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A Biomythography of Mommy

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A Biomythography of Mommy

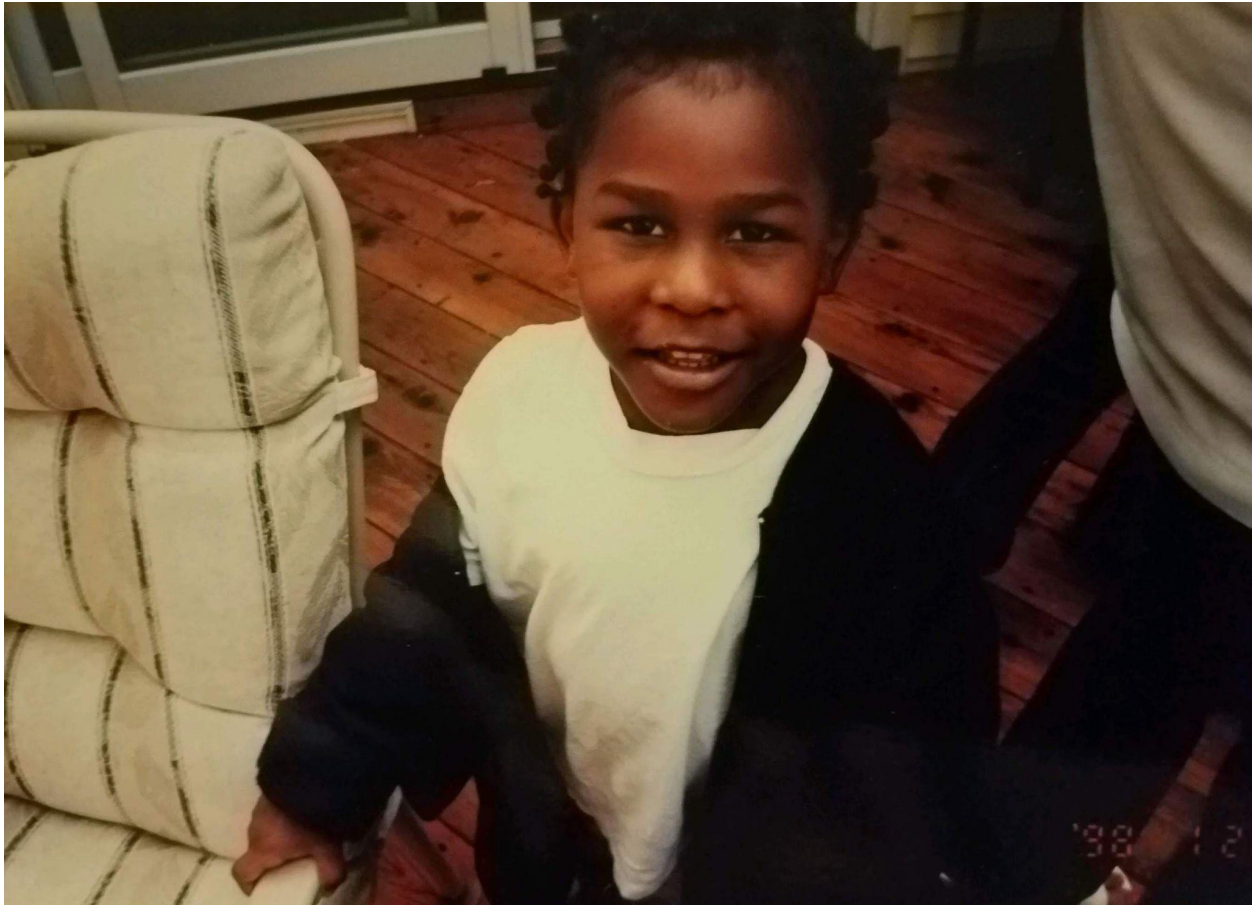
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by
Immanuel Williams

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Dedication

My younger self. You did it buddy.



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I am forever grateful to Brenique, Faith, Jesuly, Khoa, Leslie, Morenike, Sage, for seeing me at times when I couldn't see myself.

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Mommy and Auntie, thank you for trusting me to etch our family's story into the historiographical sands of time.

Thank you to the Black academics at Bard college that continue to push me to think deeper.

And to all my Black peers who challenged me to dream bigger.

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Preface

Dehydration produces as much emotional despair as physical distress. When thirsty, babies weep until attended to. My grandmother's funeral left me parched— sun-baked and heaving on the arid land of genealogical longing. I saw a glimpse into the world of my extended family. It felt like a veil was being lifted. I thirsted for more. My thirst never truly was quenched when I was younger. Growing up, my search for knowledge began in the classroom of my family. I yearned for comprehension in and about everything—from reading and arithmetic to daily chores. Always questioning, sometimes just wanting to understand for understanding's sake. Questions like, “Why can't I wear a dress to church?” or “Why are we staying in this motel?” were left unanswered. I could not have known how difficult receiving these questions could be for my mother. Sometimes she couldn't answer the questions because of her personal position, and sometimes she couldn't answer the questions because of the Black American position as descendants of enslaved individuals who endured forced displacement and concerted efforts of cultural erasure. This means decades' worth of half-written or undocumented brutality and deracination. Paper trails end and so does my family's collective memory. Because of this, sometimes my questions got me in trouble. Other times, they didn't.

This space is being used to explore my familial lineage and answer the questions my younger self longed for. I've been looking at my Blackness as a subject to conquer. Something to consume and be an expert on. I now know I must take an open, non-essentialist approach to exploring and producing scholarship on the Black American position. Stuart Hall discusses the

peculiar position of academia based within the frameworks of representation in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”. He asserts that there are at least two working definitions of cultural identity, the first being a “true self” at the core of oppressed people connected through “Mother Africa” and shared ancestry– i.e. Pan Africanism.¹ The second looks at culture as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’ . It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture.”² Culture is always being shaped while being informed by the past.

I have been using the first working definition of cultural identity when engaging with questions of lineage. It has left me frustrated trying to tie together fragments of the past to create a cohesive narrative. I realize I have been assuming the role of the native intellectual– a term used by Frantz Fanon.³ The native intellectual attempts to fight back against their violent colonial mother by dissecting themselves and their people, stripping themselves naked in the process.⁴ Advances in scholarship have been achieved through this but to do so is to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.⁵ I am borrowing from Audre Lorde's intellectual framework detailing the pitfalls of western academia when thinking of a life beyond oppressive structures,

¹ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 223.

² Hall, “Cultural identity and diaspora”, 225.

³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 37.

⁴ The full quote reads: “On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle, loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence.

In such a situation the claims of the native intellectual are no luxury but a necessity to any coherent programme. The native intellectual who takes up arms to his nation's legitimacy and who wants to bring proofs to bear out that legitimacy, who is willing to strip himself naked to study the history of his body, is obliged to dissect the heart of his people.” It is important to see the use of proverbial motherhood and bodily functions to discuss how pervasive colonialism is. Fanon, 37- 38.

⁵ Audre Lorde, “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Masters' House,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, Calif: Crossing Press, 2007), 110–13.

and creating a shorthand instead: I am abandoning formal written histories i.e. historiographical, sociological, and ethnographic studies and picking up lyrical and oral expressions to think through my family lineage.

There are at least three modes of collecting history and making sociological and ethnographic inquiries on Black American life. One of them takes the written form; this is where I began my genealogical search. At first, I prioritized Albany, New York, my birthplace, as a point of interest. This is because the majority of people I know as my family have lived, lives, died, and expect to die in the capital region of New York State. There are birth certificates and death certificates to document this, but census records don't always capture Black Americans. Neither do formal historical studies. I learned this as I probed the pages of Williams, O. R., "The Regimentation of Blacks on the Urban Frontier in Colonial Albany, New York City and Philadelphia" searching for signs of my family. Williams laid out Black interpersonal and state relations in Albany starting in the 1700s. These themes develop through examination of colonial policy aimed at controlling Black people's social and economic life. Little did I know when I read it that this text predates my family's settlement in upstate New York. I always assumed my family's Black American history began and ended in Albany. But I learned through my mother's spoken words this year that my family migrated from Bath, South Carolina to Albany, New York around the time of the second wave of the Great Migration— the late 1940s. This discovery led me to shift my idea of how Albany, the place, shaped my family and my identity. Perhaps it didn't explain as much as I had thought.

Academically, I know the Black American concept of home as a physical place is politically fraught. Black Americans are a displaced people. Considering anything a part of

America as home comes with a wave of acknowledgement of our violent arrival. Considering anywhere in Africa as home comes with the acknowledgment that if one were to travel there, they'd be met with people who have a history that reaches back before and during slavery, for which the Black American has little to no recollection and extends beyond the moment of slavery to which the individual Black American has little to no connection. Saidya Hartman details her coming to this realization in her book *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. This follows the author as she recounts her journey along a slave trade route in Ghana and connects that history to the Atlantic Slave trade while grappling with the absence of her own full genealogical documentation.

I had presumed that the black world shared a thread of connection or a common chord of memory based upon this, our tragic past. In this assumption, I was proved wrong. I didn't experience what Ralph Ellison described as the "identity of passions," which connected the black world through our common suffering and history of struggle. I soon found out that most people didn't have a clue as to the scope of the transatlantic slave trade and didn't imagine that it had any lingering effects, which made them no different from the average American. And if they knew otherwise, they were disinclined to discuss it.⁶

Hartman thought when she arrived in Ghana she would immediately feel at home. But instead she was met with strangers who saw her as an "oburoni," a stranger. Any history that connected her to Ghana went undocumented and so she was an outsider to the place that she thought of as her ancestral home. This pushed me to question what I thought of as my ancestral home—Albany, NY. Like Hartman, I didn't know the answers to my family lineage. It was easier to create a false lineage— to assume that my ancestors' American history began and ended in Albany, NY. This wrapped up my family's history neatly. It was easier to assume my family's origin in the North. But to do so is to push the knowledge of brutal family separations to the back of my

⁶ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 73.

mind. Regardless of how messy it was to imagine such an early arrival, it spared me the thought of gritty details behind ancestral pain.

Nevertheless, learning of my family's migration pushed me to read Jennifer Lemak's *Southern Life, Northern City: The History of Albany's Rapp Road Community* and her article "Albany, New York and the Great Migration." I pored over the pages of this monograph about the Black community on Rapp Road--just a few blocks from the place we called home--desperately searching for some link to my family's past in her descriptions of southern migrants to Albany before World War II. I hypothesized how my great-grandparents' adjusted to the North. I found someone whose family also came from South Carolina and who lived on the same street as my family in one of the book's passages:

Leon Dukes, an African American whose parents migrated from South Carolina, recalled his family's experiences obtaining housing in Albany.

My parents' first house as a couple was on Sheridan Avenue in Albany. Rented by a lady named Mrs. Swartz and she owned most of the houses on Sheridan Avenue and Orange Street. She specialized in renting to African Americans from the South. I remember she used to come around all dressed in black and collect the rent. And then when my parents went to buy a house up on Livingston Avenue, close to Northern Boulevard, which was a primary Irish community, there was a lot of resistance. There was one other black family in the neighborhood, but they had no children. So the threat was that we were coming with children.... They bought their first house for \$5,000 at the site now where you see Stewart's on Northern Boulevard. They had fifty dollars to put down on the house and the only bank that would give them a mortgage was Cohoes Saving Bank. My mother said that was the only bank that would give blacks an opportunity ... it did not matter how much you had in your savings account.⁷

The problem for me was that Dukes' family moved twenty years too early to be connected to me. The book raised more questions than it answered for me: Where did we fit

⁷ Jennifer A. Lemak, "Albany, New York and the Great Migration." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 32, no. 1 (2008): 47+. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed May 2, 2022). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A173646758/AONE?u=nysl_se_bardcsl&sid=googleScholar&xid=c5109cec.

into the Great Migration? Was our absence from the Black southerners led by their pastor to the western edge of the city to buy property and escape the gambling dens of the Black south end a sign that we were low-livin', no-count sinners? Where were we? Where was I? No one in my family spoke of anything that filled in these holes. And so, questions about family lineage such as, "Where do my great-great-grandparents come from?" were still being met with silence.

My yearning for understanding in part comes up against dynamics of the Black American position. Extensive sources- well documented, well researched, and reputable ones- left me needing to know more about Blackness both globally and locally. The scholarship from academics such as Bart Landry, Paula Austin, and Jennifer Lemak is detailed, and thorough, but I felt as though there was more to the story that was left untold. I was suspicious of these narratives, yet felt ill equipped to replace them or add to them. I wondered, How much of this story has been untold? Am I simply not looking in the correct places? So many questions. I now call this feeling a diasporic yearning— longing for reconnection to an amorphous heritage, tradition, civilization, and way of life strategically dispersed and dissolved. Cultural estrangement, as Frantz Fanon described.⁸

A diasporic yearning is not an experience unique to me. Many Black Americans can relate to a diasporic hunger that is often met with an intellectual severing. Those with access to resources and higher educational institutions allow these visceral feelings to show up as academic interests. They are afforded time— the most precious resource— to read literature on topics of interest or pursue independent research. I fall into this category as one who has the

⁸Fanon, 37.

privilege to attend a four-year institution on scholarship. Throughout my undergraduate pursuits, I used courses on African and African American history to contextualize the world my elders experienced— a world unknown to me; a world unknown to many Black Americans.

And yet, I still feel unsatiated. During my studies at Bard, I seemed to be grasping at a phantom limb. I wanted to hark back to a lineage that I know nothing of. No matter how many books I read, I was never afforded the specificity of personal history that goes back centuries, or decades. Generations even. My diasporic connection to Black lineage still feels general and academic. I aim for it to be personal, spiritual, and healing. But how do I do this without physical documentation of my lineage? I yearn to belong in a familial or group memory that is institutionalized— known, recognized, acknowledged, documented. I am anxious and perhaps fearful that I am watering a tree that's long gone, whose roots have shriveled, whose trunk has grown gangrenous.

While searching for answers about my family on the pages of historical narratives, I began asking my mother and aunt questions. It took some time, but they began to open up and tell incredibly rich stories about their childhood. These stories are my family's oral history. The oral tradition— the second mode of historiographical and sociological inquiry— thrives within Black American culture because its written history has been systemically redacted. Anthropologists such as Zora Neale Hurston and Patrick E. Johnson transcribe and chronicle oral history. Hurston collected and wrote down Black American folklore in *Mules and Men*. Hurston began with the curiosity of her younger self— just as I am. That pushed her to document the first ever anthology of Black folklore.⁹ Hurston also wrote a robust piece of literature detailing the

⁹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008).

story of Cudjoe Lewis, the last known survivor of the middle passage, in *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Black Cargo*.¹⁰ In both pieces, Hurston phonetically wrote out the manner in which those reciting oral histories she was recording spoke. This way they maintained on the written page the nuances, inflections, and emotion behind the stories they told. Conducting an ethnography on folklore and recounts of the Transatlantic Slave Trade allows the history to exist beyond the storyteller. By archiving these stories, Hurston etched a history in time so that memory cannot be the reason it is forgotten. Subsequently, this history shifts from individual memory to collective memory.

Patrick E. Johnson's, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men in the South An Oral History* builds off the framework Hurston establishes on authorial voice. Johnson allows the speaker's voice to shine through his organizational methods and editorial decisions. His research on Black gay life in the South is arranged topically addressing moments such as coming out and being gay in the church. Johnson forefronts the speaker's oral history by doing minimal editing to the speaker's diction and adding his authorial voice sparingly.¹¹ These scholars were influential in my decision to forefront my mother's voice and take on the task of documenting my familial oral history. Originally I would have published conversations with my mother and aunt unabridged but, for clarity purposes, I have included a foreword and afterword. This way I can talk about my scholarly goals and aesthetics. Because of this, my work lands stylistically somewhere in the land of the autoethnographic and lyrical— like Saidya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. This novel is an example of the third framework of ethnographic, sociological, and historical research surrounding Black Americans— a combination

¹⁰ Hurston, *Mules and Men*.

¹¹ Patrick E. Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 20, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807882733_johnson.4.

of written and oral histories. She, like me, runs into a wall time and again when she views her cultural identity being primarily informed by the shared history of ancestry. And so, I am trying something different.

There is not an overarching narrative my lineage tells that can be summed up as a handful of themes. Instead it tells a plethora of half- stories. Ones with details left out or amended. Ones with partial truths or full lies. Ones that end abruptly and have no resolution. All are stories nonetheless that carry out the legacy of my family. I am taking on the gauntlet of the game of telephone my family passed down through generations. I am taking my mother's words and constructing a biomythography— or at least the startings of one. This genre was created by Audre Lorde in 1982 to describe her book, *Zami: A new spelling of my Name* which intertwines, biography, myth, history, and prose.¹² This story is heavily inspired by her mother's biography.

I am adding imaginative elements to real stories. I am creating my own primary source and deciding to add to it and make it lyrical instead of dissecting it and determining its historical significance within taxonomies--analytical systems and categories--created by colonial powers. My family's story has a self-evident logic, flow, integrity, poignancy, and value that I want to capture and preserve rather than disturb. This project is exploring the intergenerational maternal relationships that occur in my family. I am primarily using oral history told to me by my mother and one of my aunts (Mommy and Auntie). This is my mother's coming of age story from age ten to fifteen. These are the years that led up to her becoming a mother. The events that occur over this course of time highlight the beginning of lasting dynamics between my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. I am forefronting my mother and her poetic retelling of

¹² Audre Lorde, *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name*, (Watertown, Mass: Persephone Press, 1982).

childhood stories that have been told numerous times as well as ones that have been kept to herself. The excavation of this oral history has allowed me to explore my relationship with my mother, my lineage, my queerness, and my Blackness.

