to me sounds full of noise but empty of feeling, and yet the arrangement has remained popular over the years. James Agee was still alive when the piece premiered. I wonder if he thought it sounded like evenings in Knoxville.

Knoxville: Summer of 1915 would become the prelude to *A Death in the Family*, Agee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel chronicling the events surrounding the death of his father in Knoxville in 1916. Agee changed the names of people, but left the street names the same. In the beginning of the novel he writes of walking downtown with his father, to see Charlie Chaplin in a film at the Majestic Theater, on Gay Street. This is my Knoxville. I can turn the street corners and look inside Gay Street shop windows. *They walked downtown in the light of mother-of-pearl, to the Majestic...It was full dark now, but still early; Gay Street was full of absorbed faces; many of the store windows were still alight...They turned aside into a darker street, where the fewer faces looked more secret, and came into the odd, shaky light of Market Square.*³²

Agee's Highland Avenue home was demolished to build an apartment building, and today it is one of Knoxville's greatest shames. The other sights Agee

mentions in *A Death in the Family* are still there, but his home is gone. Eugene Mosner was the name of the Knoxville man who salvaged the over mantle and door from the Agee house in 1962. Maybe he remembered the seeing Agee's name in the news back in 1958 when *A Death in the Family* won the Pulitzer Prize, or maybe he was fond of film. After Mosner died, the door and overmantle were inherited by his daughter, who sold them at a yard sale in 2006. He died in 1955; he never knew that the home he immortalized was bulldozed to make way for an apartment complex. The person who purchased them at the yard sale donated them to the museum, and now they sit in the dim basement of the East Tennessee Historical Society.

When James and Kerry were young Gay Street was in disrepair, mostly full of empty buildings, the retail shops empty and the theaters closed. They didn't spend much time there. In 1985 Knoxville was selected to participate in the Main Street Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and it took a while, but by the time I was in the ninth grade in 2005, Gay Street was back, the marquees lit and the road busy. I have never known it any other way. *We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee.*³³

At the beginning of the summer Knoxville used to host Sundown in the City, a twelve-week concert series that monopolized downtown one night a week. My friends and I would beg a ride from Maryville to Knoxville from one of our parents, and they would drop us off around six in the evening, promising to return by ten. We wore shorts and t-shirts and dirty tennis shoes, and walked through the crowds like the night was ours. The main stage was in Market Square, right next to Gay Street, but

the whole of downtown was alive in the twilight. It smelled like sweat and street food and the beer that spilled on my shoes as I pushed through the crowd. Sometimes we would stay and listen to the music, if it was someone we really liked, or if we saw other kids from our high school in the mass of people in front of the stage. But mostly we roamed the streets of downtown, crushing between our teeth the ice of the peach snow cones we had purchased from one of the vendors in Market Square. In those early days of summer it didn't get dark. We were suspended in a perpetual soft grayness, and the streets were further lit by the streetlamps and the commotion of excited voices all around us.

Together we walked up and down Gay Street again and again, peering into the windows of closed shops and talking about the things that are important to fifteen year olds. We once gazed into the darkened display window of Yee-haw Printers (who went out of business just a couple of years later) and puzzled at a couch prominently displayed there, upon which a man was sleeping. We stood there laughing and then shrieked and ran away when we saw him move. Sometimes we strayed from the busy avenues, walking down by the waterside or straying into the little Presbyterian cemetery on State Street. I walked past this cemetery every day I worked at the Historical Society, and I now know that some of Knoxville's most prominent historical figures are interred here—William Blount, James White—but we didn't know that then. We liked the little hill the cemetery was on, and the crooked old stones, and the small iron gate we had to hop over to get inside.

The evenings were long. We walked around and around those streets, the distant sounds of people and music from Market Square around us. It was nearly a

hundred years later, but it could almost have been James Agee's Knoxville. No train cars, no horses or buggies, but the quiet noise of a Southern city.

He heard the summer night.

All the air vibrated like a fading bell with the last exhausted screaming of locusts. Couplings clashed and conjoined; a switch engine breathed heavily. An auto engine bore beyond the edge of audibility the furious expletives of its incompetence. Hooves broached, along the hollow street, the lackadaisical rhythms of the weariest clog dancers, and endless in circles, narrow iron tires grinded continuously after. Along the sidewalks, with incisive heels and leathery shuffle, young men and women advanced, retreated.³⁴

The rich dusk of home.

¹ Roosevelt, Franklin D. "Message to Congress Suggesting Tennessee Valley Authority." 10 Apr. 1933.

² "From the New Deal to the New Century." 2012. Tennessee Valley Authority. 14 Nov. 2012. <www.tva.com>.

³ "The Displaced People of Norris Basin." *TVA: Electricity for All*. 9 Mar. 2013. <www.newdeal.feri.org/tva>.

⁴ Witek, Terry. "Reeds and Hides: Cormac McCarthy's Domestic Spaces." *Cormac McCarthy*. Bloom's Modern Critical Views. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009.

⁵ McCarthy, Cormac. *Suttree*. Modern Library ed. New York: Modern Library, 2002. 203.

⁶ McCarthy, 352.

⁷ McCarthy, 204.

⁸ McCarthy, 471.

⁹ McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. 21.

¹⁰ "Indian Removal". *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma's History and Culture*. Oklahoma Historical Society. 11 Mar. 2013. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu>.

¹¹ Cushman, Ellen. *The Cherokee Syllabary : Writing the People's Perseverance*. American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. 33.

¹² Kilpatrick, Jack Frederick Kilpatrick Anna Gritts. *The Shadow of Sequoyah : Social Documents of the Cherokees, 1862-1964*. The Civilization of the American Indian Series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965.

¹³ Blackhurst, Rob. "Is Dollywood One Big Kitsch Joke?" *Financial Times* (2009). 11 Mar. 2013.

¹⁴ "Sevierville." 11 Mar. 2012. <www.city-data.com>.

¹⁵ Hall, Joseph Sargent. *The Phonetics of Great Smoky Mountain Speech*. American Speech. Reprints and Monographs,; No. 4,; New York: King's Crown Press, 1942. 4.

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- ²¹ Dunn, 253.
- ²² Trowbridge, J. T. *A Picture of the Desolated States; and the Work of Restoration. 1865-1868*. Conn., L. Stebbins, 1868. 238.
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- ²⁴ Lakin, Matthew. "A Dark Night : The Knoxville Race Riot of 1919." *The Journal of East Tennessee History*. 72 (2000). 3.
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- ²⁶ Giovanni, 137-138.
- ²⁷ Agee, James. *A Death in the Family*. New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957. 98.
- ²⁸ McCarthy, Cormac. *The Orchard Keeper*. New York: Random House, 1965. 198.
- ²⁹ "Terrible Treble Tragedy Enacted on Gay Street Yesterday." *The Knoxville Chronicle* 20 Oct. 1882.
- ³⁰ Lakin, Matt. "Mid-Day Merry-Go-Round." *Knoxville News Sentinel* (2012). 29 Dec. 2012.
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- ³² Agee, 14-15.
- ³³ Agee, 1.
- ³⁴ Agee, 81.

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