I am writing the beginnings of a biomythography so I will not be making explicit textual references throughout the ensuing chapter. My preface serves the purpose of directly naming influences so the rest of the text can flow more lyrically. A biomythography falls under the realm of a memoir or other literary works. Audre Lorde's biomythography reads like a piece of literature. The meat of this project reads like that as well. This is a mix of a history project and a creative writing project so it will not stick to the structure of foregrounding written histories/stories. American Studies is interdisciplinary so it seems fitting that I will borrow heavily from multiple disciplines to reach my end goal. There is an emphasis academics place on written histories. This failed me when searching for answers about my genealogy which pushed me to expand upon my mothers childhood stories.

While I talked extensively with Auntie, the eldest child, about her role in the family, and while her position to my grandmother is particularly unique, I see it more fit to focus on my mother's story for now. This is largely due to the way in which colonization and cultural identity gets personified in academia and literature. It seems to be heavily intertwined within the concept of motherhood. For instance, Stuart Hall uses mother-child relationships to describe one's non-fixed relationship to the past.

The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable

points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*.¹³

Recounts of childhood are constructed through emotion. The stories that get told and retold exist both in the past and the present because retelling is experiential. Meaning: to retell a story is to live it over again– to fabricate and rediscover its meanings to you, the storyteller. A child’s relationship with their mother is always based on the moment they are in currently. Additionally, Hall is noting that even after achieving “independence” or “maturity” or “adulthood,” the child remains tied to the mother in some way. Depending on the moment they are in, they will regard their parents highly or negatively. This is also true for the way in which one engages in a memory– it is based on their position to the memory. Meaning: if one recounts something as heartwarming but learns that they no longer appreciate what occurred they can remember it as a different experience altogether, perhaps a painful one instead..

Examples of perception and recounts of stories as experiential occur throughout Jamaica Kincaid’s *Annie John*. The protagonist, Annie, has a hot and cold relationship with her mother as she grows into her own. She resents her aging and what it does to cherished rituals she does with her mother. She thinks of her childhood fondly for the bond between her mother and herself was strong. Puberty brings rifts between the two and Annie John’s perception of her mother shifts– quite dramatically. We see this in Annie John’s perception of her mother when she was in conflict with her mother for being seen outside with boys:

¹³ Hall, 226.

The word 'slut' (in patois) was repeated over and over, until suddenly I felt as if I were drowning in a well but instead of the well being filled with water it was filled with the word 'slut,' and it was pouring in through my eyes, my ears, my nostrils, my mouth. As if to save myself, I turned to her and said, 'Well, like father like son, like mother like daughter.'

At that, everything stopped. The whole earth fell silent.... I looked at my mother. She seemed tired and old and broken. Seeing that, I felt happy and sad at the same time. I soon decided that happy was better, and I was just about to enjoy this feeling when she said, 'Until this moment, in my whole life I knew without a doubt that, without any exception, I loved you best,' and then she turned her back and started again to prepare the green figs for cooking.

I looked at my mother— at her turned back this time— and she wasn't tired and old and broken at all.... It was I who was tired and old and broken, and as I wanted to go over and put my arms around her and beg for forgiveness for the thing I had just said and to explain that I didn't really mean it. But I couldn't move....¹⁴

When Annie John stands up for herself she sees her mother as something small and frail. But as soon as Annie John realizes her mother can hold her own, she is suddenly big and strong— just as the protagonist remembers from childhood. Just like her younger self, Annie John has the intense desire to wrap herself around the mighty mom she remembers. Annie John is infantilised at that moment, because of her emotional positioning to the memories of her mother that picture her as a powerful being. Because of this, though her wants are in direct opposition to her mother, she needs her comfort, her approval, and protection. Her mother in that moment is the person she longs to do cherished childhood rituals, like baths, and matching dresses. The way Annie John feels in this moment passes, and noting its fluidity is essential. Her view of her mother goes back to being one of disdain soon after. However, Annie John will always be connected to her mother— regardless of how she feels about her. Even though Annie John develops a plan to leave

¹⁴ Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), 102–3.

her parents and Antigua behind, she could never reverse the fact that she was born to the parents to which she was and the town in which she was raised in.

Annie John inspired me to dive deeper into the concept of motherhood because of the allegorical connection of motherhood and colonial rule and the talk of African soil. There are at least two sides of the symbol of motherhood. On the one hand, motherhood can be used to talk about suffocation, overbearance, or harm. The western world used linguistic tactics of motherhood to describe the relationship between the ruler and ruled. Rulers of Britain presented themselves as the caretaker of the nations that they overtook, all the while, they drained each of them for resources and made them dependent. Kincaid's *Annie John* notes the parasitic relationship between Britain and Antigua:

Something I could not name just came over us [Annie John and her mother], and suddenly I had never loved anyone or hated anyone so. But to say hate— what did I mean by that? Before, if I hated someone I simply wished the person dead. But I couldn't wish my mother dead. If my mother died, what would become of me? I couldn't imagine my life without her. Worse than that, if my mother died I would have to die, too, and even less than I could imagine my mother dead could I imagine myself dead.¹⁵

This is a metaphor for Antigua's relationship to Great Britain. The islands want independence from Great Britain but it needs resources to be able to stand on its own. Britain positioned itself to be the source of Antigua's destruction but also the place that gave it just enough resources to survive. On the other hand, there is a motherhood involving genuine protection, care, nourishment, and nurturing. The language surrounding many Black Americans who view cultural identity in the "true self" framework proposed by Fanon is an example of this. This is

¹⁵Kincaid, *Annie John*, 88.

when one starts hearing the term Mother Africa, and the Black American return to the land for self-realization. In both cases, motherhood is used to talk about extraction. Either the mother is the resource in which one will take from extensively, and give nothing in return or vice versa.

The way motherhood is used in literature to talk about big issues affects the way childhood is discussed. Childhood is considered a precious time that is to be cherished. It is then heavily surveilled and policed. Anything less than perfection during this time is considered a parental failure. What occurs is a binary way of thinking about mother-child relationships; if a child is exposed to harm, the parents are to blame. This correlation is heightened for marginalized folks. This is due to the coupling facts that guidelines for “good parenting” are deeply entrenched within white supremacy, as well as, higher stakes due to systemic oppression. Namely, systems that subjugate marginalized individuals create harmful living situations for both the parent and the child. For instance, Black mothers in need of supplemental governmental assistance are declared inept “welfare queens” and lazy caregivers. This doesn’t account for the set of circumstances that led to the need.

In contrast, there is the archetype of the coddled child which breeds the stereotype of the Mammy; the everlasting wetnurse for infantilized adults who soak up all her nutrients, discard her when they feel strong enough to stand on their own, and yet beg for refuge when they realize they will never be. While the expectation is for mothers to care for their children, any signs of too much interest in their child’s life deems them a nuisance. In this archetype, it is thought that children resent their mother for over involvement. However, any signs of pulling away on the

mother's end leads to anxiety for the child. All in all, there is a thin line Black mothers are expected to tow when raising children. These expectations disregard their humanity.

As a child, I couldn't imagine my mother existing before being a mother. Though she became a mother young, she still had a life outside of motherhood. What was that life? I'm taking my mother off the mother pedestal that entraps her. I'm presenting her a lush sofa to lounge on. I'm plopping down beside her and providing time and space for us to conversate. I am face to face with her. Eye to eye. It is imperative that I truly see my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother as full people who have dreams and aspirations that go beyond the expectations of child rearing.

Throughout this piece I have decided not to include the names of the people involved. For relatives, I have changed their names to their relation to me. Meaning, instead of stating my mother's name, I call her what I would call her in my day to day— Mommy. The same goes for all extended relatives mentioned— distant or not. There are moments where my mother and aunt slip into the present tense when talking about relatives. I have chosen to keep their manner of address relative to themselves. For instance; when my mother slips into present tense and addresses Grandma as Mommy— because that is her mother— I kept that moment in the transcript. In addition, I keep in moments when my Aunt clearly delineates relational ties using the possessive determiner *my*. Those with no relation to me have different names. This decision keeps in mind my interlocutors' personal autonomy while also employing a narrative device that allows the reader to remember my positionality as the author. *Annie John* inspired this narrative device as Kincaid doesn't explicitly state the names of her parents until the last chapter of the book¹⁶. Until

¹⁶ Kincaid, 130–34.

then we– the readers– simply know them as Annie John’s mother and father. Gathering the stories of my mother’s life before her first child, I wanted to keep in mind the fact that I am my mother’s child and I too, have internalized harmful narratives of motherhood that dehumanizes the mother and scrutinizes her every move.

I have been trusted with the narratives of elders in my family. I am allowing their truth to breathe, and sex is a big part of their lives. The women in my family are presented to have a precarious relationship to sex. They present this way due to my authorial limitations– i.e. personal identity and time constraints. Because of this, I would never have a complete understanding of the full complexities of their sexual identity and trauma. However, this endeavor captures the attempt to begin understanding their stories. Because of this, it is especially important to handle these stories with the care and attention they deserve. The content of this history is one of the deciding factors that lead me to abandoning formal narrative structures of academia. I cannot make comment on what it means to be a Black woman falling in love, and having sexual relations after experiencing sexual trauma throughout childhood; but I can listen to what my mother has to say about her experience and pass that story on.

The conversations displayed throughout the following chapters aren’t presented in chronological order. Instead, distinct moments are spliced together with interludes of prose interspersed throughout. This is so the narrative flows more like a book. I selected aspects of conversations and placed them between a mix of themes and time. While this isn’t a linear story, I tried to keep earlier stories towards the beginning and later stories towards the end. I

recommend reading the appendices which are the unabridged conversations between my mother, my aunt, and myself.

At Bard, my study of Black diasporic life made clear to me that African cultures, like me, are constantly in the process of becoming--inventing and reinventing themselves. Learning and relearning. I read Black cultural critics and thinkers like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Saidiya Hartman. I have an intellectual grasp on what structures are at play that contribute to my Black American experience. I now aim to push back against those structures by investing time, resources, and energy into researching myself. I will accomplish this by exploring family and family gatherings through ethnographic research. This is not an attempt at creating a representative history for which people can generalize about Black life. Very often, Black histories have to make universal claims to get published. Instead, I am doing the radical work of declaring myself and my family historically significant for the very nature of being. Or like how my Black single-mother says, because *I say so*.

I began this research attempting to lay out a genealogy so I can have a cohesive understanding of my family tree. This provides historical context to oral histories that have been passed down. Questions trying to assess who the major players are in my family's story were forefronted. But at the start of this endeavor, I was only able to trace my maternal lineage back two generations (not including the generation I am in, or the generations that follow) . After prying open lips sealed shut from past hurt, I am now able to trace my family back three generations not including their spouses or a number of children that came from said affairs. Due to a mix of lack of documentation, and individual memory loss, I only got a fragmented view of my family tree, with major figures appearing in stories usually left unsaid. By leaning into this

fragmentation and creating from it, I am becoming an active member in my history, my present, and my future. The text that follows is just the start of a lifetime of work I aim to pursue.

Something Happened.

Who is Grandma?

I slept on a twin mattress. It lay at the foot of a make-shift queen-sized bed whose wooden frame came from assembling furniture pieces we found walking the streets during trash night- an exquisite corpse. My sleep had depth and width and warmth and comfort. I wasn't alone. Being the youngest of seven in a two-bedroom apartment, I never was. The size of my family made my mother try to categorize us in bunches to make it easier on her. There were the brothers--the oldest three brothers. There were the sisters--the oldest two sisters. And then there were the youngest two, my sister and myself. I never questioned my mother's organizational tactics to keep track of my siblings and me. It seemed right. However, I did have questions about many other things. I was a curious child, always trying to find reasons in things my family had decided long ago were unreasonable.

A fog covers who I lay beside on that twin mattress the early morning of Halloween. Since my family's rooming situation changed daily, the chance of me remembering correctly is slim to none. For sure, my mother lay in the queen-sized bed, though. This is a fact. I woke up to her groggy,

“Hello?”

A hello that you use when answering someone with whom you are familiar. To someone you love. Someone you are unafraid to hear the phlegm that has been building in the back of your throat while asleep. It was followed by an alert but raspy,

“What?”

And—

“You’re lying.”

Whoever it was, they weren’t lying. I could tell by my mother’s silence accompanied by a tiny hum of someone on another line whispering in my mother’s ear. Followed by dialing. And ringing. And—

“Something happened to Mommy. I don’t know what. I’m getting ready to go there now.”

My Grandmother’s health had been steadily declining. Years earlier, a diabetic stroke gave her aphasia, and took mobility on her left side along with her left leg. What could it be now? My heart sank deeper than the sleep that came before. My breath doubled onto itself. The nerve endings just beneath the surface of my skin were lighting up. It itched and burned. I was up. I kept my eyes closed. I feared my mother would alter her candor in my consciousness. I stayed up all night with my mother. Hearing bits and pieces of my grandmother’s progressing ailment. My grandmother died that morning. October thirty-first. Halloween. Her favorite holiday.

I had school that day. Exhausted, eyes red from sleep deprivation and tears, I took a shower to wash some of the night away. Or at least mask the reason for my eyes. On my way out the door, my mother blurted,

“Grandma died,”

“Oh. Okay.” I replied.

Of course, I knew. But I also heard my mother tell each of my older siblings while I lay awake. The stab of the news hit me seven times over. As the wound healed, the news would strike me again in the weak tissue that formed over it. I was numb and wounded all at once. I was the last to be told what I already knew. As usual, I pretended that this was news.

That night I went trick or treating. Three years earlier was the first time I ever went trick or treating. Grandma's health gave rise to the appreciation of this holiday— my mother put her religion to the side for a day. My three older sisters supervised me while we enjoyed the sweet delights of going home to home. That night's feeling has left a stain on my heart. There were waves of excitement followed by crashes of bereavement. It followed me for the subsequent weeks.

The funeral was quite the show. My mourning clouds the specifics of the day. My memories of the funeral are akin to a Kerry James Marshall painting, faces pushed together without a sense of the place. I remember it was the first time I had seen my eldest brother in quite some time. He wore an orange jumpsuit with chains that clasped around his wrists and his ankles. My niece, his first daughter, and his second child found out her dad wasn't at school. I remember thinking it was odd he was allowed to attend the funeral and I was thankful for that. He kept the energy high. Always ready to crack a joke. This helped my mom. She wore grief on her face. Auntie- the eldest daughter- wore a long black coat that had fur on its sleeves and collar. She had a grand Afro- one of the many staple wigs she had in her repertoire. She was not in a joking mood. Aunt A - the youngest daughter- had a forgettable black outfit on. Her hair was pressed. Uncle brought his wife and his small children almost as the perfect accessory to complete his outfit of mourning. They were some of the few elders I recognized. Among them

were a sea of brown faces that all sort of had the same phenotypes as Mommy, Auntie, Aunt A, and Uncle. All people who also had some sort of relationship with my grandmother. But they have no relationship with me.

Why didn't I know these people?

The service started with some questionable song covers of church classics. The singer was my mother's acquaintance whom she met at a church we no longer attended. An elderly white woman, she knew the words, but her voice cracked like a bowl of stale triscuits in need of the oil that anointed great Black gospel singers. This was followed by a eulogy led by a minister I have never seen before. I wondered if he knew Grandma and who gave him the authority to speak about her life with such a gospel. He emphasized forgiveness. He emphasized her deadness. He emphasized keeping the past in the past. Odd. My grandmother was a worldly woman but, of course, she had a good heart. Who could be mad at that? Especially postmortem. Following the eulogy was an open mic. Auntie felt like this was her time to shine. The problem was, so did my Aunt A. Auntie and Aunt A both competed with each other to prove their star child status. Mommy stayed silent. I only remember my Aunt A's eulogy. She told a story about her youngest son. He had a handful of health complications when he was a child. During this time she had moved to Georgia. She was so enmeshed in her own life- raising a family of four- she had not looked back to Albany. Her son's health scares put life in perspective for her, causing her to make a promise with God to return to her hometown every year on Thanksgiving. For as long as I can remember this had been the case. She spoke on how this year would be the

first year we wouldn't have Thanksgiving with her mother. To me, my grandmother had always seemed to act as a neutral body who hosted gatherings and got everyone together. Made my eyes well. What's a family gathering without my grandmother? It'll all crumble without her. This grief was then met with wonder as to how Aunt A talked about her choice to move to Georgia.

What happened that made her move away and not look back?

We drove to the burial, which retrospectively seemed like a cruel third act in a series of perplexing events. After a few brief words by the minister, my grandmother was lowered into the ground. Collectively we stood with bated breath, taking in the finality. A few people took a rose from her bouquet and tossed it on top of the casket. An elderly woman who I vaguely recognized picked up a few roses. Her shoulders and bosom raised and fell on an eight count. Eyelids shut, her lips curled as she took in the smells of the flowers in her hand. She disappeared beyond the entrance gates of the cemetery. A thief! A thief! A thief! This gave permission for other elders to pick up their very own funeral memento. The bouquet was picked apart. Each rose was picked over—individually examined to see its fitness for a homecoming. This left a few flowers in the place of where the tombstone would be. A tombstone that never came. A tombstone no one can afford. My ears burned with rage. My eyes flooded, helplessly.

What would possess someone to take from my grandmother even after death?

Mommy

Typically, my mother fills up a room. Nothing about her is petite, from her personality to her bread basket. When my mother trots in her anatomy jolts around the atoms that fill the space. Suddenly the air clings to her. Kids, more perceptive of the molecular forces at play, know this—subconsciously or not. She is instantly attacked with “Nana’s home!” “Hi Mommy!” Their bodies can’t push back against the atomic magnetization. Children thrust their bodies onto her, jumping from great heights—sofa armrests, chairs, tables— or going for her ankles. They are often met with a variation of “Hey baby— wait. Let me put my bags down,” or “Hey— let *go* of me”.

Older folks recognize my mother’s spiritual grandeur as well. Mommy is called Mommy to those to whom she has never presented the nutrients of her bosom to suckle. Even those decades her senior address her as Mommy out of respect. At some point— perhaps the onset of puberty— to the people around Mommy, her atoms are no longer ionized. The energetic interplay becomes touchy, unstable, or decayed with her entrance. Most can’t take the room’s decreased oxygen. It becomes stuffy, suffocating, claustrophobic. Some can. This is partly dependent on how you mitigate my mother’s high-octane tongue lashings that may come from differing opinions or playing Spades. Most of my older siblings know how to tow the line of respect while unveiling my mother’s overreaction to herself. My older siblings are comedians. Their smart satirical set-ups and punchlines usually leave my mother wiping the embarrassment off her brow. Sometimes it gets too much for my mother. Sometimes she shuts down whole events— flips

tables, packs up her food and leaves. Or kicks people out of her home. Like a cat backed up into a corner, she fights back. Pestered and disconsolate.

Mommy is nothing without her no— her refutation, refusal, negation, disapproval, nonacceptance, disallowance, nix, abnegation, dissent, pass, declination, defiance, rejection, nonconsent. The letters N.O. are a furnace deep in her spirit that brings the comfort of self worth and self acceptance when spoken. Mommy has the ability to deny access to certain parts of herself to her loved ones and know that the love is still there. Mommy's no is hard and fast— like a steel door. Though this steel door may be unlocked with a set of keys that has been copied seven times over. Her no has been learned. It comes from years of screaming it at the top of her lungs but whose sound never went above five hertz. Inaudible.

Recurrently, my mother recedes into herself. Again, she takes the air with her— vacuumed into whatever corner of her soul she's hidden. This often comes when she's anticipating an outburst on her part. During family events she may stay in the kitchen. A helping hand. She'll choose a laborious meal to create, clean up after every finished plate, or sip dark rum solitarily.

This comes when she's asked too much. Too many questions. Or if she doesn't have the answer she thinks you need. The advice you wish she had. She may think this regardless of what she's given you. She may have presented you with an intellectual feast— a slow roasted chicken mull. Leftover boned chicken thighs, mixed vegetables made up from whatever variety she has on hand: leafy greens, cruciferous herbs and salads, marrow, alliums, roots. She has cooked the rice to the perfect fluffiness, but in her mind she's forgotten the cornbread. While you have another starch looking directly at you, the meal isn't complete without it. She often does this when she's at odds with authority— secretaries, doctors, law enforcement not understanding my

mother's rhythmic speech. Phrases blunted with asides jammed in the middle of the thought. Like jazz.

Every now and again Mommy locks herself in a room. She'll stay there for hours. This tumbles into days and weeks and months. Nothing but the sympathy of darkness and scripture accompany her. Biblical audio tracks caress her. The Lord is in her ear, speaking light into the days that come— disavowing the days that were. Obligations sit heavy on Mommy's chest. She demands more from herself and the world agrees. Sometimes she just needs a time out. But even her reprieves are laborious. The space becomes a mirror. The darkness refracts her image back to herself. Heavy. Spent. She'll sway against the density of the room— wisdomful and deprived of sight.

Child: Do you ever sit back and think about how far you've come?

Mommy: Meaning now? ... I guess-- I don't know how far I've come. I guess, because I'm not satisfied or where I want to be.

Child: Yeah, but I mean, you can always self improve but at the same time, remember that you're coming from some difficult circumstances.

Mommy: Yeah. I don't know. I know that I went through that. And I know that it was a huge part of my life. In all that, even the running away and stuff I still had—. I always had some sort of almost an escape type of thing. Like I always felt like, okay, Malik's mother's house was my

escape. Although it was always a conflict there. Yeah... I'm gonna get caught, I'm gonna get caught, I'm gonna get caught, but she was still like a safety for me. So I know that emotion of feeling deathly scared that I'm going to get caught and I'll have to go back home. And I have to go back home and have to go back home. So I was so scared about that. But even in the midst of the emotional toll of fear there would be-- and it wasn't bad because she kind of looked out for me. You know. She looked out for me. I feel like I can at least go to bed without worrying about if my mother is gonna get drunk and whatever random... guy she could have at the time gonna come in there, and try to touch on me! So I didn't have that worry. So I would rather deal with the fear of being caught... having to deal with that than having to deal with the fear of what am I going to look forward to. You know, when I laid my head down. That's why I burned the house down. I believe subconsciously I did it on purpose.

The year was '84– or '83. Darkness has been the girls' truth for the past week or so. The light bill hadn't been paid. The temperature outside wasn't too cold and the temperature inside wasn't too hot. There is no real rush to get the energy turned back on at Trinity Place– one of Mommy's many childhood homes named by the street it stands on. So the three loitered outside on their front porch, around the block, or neighboring blocks, waiting for the sun's pale glow to turn tangerine, titan, then eventually a deep plum. This fruit is replaced by the blue-black coming from the moon. This will signal the girls to turn in for the night and replace the reality of darkness due to no electricity with darkness due to closed eyelids. Before bedtime, the girls would brave Trinity Place's silent gloom only when absolutely necessary: to pee. They did this in pairs; one of them would hold onto a makeshift torch— notebook paper lit aflame– so the other

used the dim warm glow for aiming and sanitation purposes. The paper was a ticking bomb– the girl’s only had its light for a moment before its glow burned up and out singeing their fingertips in the process. Of course this wasn’t their first choice of illumination but the household candles have long burned out and so they had to make do.

Mommy was on the hunt. She was missing her jacket or a sock or another essential article of clothing that gets put on right before heading out the door– the thing that stood between herself and light. Great Aunt R was picking her up for choir practice. While she wasn’t a fan of church she is a fan of light produced by the fluorescent shine of the building’s light fixtures, and messing around with the church boys and girls. Aunt A, Mommy’s younger sibling, was also grabbing last minute essentials in the room they shared. Auntie was exempt from this church trip for an unknown reason; she was around, though – in the neighborhood or elsewhere. Mommy fumbled around her room looking for the lost item but the room’s darkness had a thickness that her irises were not equipped to tackle. She turned to her torch. Mommy ripped out a handful of notebook paper, rolled it along its length and crumpled it so the paper collapsed into itself– allowing the ridges on either side to lock and maintain its shape. Using her gas stove, she lit it.

The race to find her jacket– or her sock or her shoe– began. Quickly, Mommy began turning her room around. She had no time to waste. With every beat of her heart the flame seeped down the paper’s shaft. Mommy’s heart slammed hard against her chest, trudging gallons of blood to the furthest points of her body excluding her head. Before her eyes the paper turned to fire and the fire met her fingers. She dropped the flame. The flame– small thing– was enraged and stayed awake. Mommy called to Aunt A,

“Aunt A quick! Pull the mattress over it!”

Aunt A pushed the mattress that lay against the wall— a casualty of the hunt— on top of the fire. The licks of light from the flame were abruptly replaced by Trinity Place’s blackness. The girls lifted the mattress once again revealing tiny blood-orange stars that drifted about the room and a taste that punched the air out of their lungs— smoke. Its embers angrily glowed still. The girls managed to quiet down the flame, but it still had words to say.

“Help me move this mattress to the back, Aunt A.”

The girls pulled the mattress through their home and onto their enclosed back porch. Mommy knew the flames’ reign of terror wasn’t truly over and so she thought some air might shut it up.

“In time, it’ll cool down”.

Eventually, Great Aunt R arrived and Mommy either found her lost item of clothing or a suitable alternative to take on choir practice. They left.

The little girl had realized a long time ago she wanted nothing to do with church. Weekends were when her favorite— and only— brother got to visit her. Typically, his father’s house was what he called home. Grandma went to church every Sunday. Clockwork. Auntie loved it. Aunt A was indifferent. Mommy and Uncle hated it. Mommy would offer anything to get out of Sunday school and just hang out with her brother. Volunteering to clean the entire house usually got her off the hook. Sometimes it didn’t and the two heretics were stuffed into itchy-stiff Sunday wear and dragged to the sanctuary. The delayed gratification of church never did it for Mommy and Uncle. Paying Sunday school tithes seemed like a waste. One day Mommy took the weekly tithes and offerings allowance given to them and spent it on snacks for

herself and her favorite brother. They indulged in the pleasures of life that day. One of the few times Mommy saw the benefits of church.

That night was another where Mommy saw the benefits of church. There was light and she intended to take full advantage of it. Mommy had the time of her life. She ran and ran and ran about church. To the elders, Mommy made only minorly inconvenient mischief while hymns and spirituals were being taught. Not a care in her world. The few hours of practice were soon over and Great Aunt R took Mommy and Aunt A back home.

Mommy and Aunt A returned to Trinity Place ablaze. They pulled up to a scene of firefighters working diligently. Grandma stood across her home watching as a firestorm engulfed it. She cried, and cried, and cried, and cried. They lost it all: That jacket or shoe or sock that may not have been found by Mommy, every photograph, every toy, every document. At first, Mommy was devastated, then scared. She was the cause of the fire. Her worry turned to confusion; who could have guessed a speck of light had the potential to cause so much destruction? The embers that glowed on the mattress reminded her of the controlled flickers that Fourth of July sparklers produce. And little bitty children are given these on warm summer nights.

Grandma's hope was extinguished. She laid in the puddle of what her life was. Her knees cracked from the gravel that lay beneath her tears. Her sisters hoisted her onto their shoulders. Seeing the earth reclaim what little their sister had made their hearts pound with remorse. Auntie held Grandma's hand as her weight rested on the back of Great Aunt R. They disappeared. Great Aunt K took the hands of Aunt A and Mommy.

“Come with me, babies. Let's go away for a while.”

The embers that singed through the mattress remained still.

Great-Grandma

If Grandma was ever in a trust-fall circle with her family, she would be the only one whose weight would be caught by the sting of pavement to her back. Grandma was number six out of ten – or thirteen- children born to Great-Grandma and Great-Grandpa. The lot never had the newest clothes, or got a wide array of gifts during Christmas. But, they always seemed to have an intoxicatingly good time.

Great-Grandma worked in hospitality, holding any assortment of jobs within the field. Great-Grandpa worked in construction (although Mommy always thought he worked for General Electric). Winters were tough for Great-Grandpa. His southern hands weren't equipped for the northern snow and how it complicated his field. And so he was around the house more often, enjoying his programs.

The winter didn't bring rest for Great-Grandma. She had a steadier paycheck, so naturally she picked up the bills. They had ten little mouths to feed. Someone had to work. Great-Grandma would be mad as all-nevermind when she got home. Her face, all flushed from being stanced up from clock-in to clock-out. She'd walk through the door greeted with an assortment of,

“Hey Mommy.”

“Hey Grandma.”

And she'd meet it with a quick and firm grunt whilst sashaying into her room. Moments later she'd come out with a

“Hey baby”

And swiftly return to her corridors.

And then she'd return.

“Y'all babies hungry?”

Back to her room. Back again.

“Let me fix you a plate.”

Then she'd go to town in the kitchen. Making a full-fledged feast. It didn't matter what she cooked; if her hands touched it, it was divine. She'd pull whatever poor soul happened to be around into her kitchen and tell them about how she found herself in her long standing marriage.

“As soon as I met your father (grandfather) (great-grandfather), I knew he was the one for me.”

They'd sit there and marvel at the lengths Great-Grandma went to tell these stories—pulling out old albums, repeating herself over and over and over, leaning in real close when she stressed a point. They'd ignore the rum on her breath.

Auntie: We come from South Carolina. That, again, that's my grandparents that came from South Carolina. Anything prior to that, unfortunately, I do not know. I do not know. I would have to get in touch with Great Aunt S, but I'm sure they unfortunately just lost her husband last week, so that might not be feasible at this time. But as far as I know, my grandfather is from South Carolina. Bath, South Carolina. They met down there. [...] Then they migrated up here because

my grandfather needed to work and then all the rest of them was born up here in Albany. As far as ethnicity, I believe that my grandfather is Indian. That is within the family. From my grandfather's side, I don't know which tribe it is. Again, I would have to ask Great Aunt S about that because she would probably know. Um, it's unfortunate because by the time I got to an age to really understand and because there was so many kids, I guess they didn't think it was really important to discuss lineage and heritage and things back in the past. They're just too busy trying to deal, trying to survive what was going on and the present with so many kids and housing and job issues and all that. So, you know. But it is very important. I never got an opportunity to meet my great grandmother I think it's-- because again, that was they were all down south. So there's that.

Child: Did Grandma ever talk about the past?

Auntie: She talked about the past relative to herself, so she never talked about her grandparents or anything like that, so there was never any real leads to that. Great Aunt R before she passed away, she finally did get hooked up with cousins that was down south. But again, because they were dealing with, you know, so many children and dealing with, you know, emergent issues such as housing and all that they really didn't delve into the past. So she mainly talked about her childhood relative to her brothers and sisters. But that's about as far as it went into. [...] But it didn't go past that.

[...] But one interesting thing that you should know about my aunts and uncles— including your grandmother. They were all born in the summertime, and that's because Great- Grandma said they didn't have anything to do in the wintertime. Hmm.

Child: So who are you close to growing up?

Auntie: I was close to Great Aunt R. That's who I was close to. Yeah, I liked her. She was just like everything that I thought that I could be. Um, because she was smart, she was beautiful, she was sassy, she had style. Yeah, I liked her a lot.

Child: And even she didn't delve into the past?

Auntie: She was trying to, but there was just like so many secrets. That's the one thing about this family: it's very riddled in secrecy. She was starting to get to the bottom of it, but then she got sick. Because one thing we found that like my grandmother, my grandmother, unfortunately, was an alcoholic, a closet alcoholic, and that she would just drink by herself in her room. And then you just see, like the transformation of what she kept going in her room and she never drank in front of us. But how you got like that? And yeah, so it was a lot of things going on. It was a lot of domestic violence between them. A lot of bad things that had happened. There's a lot of secrecy that goes on in this family. So she was trying to get to the bottom of it to where we was going to have a big family reunion, but unfortunately she got sick and then nobody else picked up the mantle.

Child: Well, when did she get sick?

Auntie: She's been gone. Maybe 15 years. Yeah, it's been about 15 years, 15, 18 years ago. Yeah, we've got I'm going to say, 15 years ago. Is she passed away..

Child: So what stories get passed down?

Auntie: It's basically like stuff like when they was younger, when they were talking about like Christmas and like, you know, fun times when stuff that I remember as a child, like my grandfather, he used to play. He used to play the lottery a lot. And so like one fond memory I have, like when I used to go to their house is that when he sent you to the store, you want to go to the store! And I didn't care if it was a blizzard outside because my grandfather had this stutter and he would go, "Uh, Uh, [...], go to the store for your grandmother" and like, he'll give you a \$20 bill and tell you to go to the store and get like an RC soda and a loaf of bread. And you can keep the change. Now. Bread was like 50 cents, a soda was a quarter. He gave you a twenty dollar bill! I broke my neck. I used to keep my coat on and sit next to the door and wait. And my grandfather, he loved, loved, loved football. He loved football. So he spent a lot of time in his room with a big old TV watching his sports, and you couldn't mess with him with his sports. So like when we was like being loud in the living room, he would scream out "Y'all shut up all that noise out there! Y'all shut up all that noise." If he had to come out in that living room, somebody's going to get it. Somebody is going to get a beating. Now. One time my cousin Teacup

was singing Hello Rusty Jones and pulled her dress up over her head, and she had a big safety pin in her underwear. And she kept— she kept screaming and hollering, and my grandfather came out of that room with that belt. We was like this [mimes biting her fingers]. He smacked her on the butt. She went and told my Great Aunt C. And she tried to fuss with him. That's not one thing that you do with my grandfather. He would've done smacked you too. Yeah, he didn't play that. He was a big old guy. Yeah, he was very protective of his daughters. And that, yes, Great Aunt C, I guess, when her husband had put his hands on her. My grandfather went up there and let's just say, Oh, it didn't work out too well. He wound up. He wound up beating the crap out of him. Him and Great Uncle H went up there.

[...] Um, but yeah. So after my grandfather died— he died when I was in sixth grade. Well, actually, I was graduating from sixth grade. The day of my graduation he died actually. So my grandmother used to host a lot of different things like Thanksgiving and Christmas and different things, and she was basically the glue that, you know, brought people together. And then once she died, then people kind of went their separate ways. There was a lot of, um, a lot of rifts in the family about funeral and money and insurance policies and things of that nature. A lot of it probably wasn't true, but you know, when people just sensationalize things and they don't get the correct information and they just embellish those that really are not educated in finding out it's like, if the story sounds good, then we're going to go with it versus let them go, do my own homework and just ask. Again, this family does work in a shroud of secrecy instead of just being up front and asking, you know, "Is one plus one two?" You know, so that's when there are a lot of rifts became, you know, came with the family. People just kind of stayed in their own little clusters and kind of went on from there. You know, then when Rosetta started trying to pull

people together, you know, we came they, you know, the sisters and things came. But again, I mean, that's trying to happen now, you know, Great Aunt K reached out to me and, you know, trying to get us to get back together, you know, the rest of us because there's only four left. There's Great Aunt S there's Great Aunt K, Great Uncle P, and I think Great Aunt C is still alive. Nobody's heard from her. She's in [...] somewhere. I think

Great- Grandma usually was eclipsed by Great- Grandpa. His personality towered over her, beating her into a fetal position. Her spirit would become a mix of blood and mucus swelling her face. She tried to contain her fluids and in return she swallowed herself. She became a sponge and soaked up his violence. Superfluous drool would drip out of her eyes and mouth, soiling her blouse from all that she had taken in.

Great-Grandma sanitized her wounds with alcohol. She would crack open her bottle of vodka, rum, whisky, gin, bourbon, wine coolers, beer and scrub herself clean. Of the blood on her blouse. Then drool on the floor. Of the musk of a twelve hour shift. Then her children's embrace. Of the meal she's made. Of the apologetic kiss on her neck. Then the lottery ticket she paid for but never played. Of her northern migration. Of the family she's left behind and the family she's made. Of her children. Of her man. Of her life.

Child: So what did Great-grandma say when you were in the foster home, Mommy? Was she still alive then?

Mommy: Yes she was. I am not sure what she said. I wasn't close to my grandmother, I was close to my grandfather.

Child: Oh, Do you know if he had an opinion on it?

Mommy: He was dead by the time I was in the foster home. And if he was alive, I don't think I would have been. Not that I-- I love my grandmother. But we just-- it was. We weren't close, not that there was any ill will or anything. I was just closer to my grandfather. I do remember times when I was older and I had your eldest brother and I would go to my grandmother's house and my grandfather was alive and she would just try to keep you there because she was lonely and she would have you sit at the table and you just couldn't, you know, go visit Great-Grandma Without sitting there, you know, and conversatin' with her. But her house was like my house. Always open. Anybody could anytime if you wanted to go to a house, you could.

Child: Did you ever think like, oh, I might just go to Great-grandma's house when you were in the foster home or would you rather be in the foster home?

Mommy: I would rather be with my grandmother! But there was legal stuff that my grandmother would have had to go to court and do that. I'm not sure what was her, why she didn't, because I'm not her. Well, they removed me from my mother. And my mother didn't really fight or anything. So they kind of got her classified as-- like-- not fit to take care of me.

Child: But she still had custody of Auntie and Aunt A.

Mommy: Yeah.

Child: Oh, how does that work? I thought if they take one, they have to take them all.

Mommy: No, I ran away from home because, you know, I ran away from home and I refused to go to school and I refused to go home. So what made me get in the system was because every time they would try to bring me back I would run and was always-- kept doing it, kept doing. And then one time in court-- I ran out of court. Because they were trying to, you know, make me go back home. So that's why. So you know, "Why is she not wanting to stay home?" type of deal. That's how I got caught up in a system like that.

Where would you run?

Child: Oh. And then?

Mommy: I just kept running away. I would just say what they wanted me to say in court and I probably would be good for a couple of days, but then I'll run away again and be gone for, like, weeks and months.

Child: Wow. How old were you at this time?

Mommy: 12– 12, 13. Preteen yeah-- I never wanted to stay home.

Child: Hmm. Where would you run to?

Mommy: To Malik's house. And he would hide me. Then from Malik's house I would run to Theo's . Just back and forth to their houses, sometimes, [Malik's sister's house]. So I'll be in between all three houses. When one area got hot with the cops I would go to the other house.

Child: At 12 years old.

Mommy: Yeah. Preteen. Yup. I can't even imagine.

Child: Twelve years old is when I went over to Dad's house. What if I was hopping from house to house?

Mommy: Yeah, you guys-- none of y'all wasn't nothing like I was. Even your eldest brother. He wasn't.

Child: Well, yeah, well, I mean, it seemed like you were doing it to survive.

Mommy: Yeah, well, again, I mean, every time you turn around, somebody touching on me. Yeah, whatever that demon was would jump from one-- like get out of here. And then I found safety, safety, ya know, safety with Malik's mom [...] For a while, cuz then she was buying me clothes, you know, fixed my room up. It felt like safe, although that was just as chaotic as them--theirs. But it just... nobody was touching me. I didn't want that. That to happen. You know what I mean?

Child: Yeah.

Mommy: So I stayed there. And, you know, so they caught me and I got, you know. They locked me up... I ran out the one time...

The family split but this didn't last long. Within the next couple of days the girls' reunited at Interfaith— a homeless shelter.

Interfaith was just a house. Each family had a room of their own. Dining was provided and eaten in the common space among other families. The girls got to know the children of Interfaith. Grandma doubled her work so she could restart life for her children. While she was away the girls would busy themselves in their girly endeavors—jumping rope, playing in mud, wrestling. Two maternal figures living at Interfaith took to the girls and became Grandma's second and third pair of eyes. Though they had poor eyesight, Grandma thought them harmless enough to allow them access to the girls.

The two each had sons: Malik and Theo. The girls were infatuated with them. Something stirred within Mommy when they were around. Like picking a scab, she hated the sensation but indulged the pain nonetheless. She loved their company but wanted them to know how much she hated having them around. Malik got her mouth. Mommy was amazed about how ugly this boy was. It was her civic duty to cue Malik in on this fact. She thought it would be a shame if Malik ever got it in his head that he was anything less than repugnant. And so, she served him a never ending assortment of insults. Mommy was particularly repulsed by how black this boy was. Blue-Black. Purple. Like a sight deprivation chamber. His Blackness seemed to make her eyes linger for too long on the contours of his body. She couldn't make him out. This made her lash out even more. She didn't know what to do with these feelings. She didn't want to look at him.

Theo wasn't ugly. Auntie thought he was cute. Mommy didn't care about his looks. She thought he was an excellent sparring partner. Let him say one thing that rubbed Mommy the wrong way and a punch would be thrown. Then another, and another. They'd fall into a tussle that would last only a few moments. They'd get up, pick up where they left off in the conversation, or go on about their days. The other girls learned not to pay it any mind.

The shelter was a buffer period for the girls. Grandma soon found Hamilton Street and moved her family in. She then slipped back into her old ways— though they never truly left— and began hosting elaborate get togethers (and intimate sleepovers). The men Grandma invited over were smooth...slick. Slimy. Greasy. Grubby. They rubbed off and up on Grandma and buttered her up. These men spread a nice thick layer of compliments, booze, and good times - coating Grandma so she shined and shined. Grandma was used to this attention from men by now, but each time was special because her family would never support her inner light fixtures. Just as Grandma began to glisten, they would slip away and slowly steal Mommy's dispersed embers. Mommy fought back the way she knew how. Mommy picked up the habit of insomnia. She refused to sleep. No matter how heavy her eyelids got, Mommy made it her mission to keep them glued to the back of her skull. She began silently running away. For the first time, she had somewhere to run to. Malik's house. But even then, bouts of insomnia came from worry.

I'm gonna get caught. I'm gonna get caught. I'm gonna get caught.

I'll have to go back home. I'm gonna get caught. I'll have to go back home.

Mommy's embers caught fire deep within her body. She held her fire close to the surface of her being so it would burn those who let it. Mommy knew how to incinerate the egos of any man or woman who was at odds with what she wanted. And yet she couldn't discern whether this flame was determination, grit, defiance, or bitterness, resentment, envy. Mommy ran and ran and ran. Malik's family always accepted her with open arms. During this time, Theo fell for Auntie.

Auntie thought he was a dumb type of cute so she enjoyed being courted by the boy. And the four became a group. Malik and Theo would unwittingly distract Mommy from her reality.

Mommy cared deeply for Theo (like a friend). Theo was the funniest boy Mommy had ever met. He was a fool. A clown. Maybe he was born without that part in people's brain that registered embarrassment. Or maybe his embarrassment fueled his performance in some way that only made sense to himself. He would do anything for a laugh. Mommy's crazy rotted when paired with Theo's crazy. He matched Mommy's fire and brought a propane tank. Their interactions exploded into tender fights and deafening laughter.

Mommy learned to love Malik (like a lover). He was crazy but in time she fell into his hypnosis. Nights when she lay beside him restless, he would confide in her. She could never hold a conversation with him. But she learned to listen. She would let him talk. This was in part due to the endless debt Mommy felt towards Malik and his family for taking her in. Soon enough Mommy became Malik's archivist, therapist, and bedroom walls. He dumped all of himself onto her. While he rambled, some nights, her leadened lids dilated and undilated allowing more and less light into the hole within the center. That charcoal boy morphed. His grip suddenly felt firm. His figure doubled then folded onto itself like a shadow cast from candlelight. His image fluctuated between man and boy existing somewhere between the two. She would become so lost in the vastness of him. He was sorry. A sorry, ugly boy with little to no prospects outside of his immediate world. And yet, it didn't stop him from staking his claim to the crumbs that he deserved. Mommy empathized deeply with Malik. So much so that she let him enter her.

When he did, he burrowed a string deep within the pit of her body and tied it. He knotted this string over and over to make sure its unraveling would be laborious. Anyone who would

embark on its de-knotting would be reminded of what was. Forever. He needed to become a phantom limb attached to Mommy. Not an extra arm or foot or another large body part whose imagining was clearly absurd enough to make her realize her own psychosis, but instead an extra toe, or finger. A silent nagging that is just crazy enough to bother but not big enough to fix. He kept a tension on that string. That string, filled with accusations, assaults, was to remain fixed between Mommy and himself. Forever. Malik was a pillager. What he wanted he got. He yearned for Mommy's love and his craving hollowed him out. He resented Mommy and Theo's relationship. How dare she lean on anyone else besides him for anything? Malik was supposed to be her world. The relationship between his best friend and his love needed to cease immediately. He quickly realized that would not be the case. Then began cheating accusations. He needed to own Mommy. Then began physical fights.

When Mommy would run away she would bounce between Malik's and Theo's houses. When the police would come looking for her she would make her escape to the next house. When she became enmeshed with Malik, she could only bring herself to sleep over at Theo's if Malik was with her. That is, until the law caught up with her.

Child: Why did Grandma call the cops, if she didn't want to fight for custody?

Mommy: No, Grandma didn't call the cops. I didn't go to school.

Child: Oh. Was Malik going to school?

Mommy: Yeah.

Child: Why didn't you want to go to school?

Mommy: I just didn't want to go to school because back then my thought was that they were going to make me go home.

Child: Wow.

Mommy: And I didn't want to go home. I never told my mother that-- [realizes herself] why... I kind of never told even in all that. I never told that. You know, because I didn't want her to, . . . get her in trouble. So it was as if I was the one running away and just being an unruly kid. I just didn't want to be home. Okay. And then one time I slept outside-- me and Malik slept outside. And then Mommy-- with her guys drinking and carrying on. We slept on this ledge-- on this ledge outside with blankets. Cuz when she got drunk and passed out that's when, you know... Not all of them, but some guys were just sick.

Child: Did Malik know? Who did you tell?

Mommy: Auntie knew. Yeah. I didn't tell them. Yeah.

Child: Oh.

Mommy: No.

Child: And Malik was 12 years old too?

Mommy: No, he's older than me.

Child: How old was he?

Mommy: He's 14. He was 14. I was 12.

Child: Oh.

Mommy: He was still young though.

Child: Yeah, so 12 is like what, seventh grade, sixth grade, seventh grade and then?

Mommy: Yes, seventh.

Child: And then 14 is like what, ninth, eighth or ninth?

Mommy: Ninth, he was in ninth.

Child: So, y'all are really young.

Mommy: Yeah. And ... at first we weren't together either. We're just friends. I didn't like him, I thought he was ugly.

Child: What shifted?

Mommy: Just because of the chaos. Just being, kind of thrown in together. And then we bonded a lot, we talked a lot. Like, he used to tell me a lot of stuff that's going on with him, so we just bonded like that, we would talk a lot and then it, just developed. Like we were all friends, me, Malik, and Theo. We were all friends.

Child: Did he have any opinions when you got together with Theo?

Mommy: Absolutely, yes. Look, I was closer to Theo first. Not like that, like we were friends and I got locked up well, not locked, but they put me away. And at that time me and Malik was... I don't know what you would call it - dating, whatever, going out, and he was sleeping with every, every woman that had a pulse that would give him a chance. So, I get out and Theo tells me what was going on. What he was doing. So me and him had a plan to run away-- as kids. To go live with his family down south. And that's how me and him [wound]up-- that happened between me and him. And then I got pregnant and then Malik had got locked up -- not for school stuff. He got

locked up over some robberies. Some dumb shit he did. And then I got pregnant. Then we broke up and we weren't together. And then, when he got back, you know, I just had your eldest brother.

Child: You had plans with Theo to run off?

“I’ve got family down south ya know,” Theo confessed. It was that type of night. It was a cognac type of night. A rowdy, never ending type of night. A romping and roaring and roaring and romping type of night. A kids-mimicking-the-adults–sad-as-they-are type of night. The four would get something adjacent to the alcohol they craved and then drink and smoke and carry on. The four would bellow sweet nothings into the ether. The four would weep and weep about pop culture, indulging themselves in desserts of the world instead of reckoning with the reasons for their intense hunger. Lack of a home. After hours and hours of gluttonous love, adoration, and violence came a silent candor.

“Yeah. We can just go. We can pick up our things and start over.”

The night softened these boys. Daylight brought performances of brawn cherry picked from popular culture (your Biggies, Tupacs, or Ice-cubes) and other men-children in their lives. This was done in an effort to garner an adoration that crystallized more so as fear than love. Outside looking in, these boys’ relationships appeared schizophrenic. They didn’t truly know who each other was and so they were fearful of their own selves. Inside, looking around these boys knew the person who sat beside them could be the thing standing between life and death.

Their love for each other needed to be strong and displays of love for each other needed to be affirmed daily. Gangs of boys followed this vision. A vision predicated on power. Their word-of-mouth, bubble-gum, quick-lipped, world doctrine declared power as involving street respect. Street respect is predicated on acts of service ranging from secret handshakes to grand displays of violence. Like a game they racked up points and climbed their way to deserving respect. Nights like this melted the rules away just a bit for Malik and Theo. They talked big. Imagined bigger. They talked of ending curses brought onto their families for reasons that predated them.

“ I’ve got a support system down there. If we get enough money for a bus ticket, we’re set.”

This night Mommy and Theo were left alone. Malik got locked up— put into a juvenile correctional facility. He was put away for being a pillager, for taking what was rightfully his, but what happened to also be someone else’s. He was a serial robber. He was good at it but even the best have their off days. Mommy and the boys had grown distant. After getting caught for running away and refusing to go back to living with Grandma, she was put into a foster home. Out of town. Thirty minutes felt like an eternity. Though they kept up on the phone, it wasn’t the same. Malik needed physicality. Mommy couldn’t provide him that on demand and so he found girls who could. Behind Mommy’s back, Malik slept with any girl with a pulse. Theo stood by idly, thinking of another. His head was elsewhere.

Theo couldn't provide Auntie the effects of a grown man's attention— all piquant and clammy. For her, Theo could provide fun. He was someone you called for a good time. If you wanted your ribs to be bruised from laughing, your throat to be sore from coughing, and drinking, and smoking, and screaming, you called Theo. He understood that now is the time to explore the world. How could you take what you want if you haven't truly experienced it? He was sincere in his love for Auntie and he was loyal like a dog, but young. As was Auntie.

Auntie found herself prisoner under a spell. This spell sunk its teeth deep in her and drew blood. That blood was an oath for which she vowed to forever be of service. It was with a man. A grown man who had a wife. A grown man who had a family. Who sought her out, who made her feel special, but whose plan reduced Auntie to just a cog. She could've been replaced with any other brown lipped, lollipop-licking child. This made her feel: seen, heard, confused, flushed, touched. Or Auntie was taken prisoner. Her light was preyed upon by a man. A grown man, with a wife. A grown man who made her scared to speak out. To talk against him and fight for herself.

“Forget about everyone else.”

Theo. Mommy. The two were beaten down. Their hearts spun from the liquor. Their stomachs churned from their loves' neglect. But more importantly, their heads were smashed in and they were picking up the mush that used to be their reason, logic, and wisdom. They lost their minds. They searched the depths of each other to find it again. They yearned to know why

they weren't enough for their first loves. Their search within slowly became looking outward. Looking up they caught each other's eyes. They saw each other's souls. They began to think the answers to their problems lay buried deep within one another. Theo looked good. Mommy looked even better. Something about the tears swelling up their eyes leaving streaks of ash was pulchritudinous. Theo wanted to devour Mommy. Mommy wanted to be enveloped in Theo; so Mommy took what she wanted. What she deserved. What was rightfully hers. She wanted Theo badly. She couldn't understand this desire because her want for this boy was met with an equal wave of disinterest. She loved Theo, but she didn't like him. The liquor in her system numbed her disinterest just enough to kiss him. His body was hers and her body remained her own. Her stomach slowly churned like plaster mixing, getting thicker, solidifying in time. They shared each other. His fluids combined with hers. They exchanged saliva and became each other. They kept mixing and mixing, making (and becoming) a third thing. A child.

Mommy: Yeah, it were stupid because, see, he had just got hurt by Auntie. We were just kids like -- he got hurt by Auntie and all that. And. You know, I found out what Malik was doing. So we had plans to leave. And... that just never happened. It was just some weak dream. Well, I think he really believed it. But we didn't have the money....

Child: That would have been such a different life.

Mommy: Yeah, he was. We weren't-- yes, we were kind of like. Yeah, we weren't together, though, like we were. I mean, you had. Yes, we did have that-- share that moment. We were vulnerable

because we were both crying we're-- you know, these are two people that we loved you know. Back then everything was like you eat, sleep, that person. So everything feels like your whole world is just down, like you're never going to find somebody else. It's just over with. Everything is so dramatic. It's super intense. And stuff. And then Malik is my first. So even that whole tie there. And then, you know, I live with him, he was there when my mom was-- so it was like everything felt so devastating. And he [Theo] got devastated by Auntie and the whole [...] stuff. So we were two hurting people just happened to just make a dumbass mistake. Thinking that we were broken people instead of healing from what we were going through, thinking that we were gonna just, you know. Yeah. We wanted to leave. We wanted to leave. We got tired. We wanted to leave. ... Obviously that never happened.

Child: Yeah. How long did y'all imagine this life?

Mommy: Oh, time? I don't know, like, length of time-wise? When reality kicked in, is when I got placed far away. To Schenectady. And we didn't have like, we couldn't talk a lot. We talked a lot on the phone and stuff, but. But, you know. [...] But, you know, he hooked up with [...] and then [...] started having kids with [...]. He just started being. He just wilded out. He wasn't always like that, though. But, you know, but. He went down that path and then he started, you know, using drugs, you know, he's. He got caught up in all that. But yeah we talked about it a lot. To fill lights in us. The reality is that's not going to happen, yeah.

Child: Right.

Mommy: Yeah.

Child: Yeah, that makes sense. Mm.

Mommy: Yeah, and then, um.. My foster mom and dad, um. I was there for a while, but I wasn't really there for a while when I do the math. But it seems like a long time.

Child: It was three years or two years?

Mommy: 12 to 15, yeah. Three years.

Child: That's a long time. You know, what's so weird, I went away for 12 to 15.

Mommy: Three. Yeah. Isn't that weird? Yeah.

Child: But I went--

Mommy: There's something about that twelve.

Child: A lot of and I mean, in the grand scheme of things, it doesn't seem like a long time, but those are so--

Mommy: And a lot can happen in three years. It seems like eternity, though.

Child: Mm hmm. Because--

Mommy: When you look at it without-- you just talk about the days and the hours and the minutes, and the moments. It doesn't seem like a long time. But when you are in the thick of it-- it is a long time.

Child: It seems like there's no end.

Mommy: Right.

Child: You get into whatever routine, and it seems like that's just going to be it.

Mommy: So. Like you, you definitely had up from 12 to 15 years with a lot-- I can't even begin to imagine how you felt, but the foster home wasn't bad for me though. It was just that I was away from my family. Well, I guess it's just a rejection of my mom not fighting for me. That's how I feel, my twelve to fifteen. It probably can't even touch your twelve to fifteen. It probably can't even touch your 12 to 15. I mean, I could be wrong, though.

Child: Well it seems like we have some common themes.

Mommy: Yeah.

Child: I mean, I liked the foster home more than I liked Dad's House.

Mommy: Me, too, I loved the foster home more than I liked Malik's mother's house and--. She was a good grandmother though, I wish she would've stayed around.

Mommy: Yeah. And then when being in the foster home, I felt totally safe. You know, I just feel like any of it was gonna happen. Not the fear of getting caught. You know, I have to go back home or that, but I did feel hurt, devastated, like so rejected. -- There were times there were scheduled visits and they even made provisions for her to be there, right? You know, whatever excuse she gave she just wouldn't show up. So that part hurt. And then when I ran away from the foster home when I had your eldest brother and they was telling me I couldn't-- you know that whole thing with signing him over. I was such a dumb kid. I wish I would've known what I know now, but... Talking about when I ran away with him. Because the foster home shut down, which was my safety because they didn't have-- It was in Yates Village-- they didn't have a two-way fire escape. So they put me in a foster home in Albany. And I ran away with your eldest brother to Malik's house. And they wouldn't let me go home because Mommy wasn't fit for me and my son to be there. Hmm. Oh, Mommy... Mommy had a lot of-- you know, Grandma couldn't read or write, right?

Child: I think I vaguely knew that.

Mommy: You know, she couldn't read or write. So my mother had a lot of issues, but because she was the one with the, you know, kind of what they would call her ugly because she had like thick glasses and oh, so she had like a lot of hurt and stuff. But regardless of whatever. I know my mother is my mother and I still rock with my mother. If my mother was alive I would still rock with my mother. Because even at the end, you know, regardless of what me and her went through, that's still my mother. I mean, not that I dismiss that's what she did, but I know she's just a hurting person.

Child: Yeah.

Mommy: But she's still my mother, and yeah, she's still my mother. I think she-- because I ran away-- [inaudible]. This is me guessing with me and I if was the mom and that--and she was my daughter. I think with her it's. I never----- I mean, I probably was just a wild teen. She didn't know how to handle it. So I mean, I pretty much had it in her house. Auntie and Aunt A did what they were told. I didn't lay down. I fought. I fought out of there. Auntie and Aunt A did it differently. And then my mouth.

Child: How did Grandma navigate if she couldn't read or write?

Mommy: Auntie. I don't know what she did when the early ages. Auntie was always smart with reading and picking up reading and writing. I know when Auntie got like-- she always read, Auntie was smart, nice, very smart and book smarts, she's got that. So when she was getting up and older, Auntie will fill out the application. Auntie will do everything for mommy. Auntie was Mommy's right hand. Auntie would do everything for mommy. So, Auntie was Mommy's right hand.

Grandma

The Auntie that stands before us today isn't my auntie. She is my grandmother and great-grandmother reincarnated—in looks. *Only in looks*. Tall, slender, thick rim glasses. Protruding eyes framing a narrow nose bridge flowering out to pronounced nostrils. A wide and flat smile falls underneath this nose and high rounded cheekbones. Beautiful, but with age, fragile, small. As she ages, she sheds the weight of her youth. The materials of the world seem to be ridding themselves of her. One could say she's ridding herself of it, but she adorns herself with large jewelry pieces and lavish wigs. She likes to look good. This newfound weight— or lack thereof— permits her to play with her looks. While her thinning frame often makes these adornments drown her, she still manages to pull it off— she is met with nothing but flowers.

Auntie owns a horse. It is so high that you'll only see the silhouette of her nostrils condemning you where you stand. Surrounding you are this horse's thighs— thick and defined. It's been built up and nourished. You could've never guessed this foal came premature and was met with degradation. Upon birth she was told to lead the pack— instead of receiving the tenderness and care she needed.

Auntie makes it her mission to be the wisest in the room. If there's an issue she has the solution. Problems she can't solve are problems unsolvable to the rest of the world. There's always a lesson to be learned. An old wives tale to be taught. You go to her when you want to

maintain the illusion of universal morality. She packages that world-view neatly in her every breath.

Auntie is slick. Adaptable. Proving her wrong leaves you the fool. She is quick to leave anything that no longer serves her; but she is so good at using words to turn things in her favor that this rarely occurs in fact.

When Auntie is hurt, she makes it everyone's mission to console her. She'll go down her call list— "breaking the news" so folks will mirror her level of outrage. Though she is the anchor-woman on each call, her words always shock her to ungodly levels.

Auntie has worked hard to enjoy the pleasures of life. She must. She's seen this family's divide from those who have, and those who don't. She clings onto physical objects as though they are her breath of life, not realizing the air it is stealing from her.

Auntie: So my grandfather didn't have much education, but he worked for construction. It's the same path that Great Uncle H took, but Great Uncle M, he was the first one to graduate from college. He went to Ithaca College and he had his bachelors. So they used to make fun of him a lot. That was the one thing like in this family that if you talked a certain way, you were always considered white. We had the haves and the have nots, and unfortunately, my mother was on the side of the have nots, so she was treated a little differently. One reason why education is important to me personally— because my mother was said to be in special education, and so she wasn't able to finish high school because she had some learning disabilities and things. But it was good to know that her daughter, you know, could, you know, finish, finish well and then bring up the next generation, which is you guys to have college degrees and things. So you guys

really come from her– the fact that she had a learning disability. You know, they didn't think much of her. But this– the lineage that we come through says that we can't and we do. So that's the one thing I kind of smile about that. I know that she was proud of that.

Child: How do you differentiate between the haves and have nots? What is it? What is it like material things?

Auntie: It was definitely material things. It was, you know, they were married. You know, she wasn't. Lifestyle. You know, she couldn't drive. They could. And it wasn't just her. It was Great Aunt J, Great Uncle P, Great Aunt C. You know, they had low wage paying jobs. They worked for the state. You know, they seemingly, and I say, seemingly had a better life, but then when you pull back the sheet, you realize that no, no, that's not the case at all.

Child: So what do you mean work for the state?

Auntie: Work for the state of New York. So back then, working for the state of New York was like the biggest thing when you got into work for the state. So even if you was the secretary at the state, that was better per se. You might want to check your pizza– [the pizza is burnt] [...]

Child: OK, wait, you didn't finish.

Auntie: So working for the state means when you get a state, when you have a state job, you work for the state of New York. So that means you could be working in anything. General services all those different office buildings, you could be working like even picking up the garbage and still working for the state of New York because it's part of the state 's general services. You could be working in different schools and SUNY - anything that's still a part of the state of New York. So when you work for the state, I mean, you get better benefits and things like that versus working for not-for-profit or for a private conglomeration. So when you've got into the state, you were supposedly set because you had job security and things like that. So because of that, you know, they had some things in common like Great Aunt R, Great Aunt C, Great Aunt S, Great Uncle H was a little different because he worked for construction, but he kind of teetered in both worlds because, you know, the have nots was pretty live. They didn't give a shit. Versus the haves, they were like considered trying to act white. And oh, we went on vacation and we did this and we did that and we went shopping every week and blah blah blah versus the have nots. It's like we got our check and food stamps and we were ready to set it off up here. So, yeah,

Child: So it was like so acting white, acting white is what? Like participating—

Auntie: Acting white is being able to put together a noun and pronoun within a sentence and being able to maneuver through different conversations, maneuver through different rooms. So, you know, when you go to school, you speak one way when you're around your family, you speak an entirely different way. And if they've ever heard you in your school setting that your tone changes, your vocabulary may become bigger. You know things of that nature, they'll start

saying, Yeah, they make fun of you. Instead of saying, "Ain't nobody going to do nothing over there?" You don't go into a school setting and say something like that. You don't go to a work setting and speak that way.

Child: So, OK, so you can list out who the haves and have nots are for the older generation, but do you think that that continues through this generation?

Auntie: Absolutely. Absolutely. I know I have some cousins that are very snobbish, and they wouldn't dare condescend to go certain places because they feel it's beneath them so that that attitude absolutely is not only within this family, it's through –the through– the community as a whole. They just don't condescend to do certain things. I know that I do not-- [Interrupted by a phone call] [...]

Child: What do you feel like she [Grandma] passed down?

Auntie: I feel like she passed down tenacity and strength because it must be. It had to be very hard to raise kids and you are functionally illiterate. It must have been scary for her to have to hide that even though I knew it. I've been signing out DSS forms, all kinds of stuff ever since I was like eight years old. You know, trying to fit in in a world that didn't think that you were beautiful. You know, trying to do the best that you can do with very limited skills. But she was able to do, you know, the best that she could? I've learned more about her since she's been gone

than when she was alive. So. And when you know how to do better, you should do better. When you know better, do better. You know...

I don't see [my mother] through a child's eye. I see her as an adult, as a person first and then as a woman and then having this awesome responsibility to be a mother. See, we look at our parents first as these godlike figures like they're going to figure it out, not realizing that they were children. They were people. They had dreams and aspirations and all that. And when you strip that away, the title of mother–parent–this woman... who is that person? Well, they're a person. They bleed just like you. They had dreams and thoughts and all that, just like you. You know, I challenge everybody, you know, take your mother or father off of that godlike pedestal because you'll find that they're a person just like you, that with thoughts and dreams and all of that. That's why I know her better now. You know, and when you see that your dream is deferred or it's just not going to come to fruition, how that must feel. How stripped you must feel, how disappointing and depressing that must be. You know. But she went from being on social service to being a dietary aide up at Teresian House and learning how to read. That was just people may think, you know, that's nothing, but that was everything to her, for her to be able to confess that to me, even though I've known it for years.

Grandma enjoyed the pleasures of life. Grandma loved to party. Smoke, drink, dance, smoke, stay up late, watch scary movies, scream and holler, drink, host cookouts, host Thanksgiving, go to church, carry-on.

Grandma worked. She got up every morning no matter what occurred the night before and got to work. She bathed the elderly. She fed the ill. She wiped the bottoms of the disabled.

She dressed them. She made sure they took their medications. She cleaned after them. She did what she had to do to get the money she needed. Then she would drink the money away.

Budgeting was overwhelming. Living was overwhelming. Who could she turn to in her time of need? She was inept. God didn't bless her with the skills of her siblings and so she had to make do.

Child: What did Grandma do for a living?

Mommy: Remember, she worked at-- she did housekeeping. And then she was-- remember before she got-- she was a resident assistant at Teresian House.

Child: She was an R.N.?

Mommy: A resident assistant,

Child: Oh, Oh, a resident assistant. What is that?

Mommy: That details feeding, transport and patient, you know, elderly feeding, setting up dining, buss down, cleaning the dining room, you know, assistant transported to the residence to different areas, preparing food, feeding some--like that.

Child: When was Grandma born?

Mommy: My mother was born in 1954. I know you asked that question about my grandmother.

My mother was born in 1954. Yeah, yeah.

Child: My great grandmother was born in 1920. Something, right? 1929. Yeah. And then Grandma was born in 1954.

Mommy: 1954, yeah.

Child: And she didn't learn how to read and write. Was there a reason?

Mommy: I don't, I don't know the reason she just never did. I don't know how she passed. She can't read or write nothing but her name.

Child: Wow, that's so interesting.

Mommy: And when we were working in Teresian House and she had to do in-service because that's how you keep up the thing. For me, I had to sit by her and take the test with her. To show her the answers.

Child: Oh.

Mommy: She was crying, I remember how embarrassed she was. She's so scared that they are going to find out that she couldn't read. Um. And I said, "Ma, Mommy, I'm just going, I'm going to request my in-service the time you request your in-service and just come downstairs and I'll do it with you". Hmm. Well, she was smart, though it's weird because she was still smart, like. Right. And she was skilled in different ways. Which is just like the slaves probably. I hate to say it but they didn't know how to read or write.

Manny: Did Great-Grandma know how to read and write?

Mommy: Yeah.

Child: Oh, maybe she had a learning disability.

Mommy: She did. I don't- yeah. I don't think they called it an IEP [Individualized Education Program] back then-- I don't know how she made it through, but I just don't know.

Child: Hmm.

Mommy: She was secretive, though. Mommy. Everything they do, they kept in the closet. They don't talk about anything. [long pause] I don't know. I guess I probably need to go out and talk to Auntie about like the in-depths of Mommy. Because mMommy and Auntie was really close. I think I was too much in survival mode, and self-absorbed to care about why, about why she

couldn't read or write. When I was younger. I was ready to get up out of there. Whether you can read or write, that's not my problem. I'm ready to get out of here. I know that sounds horrible, but I-- Auntie was invested more that way.

[...] Yeah. She works. She's always worked though. I know we were poor-- but Mommy, never stayed home. I know that. Whether she was working in some type of motel, cleaning or something, she's always worked. And she's never stayed with the guys that were decent guys.

How humbling is it to rely on your daughters to make material advances in the world. How humbling is it to birth a child and witness her making her first instinctual connection that she can walk on her hind legs. To see her push her body upright in an attempt to stand and fall backwards instead. To be there to catch her head before it hit the hardwood floors and caress her soft crown. To hold her crown in the palm of your hands. To nourish her bald spot due to friction with delicate oils of various plants making sure it doesn't persist; keeping her kitchen nice and soft. To show her the world through your ethical codes. To see her off on her first day of school, and worry about her. To witness her growth in primary school reading, writing and arithmetic. To open mail addressed to you and have her read it; her small fingers underneath each word sounding it out as she went. Knowing that child is more learned than you feel you'll ever be. How humbling is it to have your daughter read out job applications to you so you can feed her the responses. You always got the job so not only does she possess an adult grasp on grammar but her calligraphy is impeccable. How humbling is it to rely on the child you brought into this world.

How dare she be so good? How dare she be able to take up the task you brought to her— a task you can never carry alone. Okay, if she wants to be an adult, then you'll treat her like one. She better be able to look after her younger siblings since she is so astute. She better be able to cook and clean while you're away at the job she helped you get. If she got something wrong— well that can't be, she's brilliant that's just not in the cards. She cannot get anything wrong; you won't allow it. She's-a-bright-little-one-isn't-she? She's-gonna-go-far-isn't-she? She's-top-of-her-class! She-looks-after-the-young-ones! She's-got-a-good-head-on-her-shoulders! How-you-love-her-so. How-you-need-her-so. How-you-need-her-so.

Auntie: ... Yeah, I remember we were on Sheridan Avenue when she said she wanted to talk to me about something. And she's like, "You know, I don't read that well." ...Ok. She wanted to get this promotion at work, and she confessed it to them. That she couldn't read that well. And so she started going— they had a program up at Teresian House that she started going to-- to learn how to read. Imagine that. You're over 40 years old telling your adult daughter that you can't read. That's humbling. But that showed me-- that took so much strength to do that. You know, for me to understand the importance of education and— [she asks herself] why is this so important to me? Why when people say, "Why do you do this?" That's why. Because I know what it looks like when you don't. And why she made fun of me, but then secretly needed me. Hmm. She'll make fun of you. Yeah. "Well, you talking all that white people talk." Don't worry, you would get it too, because she would just be-- "You talking like those white people— this and that and the other". Yeah. But then when something came in the mail or something, you know, whatever she called

me, come and read it and understand. She finally told me that she was – she was proud of me, and she thanks me. It was the last conversation I had with her. Then she was gone. I didn't think I would ever hear those words from her. Because I didn't think that she was proud of me, she never said so.

Grandma embarked on her usual ten to fifteen hour shift. Her eyes were rubbed raw from trying to focus on the tasks at hand. Her coke-bottle glasses weren't cringing up the edges of the world. She had one goal: feeding her residents. It was dinnertime. Or perhaps it was lunchtime. Or maybe it was snack time. She scooped up mashed potatoes. Or she cut the crusts off sandwiches. Or she broke up graham crackers. She then cut up the turkey. Or she grabbed a handful of pretzels. Or she opened the pudding cups. She then scooped the green beans. Or she cut up the fruit. Or she handed out the eating utensils. But upon opening the carton of milk or a carton of juice or pouring a glass of water, her arm became a sandbag and her hand a sledgehammer falling in halftime to her side– spilling juice, milk, water all over herself. Half of her body sank. She couldn't pick herself up.

Mommy sat all seven of her children down that night.

“Grandma had a stroke. She's in the hospital but soon she'll be at Teresian House. They're taking her leg.”

Afterword

Accompanying this written work is an installation titled *She is Clothed with Strength and Dignity; She Can Laugh at the Days to Come!* I used this exhibition as a space to visually engage the written work I am pursuing here. Through text and art, I have imagined my family and myself within my family. While I have referenced social constructs and categories including motherhood, masculinity, childhood, race, and religion, I have tried to reach beyond the simplified and overly flattened bounds in which these notions are often explored. I rooted my visual work in the research conducted for writing *A Biomythography of Mommy*. From this, I employed different visual modes of examining, constructing, and recording oral history. Similar to this writing process, I added imaginative elements to real stories. I created a visual vocabulary utilizing play and imagination to produce alternative histories—critical confabulations of sorts. Simultaneously, I borrowed from art historical references of dinner scenes including Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* and Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. This was only the starting point as I am heavily inspired by a number of Black visual artists including but not limited to Glenn Ligon, Clifford Prince King, Lorna Simpson, and Carrie Mae Weems.

Conversations with my mother not included in *A Biomythography of Mommy* played throughout the space. In this, her accounts range from her relationship with Malik and Theo, their queerness, to the reason for her running away. Interjected between this audio were a compilation of commercials from the 1970s and 80s America. My mother's voice grounds the more imaginative visuals. I embarked on large monoprints, wax paper molds, furniture making,

drawing, painting, audio and lightwork– all in an effort to curate an experience that engaged all senses.

Ultimately, I have started an unconventional familial archive with both these projects. This is only the beginning of me archiving and expanding upon my family's oral, written, and visual histories. I have a number of recorded conversations with Mommy and Auntie that went untouched in this project. Even with the amount of transcripts I include in this work, there are large portions of the interview that could not adequately be addressed in this project. Nevertheless, the transcripts are a fertile ground for the oral histories I am mining. Because of this, I urge the reader to look through the transcripts in the appendices.

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Appendix A.

This is among one of the first interviews I conducted with my mother. In this she details the years leading up to having her first child. This is the first time my mother ever detailed her experience of sexual assault as a child to me. Omissions in this text are due to a number of reasons that come from various conversations I had with Mommy. The names in this follow the same rules as before. Everyone related to me has been renamed to their relation to me. When my mother says phrases such as Mommy, my mother, my grandma she is referring to relatives in relation to herself.

...

Child: How was your childhood?

Mommy: And I would say I would say some part, I don't feel like, I mean, I had somewhat of a childhood. I would say quite truthfully and truthfully, but I feel like I had kids young, so a lot of my teenage years-- You know cuz I had babies young. I did have somewhat of a childhood.
[inaudible].

Child: I yeah. Well, I wasn't saying that. No, what were you saying?

Mommy: Unstable at some moments. Um, was in the foster home for, you know, some point. Which felt like forever, but it really wasn't when I really do the math. Rejected by my mother because she didn't really fight to get me out.

Child: Have you? Have you ever talked to her about that, though? When she was alive, did you ever talk to her about like. Did you ever had that opportunity?

Mommy: No, I had the opportunity to talk to her about rape three times, and each time she actually she didn't know-- was without understanding. I didn't talk to her about that part because we couldn't get past that one part.

[...]

Child: [...] Did we ever own property like did like grandma or or your grandma like own property or your grandfather owned property? Did they own their house or did they rent it?

Mommy: No, they owned their house. They owned their house but I'm not sure any other property besides that,

Child: What happened to it?

Mommy: I'm really not sure. I know Great Aunt S was like-- My grandmom passed away. She was in charge of all that.

Child: And it's no longer in the family?

Mommy: No, I don't, I can't even – I could just guess, but I wouldn't be accurate because I don't really know facts.

Child: Well.

Mommy: And remember, with that part of it, Auntie will have to--I wasn't there for that chunk.

Child: Hmm.

Child: So what did your grandma say when you were in the foster home, was she still alive then?

Mommy: Yes she was. I am not sure what she said. I wasn't close to my grandmother, I was close to my grandfather.

Child: Oh, do you know if he had an opinion on it?

Mommy: He was dead by the time I was in the foster home--.

Child: Oh.

Mommy: And if he was alive, I don't think I would have been.

Child: Oh.

Mommy: Not that I-- I love my grandmother. But we just-- it was. We weren't close and there was any ill will or anything. I was just closer to my grandfather.

Child: [00:08:09] Yeah, you said--.

Mommy: [00:08:12] I do remember times when I was older and I had your eldest brother and I would go to my grandmother's house and my grandfather was alive and she would just try to keep you there because she was lonely and she would have you sit at the table and you just couldn't, you know, go visit grandma without sitting there, you know, and conversatin' with her. But her house was like my house. Always open. Anybody could anytime if you wanted to go to a house, you could.

Child: [00:08:54] Did you ever think like, oh, I might just go to grandma's house when you were in the foster home or did you like would you rather have been in the foster?

Mommy: [00:09:05] I would rather be with my grandmother. But there was legal stuff that my grandmother would have had to go to court and do that.

Child: [00:09:17] Oh,

Mommy: [00:09:18] I'm not sure what was her, why she didn't, because I'm not her. Well, they removed me from my mother. And my mother didn't really fight or anything? So they kind of got her classified as –like– not fit to take care of me.

Child: [00:09:48] But she still had custody of Auntie and Aunt A.

Mommy: [00:09:52] Yeah.

Child: [00:09:56] Oh, how does that work? I thought that they I thought that they can only take-- if they take one, they have to take them all.

Mommy: [00:10:03] No, I ran away from home because, you know, I ran away from home and I refused to go to school and I refused to go home. So what made me get in the system– because I just– every time they will try to bring me back I would run and was always-- kept doing it, kept doing. And then one time in court-- I ran out of court. Because they were trying to, you know,

make me go back home. So that's why. So why is this "why", you know, "why is she not wanting to stay home?" Type of deal. That's how I got caught up in a system like that.

Child: [00:10:45] Oh. And then?

Mommy: [00:10:50] I never wanted to-- I just kept running away. I would say-- I would just say what they wanted me to say in court and I probably would be good for a couple of days, but then I'll run away again and be gone for --like-- weeks and months.

Child: [00:11:06] Wow. How old were you at this time?

Mommy: [00:11:10] Pre-, 12, 12, 13. Preteen yeah-- I never wanted to stay home.

Child: [00:11:23] Hmm. How would you? Where would you run to?

Mommy: [00:11:31] To Malik's house. And he would hide me. Then from Malik's house I would run to Grannie's house-- which is Theo's grandmother. Just back and forth to their houses, sometimes, Sarah, which is Malik's sister. So I'll be in between all three houses. Well, one area got hot with the cops, I would go to the other house.

Child: [00:12:13] At 12 years old.

Mommy: [00:12:15] Yeah. Preteen. Yup. I can't even imagine. Twelve years old is when I went over to Dad's house. What if I was hopping from house to house?

Mommy: [00:12:32] Yeah, you guys-- none of y'all wasn't nothing like I was. Even your eldest brother he wasn't.

Child: [00:12:40] Well, yeah, well, I mean, it seemed like you were doing it to survive.

Mommy: [00:12:47] Yeah, well, again, I mean, every time you turn around, somebody touching on me. Yeah, whatever that demon was would jump from one-- like get out of here.

[...]

Mommy: [...] I'm still playing with dolls.

Child: [00:13:21] Yeah, you're a little kid. Yeah.

Mommy: [00:13:45] And then I found safety, safety, ya know, safety with [...]. Not my sister, that's Malik's Mom. For a while, cuz then she was buying me clothes, you know, fixed my room up, it felt like safe, although that was just as chaotic as them--theirs, but it just nobody was touching me. I didn't want that. That to happen. You know what I mean?

Child: [00:14:11] Yeah.

Mommy: [00:14:12] So I stayed there. And, you know, so they caught me and I got, you know. They locked me up I ran out the one time--

Child: [00:14:23] So did —so grandma called the cops, but she didn't want to fight for custody?

Mommy: [00:14:31] No Grandma didn't call the cops. I didn't go to school.

Child: [00:14:34] Oh. Was Malik going to school?

Mommy: [00:14:50] Yeah.

Child: [00:14:54] What would happen if? Why do you why didn't you want to go to school?

Mommy: [00:15:01] I didn't go to school because I just didn't want to go to school because I think back then my thought was that they were going to make me go home.

Child: [00:15:13] Wow.

Mommy: [00:15:17] And that wasn't-- I didn't want to go home. I never told my mother that-- why I kind of I never told even in all that. I never told that. You know because I didn't want her

to get her in trouble. So it was as if I was the one running away and just being an unruly kid. I just didn't want to be home. Okay. And then one time I slept outside-- me and Malik slept outside. And then Mommy-- with her guys drinking and carrying on. We slept on this ledge-- on this ledge outside with blankets. Cuz when she got drunk and passed out that's when, you know... Not all of them, but some guys were just sick.

Child: [00:16:24] Did Malik know? Who did you-- you told no one? You only kept it to yourself?

Mommy: [00:16:32] Auntie knew. Yeah. I didn't tell them. Yeah.

Child: [00:16:36] Oh.

Mommy: [00:16:37] No.

Child: [00:16:43] And Malik was like 12 years old too?

Mommy: [00:16:47] No, he's older than me.

Child: [00:16:52] How old was he?

Mommy: [00:16:54] He's 14. He was 14. I was 12.

Child: [00:16:57] Oh.

Mommy: [00:16:59] He was still young though.

Child: [00:17:04] Yeah, so 12 is like what, seventh grade, sixth grade, seventh grade and then.

Mommy: [00:17:10] Yes, seventh.

Child: [00:17:11] And then 14 is like what, ninth, eighth or ninth?

Mommy: [00:17:18] Ninth, he was in ninth.

Child: [00:17:22] So, y'all are really young.

Mommy: [00:17:25] Yeah. And we will— at first we weren't together either. We're just friends. I didn't like him, I thought he was ugly.

Child: [00:17:46] What shifted?

Mommy: [00:17:50] Just because of the chaos. Just being, kind of thrown in together. And then we bonded a lot, we talked a lot. Like, he used to tell me a lot of stuff that's going on with him,

so we just bond like that, we would talk a lot and then it just developed. Like we were all friends, me, Malik, and Theo. We were all friends.

Child: [00:18:34] Did he have any opinions when you got together with Theo?

Mommy: [00:18:41] Absolutely, yes. Look, I was closer to Theo first. Not like that, like we were friends and I got lock well, not lock, but they put me away. And at that time me and Malik was. I don't know what you would call it... dating whatever going out, and he was sleeping with every, every woman that had a plus that would give him a chance. So, I get out and Theo tells me what was going on. What he was doing. So me and him had a plan to run away-- as kids. To go live with his family down south. And that's how me and him wind up-- that happened between me and him. And then I got pregnant and then Ty had got locked up -- not for school stuff. He got locked up over some robberies. Some dumb shit he did. And then I got pregnant. Then we broke up and we weren't together. And then, when he got back, you know, I just had your eldest brother.

Child: [00:20:01] You had-- you had plans with Theo to run off?

Mommy: [00:20:05] No, he's my friend of.

Child: [00:20:09] No, I mean, you had plans with Theo to run?

Mommy: [00:20:13] Yeah, it were stupid because, see, I he had just got hurt byAuntie. We were just kids like -- he got hurt byAuntie and the whole thing with Jerry all that. And you know, I found out that-- what Malik was doing. So we had plans to leave. And. That just never happened. It was just some weak dream. Well, I think he really believed it. But we didn't have the money. So we weren't.

Child: [00:20:57] What would have happened that would have been such a different life?

Mommy: [00:21:03] Yeah, he was. We weren't yes, we were kind of like. Yeah, we weren't together, though, like we were. I mean, you had. Yes, we did have that-- share that moment. We were vulnerable because we were both crying we're-- you know, these are two people that are we loved, you know, back then when you first--. Back then everything is like you eat, sleep, that person. So everything feels like your whole world is just down, like there's never going to be, you're never going to find somebody else. It's just over with. Everything is so dramatic. It's super intense. And stuff. And then Malik is my first. So even that whole tie there. And then, you know, he was, you know, I live with him, he was there when my mom was-- so it was like everything felt so devastating. And he got devastated by Auntie [...] So we were two hurting people just happened to just make a dumbass mistake. Thinking that we were broken people instead of healing from what we were going through, thinking that we were were gonna just, you know. Yeah. We wanted to leave. We wanted to leave. We got tired. We wanted to leave.

Child: [00:22:42] Yeah,

Mommy: [00:22:42] It's so.

Child: [00:22:45] How long?

Mommy: [00:22:48] Obviously had never happened.

Child: [00:22:52] Yeah. How long did ya'll –like– imagine this life?

Mommy: [00:23:00] Oh, time? I don't know, like, length of time wise. When reality kicked in, is when I got placed far away. To Schenectady. And we didn't have like– we couldn't talk a lot. We talked a lot on the phone and stuff, but. But, you know. He definitely has. But, you know, he hooked up with Rita and then Theo started having kids with Rita. He just started being. He just wilded out. He wasn't always like that, though. But, you know, but. He went down that path and then he started, you know, using drugs, you know, he's. He got caught up in all that. But yeah we talked about it a lot. To fill lights in us. The reality is that's not going to happen, yeah.

Child: [00:24:06] Yeah. And when you –when you– got placed in Schenectady, you were still 12 right?

Child: [00:24:16] Yeah. Hmm. Year-- 12 yeah.

Mommy: [00:24:25] And how old is Theo?

Mommy: [00:24:29] Uh. Same age as Auntie. So he's two years-- Him and Malik and Auntie are all the same age.

Child: [00:24:38] Oh. Oh.

Mommy: [00:24:46] I believe they were the same age, yes.

Mommy: [00:24:51] But you got oh, OK, but you got pregnant, you didn't get pregnant until later, though you didn't get pregnant until.

Child: [00:25:21] Oh, you're a 15 year old. Yeah, yeah, so you got pregnant when you were 15.

Mommy: Yeah.

Child: So that whole thing, like the whole like Malik going away and Auntie getting with somebody else was when you were 15?

Mommy: Right.

Child: Oh, OK.

Mommy: [00:25:25] But I was— I was gone and I would come-- I was gone. I'm skipping around because I'm mixing all the times together. Okay. Yeah. Well, I remember I got raped, I got put in a home. First, remember I told you that. So that's when Theo told me all what Malik was doing, I would go away.

Child: [00:25:52] Right.

Mommy: [00:25:54] Yeah.

Child: [00:25:55] Yeah, that makes sense. Mm.

Mommy: [00:26:15] Yeah, and then, um.. My foster mom and dad Um. I was there for a while, but I wasn't really there for a while when I do the math. But it seems like a long time.

Child: [00:26:31] It was three years or two years?

Mommy: [00:26:37] 12 to 15, yeah. Three years.

Child: [00:26:42] That's a long time. You know, what's so weird, I went away for 12 to 15.

Mommy: [00:26:53] Three. Yeah. Isn't that weird? Yeah.

Child: [00:26:59] But I went--

Mommy: [00:27:00] There's something about that twelve.

Child: [00:27:03] A lot of and I mean, in the grand scheme of things, it doesn't seem like a long time, but those are so--

Mommy: [00:27:13] And a lot can happen in three years. It seems like eternity, though.

Child: [00:27:15] Mm hmm. Because--

Mommy: [00:27:18] When you look at it without-- you just talk about the days and the hours and the minutes, and the moments. It doesn't seem like a long time. But when you are in the thick of it it is a long time.

Child: [00:27:31] It seems like there's no end.

Mommy: [00:27:34] Right.

Child: [00:27:35] You get into whatever routine, and it seems like that's just going to be it.

Mommy: [00:27:41] So. Last year, you– you definitely had up from 12 to 15 years with a lot-- I can't even begin to imagine how you felt, but the foster home wasn't bad for me though. It was just... I was away from my family. Well, I guess it's just a rejection of my mom not fighting for me. That's how I feel, my twelve to fifteen. It probably can't even touch your twelve to fifteen. It probably can't even touch your 12 to 15. I mean, I could be wrong, though.

Child: [00:28:26] Well it seems like we have some common themes.

Mommy: [00:28:31] Yeah.

Child: [00:28:33] I mean, I like the foster home more than I liked Dad's House.

Mommy: [00:28:38] Me, too, I loved the foster home more than I liked Malik's mother's house and--. She was a good Grandmother though, I wish she would've stayed around.

Mommy: [00:28:52] What happened? She just died?

Mommy: [00:28:55] Yes, she died on my birthday. Had a heart attack and died on my birthday.

Child: [00:29:02] How old were you?

Mommy: [00:29:09] 30 ish. Oh, you guys were born, though.

Child: [00:29:14] Yeah, I was— I was like. Eight ish. I was like...

Child: [00:29:25] So she stuck around for a while, though.

Mommy: [00:29:28] Yes, she was a good grand-- I mean, out of grandmothers you--. Besides her-- the the only thing scary about her is we went to church. I told you she started hissing like a snake. But if you get past her hissing like a snake. [hearty laughter]. She was a good. [more laughter] She was a good--. She was a good woman. House. Food. [Laughter] You just gotta you know, get over her hissing like a snake. I'm only playing. I'm only playing. [inaudible] She was there with me when nobody else was. So, yeah,

Child: [00:30:33] Yeah,

Mommy: [00:30:35] Glenda would get mad at me cuz she was like "she ain't your fucking daughter. I'm your daughter."

Child: [00:30:56] What she used to say?

Mommy: [00:31:02] I don't remember. I think she kind of like. I don't remember. Because I didn't care to remember, to be honest, probably why I blocked it out my memory.

Child: [00:31:26] Do you ever sit back and think about how far you've come?

Mommy: [00:31:29] Meaning now? I guess-- I don't know how far I've come. I guess, because I'm not satisfied or where I want to be.

Child: [00:31:53] Yeah, but I mean, you can always self improve but always, but at the same time, like remember that you're coming from some difficult circumstances.

Mommy: [00:32:13] Yeah. I don't know, I I don't like-- I know that I went through that. And I know that it was a huge part of my life. In all that, even the running away and stuff I still had, I don't--. I always had some sort of. Almost like I feel like. An escape type of thing like I always felt like, okay, Malik's mother's house was my escape. Although it was always a conflict here. Yeah, I'm gonna get caught, I'm gonna get caught, I'm gonna get caught, but she was still like a safety for me. So I know that that emotion of feeling deathly scared that I'm going to get caught and I'll have to go back home and I have to go back home and have to go back home. So I was so scared about that. But even in the midst of the emotional toll of fear there would be-- and it wasn't bad because she kind of looked out for me. You Know. She looked out for me, Then I didn't, you know, I feel like I can at least go to bed without worrying about if my mother is gonna get drunk and whatever random guy she could have at the time gonna to come in there, and try to touch on me. So I didn't have that worry. So I rather deal with the fear of being caught. Of maybe having to deal with that then having to deal with the fear of what have I what am I going to look

forward to? You know when I laid my head down. That's why I burned the house down. I believe subconsciously I did it on purpose.

Child: [00:34:04] Look. You were on your Destiny's Child, you said, I'm a survivor.

Mommy: [00:34:17] Yeah. And then when being the foster home, I was totally felt safe. You know, I just feel like any of it was gonna happen. Not the fear of getting caught. You know, I have to go back home or that, but I did feel hurt, devastated, like so rejected that. She felt like she didn't like-- there were times there were scheduled visits and even made provisions for her to be there, right? You know, whatever excuse she gave they would, and she just wouldn't show up. So that part hurt. And then when I ran-- when the foster when I had your eldest brother and they was telling me I couldn't you know that whole thing with signing him over. I was such a dumb kid. I wish I would've known what I know now, but. Talk about when I ran away with him. Because the foster home shut down, which was my safety because they didn't have-- It was in Yates village-- they didn't have a two way fire escape. So they put me in a foster home in Albany. And I ran away with your eldest brother to Malik's house. And they wouldn't let me go home because mommy wasn't fit for me and my son to be there. Hmm. Oh, mommy. Mommy had a lot of mom, you know, grandma couldn't read or write, right?

Child: [00:36:35] I think I vaguely knew that.

Mommy: [00:36:39] You know, she couldn't read or write. So my mother had a lot of issues, but because she was the one with the, you know, kind of what they would call her ugly because she had like thick glasses and oh, so she had like a lot of hurt and stuff. But regardless of whatever. I know my mother is my mother and I still rock with my mother if my mother was alive I would still rock with my mother. Because even at the end, you know, regardless of what me and her went through that's still my mother. I mean, not that I dismiss that's what she did, but I know she's just a hurting person.

Child: [00:37:31] Yeah.

Mommy: [00:37:33] But she's still my mother, and yeah, she's still my mother. I think she-- because I ran away-- [inaudible]. This is me guessing with me and I if was the mom and that--and she was my daughter. I think with her it's. I never-- I mean. I probably was just a wild teen, she didn't know how to handle it. So I mean, I pretty much had it in her house. Auntie and Aunt A did what they were told. I didn't lay down. I fought. I fought out of there. Auntie and Aunt A did it differently. And then my mouth.

Child: [00:38:44] How-- how did grandma navigate if she couldn't read or write?

Mommy: [00:38:52] Auntie. I don't know what she did when the early ages. Auntie was always smart with reading and picking up reading and writing. I know when Auntie got like-- she always read, Auntie was smart, nice, very smart and Book smarts she's got that. So when she was

getting up and older. Auntie will fill out the application. Auntie will do everything for mommy. Auntie was mommy's right hand. Auntie would do everything for mommy. So, Auntie was mommy's right hand.

Child: [00:39:35] What did-- what did grandma do for a living?

Mommy: [00:39:40] Remember, she worked at she did housekeeping, and then she was-- rememberer before she got-- she was a resident assistant at Treason House.

Child: [00:39:54] She was an R.N.?

Mommy: [00:39:57] A resident assistant,

Child: [00:39:59] Oh, Oh, a resident assistant was is that?

Mommy: [00:40:05] That details feeding, transport and patient, you know, elderly feeding, setting up dining buss down, cleaning the dining room, you know, assistant transported to the residence to different areas, preparing food, feeding some like that.

Child: [00:40:32] When was grandma born?

Mommy: [00:40:40] My mother was born in 1954. I know you asked that question about my grandmother. My mother was born in 1954. Yeah, yeah.

Child: [00:40:51] My great grandmother was born in 1930. Something, right? Yeah. And then grandma was born in 1954,

Mommy: [00:41:01] 1954, yeah.

Child: [00:41:05] And she didn't learn how to read and write. Was there a reason?

Mommy: [00:41:11] I don't I don't know the reason she did just ever did. I know how she passed. She can't read or write nothing but her name.

Child: [00:41:34] Wow, that's so interesting.

Mommy: [00:41:37] And when we were working in a house and she had to do in service because that's how you keep up the thing. For me, I had to sit by her and take the test with her. To show her the answers.

Child: [00:41:57] Oh.

Mommy: [00:42:02] She was crying, I remember how embarrassed she was. She's so scared that they are going to find out that she couldn't read. Um. And I said "ma, mommy, I'm just going I'm going to request my in service the time, you request you're in service and just come downstairs and I'll do it with you". Hmm. Well, she was smart, though it's weird because she was still smart, like. Right. And she was skilled in different ways. Which is just like the slaves probably. I hate to say it but they didn't know how to read or write.

Child: [00:43:17] Did your great grandmother know how to read and write? I mean, did I mean, did my did your grandmother know how to read or write?

Mommy: [00:43:27] Yeah.

Child: [00:43:34] Oh, maybe she had a learning disability.

Mommy: [00:43:38] She did. I don't- yeah. I don't think they called it an IEP back then-- I don't know how she made it through, but I just don't know.

Child: [00:43:57] Hmm.

Mommy: [00:43:59] She was secretive, though. Mommy. Everything they do, they kept in the closet. They don't talk about anything. They really like-- I don't know. I guess I probably need to go out and talk to Auntie about like the in depths of mommy. Because mommy and Auntie was

really close. I think I was too much in survival mode, and self-absorbed to care about why about was she couldn't read or write. When I was younger. I was ready to get up out of there. Whether you can read or write, that's not my problem. I'm ready to get out of here. I know that sounds horrible, but I--Auntie was invested more that way.

Child: [00:45:32] Yeah. I mean, I don't blame it.

Mommy: [00:45:42] Yeah. She works. She's always worked though. I know we were poor-- but mommy never stayed home. I know that. Whether she was working in some type of motel, cleaning or something, she's always worked. And then her husband. And she's never stayed with the guys that were decent guys. Her husband-- Harris. When you trace his name back. He was a good guy.. Rashida's dad.

Child: [00:46:43] Well, she wasn't messing with it.

Mommy: [00:46:47] And then really with the rape and the molestation was [...].

Child: [00:47:06] Oh, yeah.

Mommy: [00:47:10] When she was-- he was flying up through there. Well, you know, back and forth type of deal, when she got drunk, that's when he-- the predator part came in. She has a couple of random, but he was the worst, though. He was the predator.

Child: [00:47:33] Is he still alive?

Mommy: [00:47:34] She was in a relationship. She was-- some of the guys. They were all right. Like, I love [...] was good. That's our other husband's name. He was a good guy. [...] was a good guy. [...] was a piece of shit. I don't know if you remember [...].

Child: [00:47:56] I remember [...] is the one that I remember.

Mommy: [00:48:00] Yeah, but he wasn't a predator, [...], in our lives when we were younger, too, but he wasn't a predator. He just was-- he was a piece of shit, but he wasn't predatorial, you know?

Child: [00:48:28] You know. Well, what I you like. I really hope this generation isn't. Like, we don't grow up and find out that there are predators.

Mommy: [00:48:47] I wish like it was. I mean, it doesn't I can do about what will happen to us. And I wish that I could have been more wiser because I would never want that to happen to anyone on my own. And I always try to encourage them. Because there's lots of ways I know they probably would never do it, but they could get justice in the area or get some type O. I even with knowing it now. I just pray that God will give you wisdom. A house is worth it because I would never want to be a dear. You know, I sort of, well, you know, Chris, a home that they feel

like they. No word hurt, and with the support of, yeah, you do have to be careful, though. There's no. I don't know what's happening in these proposals.

Child: [00:49:51] It's like, what do you do?

Mommy: [00:49:54] I don't know. I'm still answer that question is. And you just you hit some of the. You know, I guess you, you know, educate them with good touch, bad touch. And really, it all depends on the person by. All right. You know, it depends on your perception of what is always happening, but it depends on the culpability of the person. You know, I'm afraid I don't have that Typekit here. I think you should always be aware. And educate them as much as you can and pray that they feel comfortable to tell you. That was an older. So.

Child: [00:51:14] New York State got rid of the statute of limitations for rape and molestation.

Mommy: [00:51:19] That's what I was told. I always do. I keep giving them inbox and I give them like, I problem a lot because with my own job. She wasn't trying to kill rape, and there's often the services that are there to help. How you find answers. You know? And therefore, would you tell for that, you know?

Child: [00:51:57] She. How do you even like how do you know? Are there any signs in children?

[...]

Mommy: [00:53:13] And but this I don't know. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. It's subtle signs like something else. "Wait, that's not really their behavior". [...]

Mommy: [00:53:53] Because I don't know, I I think I somewhat pent up anger from being raped and then the girls being violated. I don't know what I'm capable of doing. Cause I got my girls underneath my nose and then somebody to touch upon my one of my grandkids, I don't know if I could take another one of that. I'll be honest, this is the truth, because I know this is trauma, but I'm suspicious of everybody. Not everybody, like I was suspicious of any like not everybody, but I'm awake when it comes to. Great. Different things. [...] Yeah, it's protective.

Mommy: I know that's terrible.

Child: No, it's actually that's an honest feeling because I mean, they say that majority of it happens with people that you know.

Mommy: Right.

Child: I don't know. That's heavy stuff.

Appendix B.

This is the second longest interview I have with Mommy. In this she details her side of what occurs during Grandma's funeral. She talks about her relationship to the church, religion, sexuality, and her relationship to her brother who recently passed. The omissions are primarily half phrases. However, omissions in this text are also due to a number of reasons that come from various conversations I had with Mommy. There is some strong language in this with the use of a slur against the LGBTQ+. The names follow the same rules as before.

...

Child: [00:00:07] I feel like.. Sundays... I don't really vibe sundays.

Mommy: [00:00:12] Why, because it's like a rest day?

Child: [00:00:14] Yeah, it's like I don't know something about the energy is always like so low.

Mommy: [00:00:19] Well, because it's the end of the week, that's the Bible. Even Jesus even got rested on this day. [laughs]

Child: [00:00:26] Why that look?

Mommy: [00:00:28] You don't know that God rested on the seventh day?

Child: [00:00:31] I never said that. I said, I just don't like how low the energy is. It makes me feel sad.

Mommy: [00:00:36] Oh, okay. I won't look like that. Sorry.

Child: [00:00:41] Yes. When did I ever say, Oh God, I don't know that God rested on this day?

Mommy: [00:00:50] Well, okay, I be pop popping on my Christian groups.

Child: [00:00:58] You're Christian. You'd be popping off on your Christian groups?

Mommy: [00:01:00] No. I'm Popping my Christian groups. I be getting like two hundred and fifty likes, but not the regular ones.

Child: [00:01:09] You get two hundred and fifty likes... What you say?

Mommy: [00:01:13] I always say a whole bunch of stuff.

Child: [00:01:19] You're Facebook famous?

Mommy: [00:01:21] No, I'm not. Facebook. Christian famous. Yes. Well, all the people that we don't know.

Child: [00:01:27] Yeah, it was

Mommy: [00:01:29] Right here. Well, that's 29 that I can't. I put: seriously all I got is Psalms: 91. God, I put all things in your hand. Of course, that's not the group that I should have showed you.[Laughs] All right. Wait, where's the one other ones? [looks through her phone to find other facebook groups] Of course, the people. I don't know. Oh no that's something else. The other group is that was 19.[Can't find it]. Ok, I don't know.

Child: [00:02:08] There was one, there was another, there's one that you were just like, you popped off?

Mommy: [00:02:13] Not pop off. I just said... like,

Child: [00:02:16] What did you say? You know?

Mommy: [00:02:22] I'm under a whole bunch of like something happens like what you guys, I put you guys on a prayer thing. Yeah, I'd be like, Well, you know, I have I have like, I probably got 10 prayer groups that I put you guys on, like something happened or what [...] or [...] I'll put them on there. I don't say names. I be like, "Can you pray for?".. And they pray for you. They

stand and pray for us. This one man I told you about, I knew I was going to get kicked out. I thought I just projected. The narrative in my head. I thought I was going to get kicked out of the prayer Group, right? I told you that right. She was like, gave me the link to go and set up to pray with her with her people. And I just said, No, I'm blocking you.

Child: [00:03:06] But why?

Mommy: [00:03:07] There's no reason.

Child: [00:03:09] Because you thought you were going to get kicked out.

Mommy: [00:03:12] Yes.

Child: [00:03:13] But why? Like what made you think that you're going to get kicked out?

Mommy: [00:03:16] Because I got kicked out last time because of my mouth.

Child: [00:03:19] So yeah, but– but what like, what about this time?

Mommy: [00:03:24] I don't know. There's no, I can't pinpoint it. I said, I'm just going to because I already know from my last experience I'm not going to be involved in this, So I just blocked her.

Child: [00:03:40] You said, but... [at a loss for words]

Mommy: [00:03:41] I didn't tell her that, No I just blocked her. [grunting laugh] She invited me--.

Child: [00:03:45] So this is your last experience with being in a prayer group.

Mommy: [00:03:48] Mm hmm.

Child: [00:03:48] But you lean on this peer group for support. Well, multiple.

Mommy: [00:03:54] I don't. Yeah, I don't know. This was a live one. And she lives in Albany. I ain't got time for it.

Child: [00:04:00] You can only do the virtual ones.

Mommy: [00:04:03] It was virtual. I just blocked her. [laughs] I-- just interviewed me because it's not going to make sense to you.

[...]

Child: [00:09:56] So like what are the steps to becoming like someone who would go to heaven?

Mommy: [00:10:04] Accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal lord and savior. You're going to heaven no matter how much you practice whenever, because you have accepted him.

Child: [00:10:12] Mm hmm.

Mommy: [00:10:14] And people don't believe that people think that because people have don't Follow, you know, go to church. Twenty four-- Alright alright I'm being exaggerating. Don't follow like the religious-- Cs-- of it, that you're not going to go to heaven. And I don't believe that. I don't believe it. That's why I don't believe suicide-- When someone commits suicide, there's another thing that they don't agree. Like, I believe at one time they lost their mind. I believe sometimes they when they they lost their mind, don't believe people that go commit suicide is going to hell. I don't believe it. I think at that time in their head, something [snaps fingers] snapped and they lost their mind. They've lost their mind, and I believe that they went to heaven. I do. I don't believe God Is going to let them go to hell. I don't. That's my thoughts. And that nobody agrees with me. You lost your mind. You temporarily lost your mind while you want to die. Do you understand your temporary loss, your mind of why you feel like you can't take it no more. I don't believe they're in hell. I don't, and a lot we-- I argue with these people all the time. they're not in hell. I don't believe that. I don't believe my loving father would have let them

go to hell. That's how I believe. So it was a lot. That's that's it, I don't. They always see God-- to me, this is I-- even when I first got gave my life to the Lord, they always see God is always angry, like he's just angry. Damn you who got your boxers in a twist. He's always mad. Like, they always see him as mad. They don't see him loving and caring. And I'm a parent and I know as a parent, I'm talking about me as a human being, and I know God is way beyond me. I know if my kid lost their mind I'm going to put them in hell? Because they lost their mind and decided to hurt themselves? They don't got it. They lost their mind.

Child: [00:12:14] Sometimes I be thinking that God is only angry, though.

Mommy: [00:12:17] Because that's what we were taught. No, he's not, though.

Child: [00:12:19] Well, what about all the stuff that we've been through as a family?

Mommy: [00:12:23] I mean, there's things that we go through that--God never promised that we were going to walk out a bed of roses.

Child: [00:12:30] But I'm like, Sometimes I'm like, We can't even have the bare minimum of life.

Mommy: [00:12:35] I think we do though. And maybe it's the way you perceive it. I think we got more of the bare minimum. We just we-- I think the quality of what we have is just being able

to be strong and be there and to accept people where we are as far as our family is. That's what I feel.

Child: [00:12:57] Do you feel like we have like you feel like we have enough?

Mommy: [00:13:04] What do you mean material wise? Like, what do you mean?

Child: [00:13:07] Just in general.

Mommy: [00:13:08] I feel like we do. I mean, I think it was hard because I mean, the stability part. I'm pretty sure as a kid that part I would never wish that on you. Like not being able to be stable. But like, I think that as far as other things is concerned that we do have more than what we think we have. It's just how we perceive it.

Child: [00:13:38] How we perceive it, that makes me think about like Auntie. Last time we interviewed, you remember she was like, how in the older generation the— your aunts and your your mother's generation like the haves and the have nots?

Mommy: [00:13:56] Yeah.

Child: [00:13:57] What do you think about that?

Mommy: [00:13:59] The haves and the have nots in the way they divided the like, the way that they had had it? What do I think about it? I don't. I don't, because I think that a lot of times people judge things about what— what is it judged by? What is the haves and the have nots judge by? Is it material? Or is it much more richer than that? To me I don't. This shit-- excuse me-- all this I don't give a f- about. I think I mean, like the material stuff. I mean, OK, we need that. We need a roof over our head. But none of it affects me, though, because I've already have and I have not. I have abundance and I have. I haven't had it. So I know what it means to have had, and I know what it means not to have, not I'm just Learning to-- At whatever stage I am to be content with where I'm at, not in settling and you always reach up and you know, to try to be better. But I think that if we always judge our amount or whatever our worth and whatever, whatever that have and have not means to a person will be, we will never be happy because we're always going to, no matter even if We thought that we have a lot of money or have a lot of stuff or what I have on my bills is payed and I have extras. I'm still not happy because it's judged by what I have. I'm always going to be wanting to strive to get more, which is not the wrong with it. But put it in perspective of why you do it. I mean...

Child: [00:15:42] Do you feel like the older generation was caught up with thinking about that?

Mommy: [00:15:49] No, I think that they know. I don't know. I think that because they didn't have, they had to worry about, they probably--- No. I don't know if they're caught up in thought thinking like that. No, I think it's because they struggled. And I think that it's because they

struggle that they, you know, [goes quiet] I don't know, to be honest, I don't know what they thought and how they felt.

Child: [00:16:18] What did you observe?

Mommy: [00:16:22] With them, I mean, Auntie observed that I didn't, I don't know. I didn't observe that I just was. I just was happy to be with my family.

Child: [00:16:32] Hmm. I know. Like, what did you mean when I say, what did you observe, like when you look back at it? Do you see, um, do you see that showing up in any way like looking back at it as an adult now? Do you see those who had more material possessions than others?

Mommy: [00:16:57] And yeah, I saw that. Yeah, but I didn't focus on it. I saw it because if I was to really be honest, I saw it. But being with my mother, I don't know. It was just different. It's like, I don't know. I guess my focus and my perception is different from what others would think. I mean, it's nothing like, I feel like this if it's nothing wrong with having these things and it's great that you have these things. But I think life is more richer than that. I mean, you have to be contented whatever you have, if you're eating steak or peanut butter and jelly, because I've known to have it not and I have not. And to have more and to have abundance, and that's nothing wrong with that. I don't think anything's wrong with that. I think that you have to learn to be content because you're going to be always, you're going to be like a yo yo.

Child: [00:17:52] But do you think that they were thinking about, though?

Mommy: [00:17:54] I don't know. I probably could care less what they thought. Not in a disrespectful way. I didn't care.

Child: [00:18:01] Do you think it would have affected the relationships that they had?

Mommy: [00:18:07] Like with us were me or Mommy and all them?

Child: [00:18:10] With each other, with y'all?

Mommy: [00:18:13] Did it affect it? Probably, yes. To be honest, yes. They probably. Yes, it did.

Child: [00:18:27] Like how?

Mommy: [00:18:27] I mean, they tried. They thought they was all that because they thought that because they had a couple of more coins that they were better than people. Well, what I perceived that they were better than me, but better than us. But who cares?

Child: [00:18:48] Were they rude to you?

Mommy: [00:18:50] They were scared of me. They're rude to Mommy. According to-- they were scared of me because they didn't know how I would respond. They would, they were everybody. Even my aunt even sent it to him [points to her partner]. Oh, no, no, don't don't piss Poochie off. They don't know what, how I would respond. I was a livewire.

Child: [00:19:17] Which ones were the ones who were uppity?

Mommy: [00:19:23] Great Aunt K, Which has totally due a 360 according to Auntie, but I won't give her the time of day because she treated my mother bad. But Great Aunt C Great Uncle H--.

Child: [00:19:32] So it does affect you?

Mommy: [00:19:34] No, I'm going to stand with my mother.

Child: [00:19:37] So it did hurt your feelings to see how they treated your mom?

Mommy: [00:19:41] Yeah. If it wasn't, if my mom didn't get affected by it, no, then it wouldn't have bothered me. But you're not going to sit there and hurt my mom.

Child: [00:19:51] So you have you have you seen the do you know at that time where?

Mommy: [00:19:59] That they treated it wrong. They should make her-- [getting upset] mommy used to cry all the time about it. They didn't because she or she had like, you know, big thick glasses. She wasn't, according to what she felt in her. So I thought she was beautiful. But according to what she felt in herself, didn't think that she was the most prettiest one. She was in the darker one. She didn't have the Indian-- like she perceived-- like that. So. And then she had a really, really, really bad learning disability where she even couldn't read as an adult. So when she-- if you made my mother cry, I'm going to be with my mom regardless, and I know maybe I should let it go. And Auntie said that she has since did a three sixty, and she wants to put all that past her, and that's fine. But I still remember how my mother cried. And you're not going to make my mother cry as much as me and my mother might not have seen eye to eye, but that's my mother.

Child: [00:20:58] You know, I don't know what would they, what she cried over. What would she cry over?

Mommy: [00:21:04] Just the way they treated her in a way that she perceived that they treated her.

Child: [00:21:10] Do you have a time?

Mommy: [00:21:11] No, I don't have. I don't. I mean, it's just it was all the time, especially when she would just go back and think about her childhood, and she would just say that they would

treat her bad. They would treat her, you know, they would. Treat her like she felt not, you know, the Misfit, the outcast, the black sheep. That's what she felt, and then she would cry about it.

Child: [00:21:44] So did they also, do you know what type of jobs they had?

Mommy: [00:21:49] Who? Well, they all weren't well, Great Aunt R, Where she wasn't uppity, she had money, but she was pretty good to um.

Child: [00:22:01] Who were the ones that– like– had more material possessions?

Mommy: [00:22:07] Great Aunt S. Great Uncle H. But he I, he always saw mommy. You know, he always was with mom. He wasn't really that bad. Aunt K was the one that they-- no one liked. But I'm pretty sure she has a different story. Um. And that's the I don't know who else, but I just remember more Great Aunt K and Great Aunt S. The rest of them kind of like– although that there was a lot of them kind of like separated and did their own thing because Great Aunt C used to be with mommy when she was here. But then she moved away. Great Uncle H. Yes, he had money, but he was still, you know, come around and be with mommy. No matter what he was kind of like now that I look at, he was kind of uppity and I think he I feel-- this my perception that he only kept around because he it made him feel good. Hmm. It kind of did something for him, for his ego. But I don't know If Mommy was affected by Great Uncle H, but because she didn't really say too much. But Great Aunt S she was very religious and very. That's the one that's married to Great Uncle B that was the chief of police of Albany that has cancer now.

Child: [00:23:31] So, so, yeah, what type of what type of jobs they had?

Mommy: [00:23:36] I wrote, I told you Great Aunt K, and Great Aunt R worked for the state. Great Uncle H worked. I remember I said electrical, but Auntie said it was something different--
Construction

Child: [00:23:48] construction took over the business. Yeah. So the state, what is the state?

Mommy: [00:23:52] I don't know. I just don't. I don't know exactly what they did, but they retired. Lovely.

Child: [00:24:00] So pension, They were pensioned.

Mommy: [00:24:02] Yeah, they was. Yeah, the state still takes care of Great Aunt K. What it was going to say, Great Aunt R. She had money, but she was down to earth. She would come around you guys and stuff. But you, you wouldn't remember she died from lung cancer. But she was OK though. She was a decent aunt, especially to Auntie. Great Aunt R was a decent aunt. Great Uncle H was decent. I remember. But, you know, he just had problems with fucking, like putting his hands on people. That's what Auntie--. I never seen it though. At least I was in La La Land, I never seen him. But that's the story. And if there is smoke. There's fire. I never seen it though Auntie says she saw it. I never seen it.

Child: [00:24:52] What is putting in his hands on people?

Mommy: [00:24:54] Hitting women, hitting the women. Yeah.

Child: [00:25:00] If there's smoke, there's fire.

Mommy: [00:25:02] That's what I said, So just because I didn't see it doesn't mean it didn't happen. Yeah.

Child: [00:25:14] I'm just like haves and have nots. This is kind of crazy.

Mommy: [00:25:19] Auntie will have to get into those, though that more than that. Yeah, but it's because they know this is what I'm just going to say what I think and maybe I'm wrong, it's because like when I felt like when because they got what they feel like, they made it that they felt like they were way better and they were bougie and forgetting the struggle. Like they were conservative black people. That's what I think. And the conservative Black people. Conservative black people that think that they're all that. Where all of a sudden you don't remember eating mayonnaise sandwiches. Get out of here. Nigga just because you could put cheese on your bread [laughs] now. Don't forget that you had to eat a mayonnaise sandwich. Hmm. So they forgot where they came from.

Child: [00:26:19] So maybe that forgetting is them not having actually. It's like getting in the way of something

Mommy: [00:26:27] I think that the struggle makes you the richness of who you are in all everything that happens in life makes you who you are. Good, bad and ugly. You can make it make you better or make you bitter. It's simple. I choose not to let it make me bitter. I choose to make me better. That's what I'm like. Whatever I don't know

Child: [00:26:54] Because I would. I would try to think about what the parameters of like have and have not are for, um, for our generation, my generation, like who would who would have or even in your like your siblings, who would have and who would have not. Based on this,

Mommy: [00:27:16] [quickly] We would have not. And if it was just based on our siblings and I, we wouldn't have, Uncle, wouldn't have, Auntie would have. But she would be a struggle, though she would have. But kind of a made up mess. And Aunt A would have.

Child: [00:27:35] You're able to come to that. But it's like, what is the criteria?

Mommy: [00:27:38] The criteria is the stability of having housing. The stability to be able to pay your bills without relying on services. The ability to be able to get School clothes without having To ask for help. The ability to be able to financially eat out when you want to. I mean, without having to work for a certain amount, a certain time. And they have partners, they have

Aunt A had Martin. Auntie had Kobe. I didn't have a partner. It was just me and you guys. So they would have. But they didn't act. They didn't act. I mean, I didn't think they acted different. I mean, me and Uncle would be the ones that had not. And Auntie, and Aunt A would have been the ones that had if you was to judge it by that and you saying my siblings. Yeah, that's what it been like. Yeah,

Child: [00:28:48] But Uncle had a partner.

Mommy: [00:28:51] Yeah. But Uncle had a partner, but Uncle and his partner didn't really did anything like getting help financially, like like Martin and Aunt A they worked regardless of what job they worked. They worked together and they combined their income. Kobe and Auntie, they worked, they combined their income, and Auntie always worked. You know, Auntie always had made, you know, made the bread, you know, made the bacon. Me. I had no—it was just me. And Uncle. It was just us solely providing. Even though Uncle did have a partner, he still was only the sole provider that made it, you know where he financially was challenged.

Child: [00:29:37] But nobody owns anything.

Mommy: [00:29:39] No. No. Well, I thought Aunt A did, I thought, and maybe I'm wrong. I thought Aunt A owned that house, but maybe I'm wrong.

[..]

Mommy: [00:29:59] I think it was rent to own, and then the whole thing went when they broke up. Oh, I did with Eileen. Briefly, very briefly. That was in my--. That was supposed to be on where I was. They were supposed to that fell through because the stuff were church.

Child: [00:30:19] But so what? What happened?

Mommy: [00:30:22] Well, Eileen, well, financially, they [a church for which Mommy was a member] put up the money for the down payment on my house, which is good.

Child: [00:30:30] What time? What's the time span?

Mommy: [00:30:31] I can't remember. Um, I don't remember. I have to look it up. A, baby, you were in Pampers. This is when you were running around and with dresses and we had just got your first haircut and you will put the dress on. Remember, so you were a baby? You knew he wasn't even potty trained, but you was after. Yeah, you. You did. When we first got it you wasn't potty trained and then you grew up a little bit. Yeah, and then you were, you know, potty trained, of course. But um. So um,

Child: [00:31:11] So we had a church. I'm going to tell you what I remember. I remember seeing the house for the first time. There was a lady and like a pencil skirt dress because I remember I

want that dress. Yeah, she had red hair. Oh, she had red hair. Hmm. She was showing the house. And then I remember--.

Mommy: [00:31:39] [...] yeah,

Child: [00:31:41] [...] and she was showing us the house. We wound up being in the house for some reason. And then fast forward, the floors get done. A bunch of work starts. It starts happening on. That's it.

Mommy: [00:31:58] Yeah, that's yeah, that's a church. They had the right intention, but didn't prepare me financially to have it. Their heart was in the right place for that And but didn't. I was still on DSS. I mean, they gave me a property which they had to have technically in their name. I couldn't do anything with it because I didn't have a job at the time. You know, a job and they didn't, and they didn't walk me through ever owning anything. And I kind of like was submissive to what their process. And then the next thing you know, we had to go. They the things happened financially with them.

Child: [00:32:43] They went bankrupt.

Mommy: [00:32:43] Yeah.

Child: [00:32:45] Wasn't that around 2008?

Mommy: [00:32:47] Maybe I'm, I'm not sure I'm not. I'm— I don't know. I would have to look up at my background because my background check shows everywhere I've been.

Child: [00:32:57] I remember staying on second half from eight to I had my 10th birthday and we were moving out on my after my tenth birthday. Remember because we went to Golden Corral. Hmm.

Mommy: [00:33:12] Yeah, you're probably right, right? Yeah.

Mommy: [00:33:16] But what was the beginning of Eileen, though?

Child: [00:33:20] I can't remember the beginning, but I remember that I remember a lot of renovations happening and then like, we just blink and where I just blink and I'm in Second ave. Yeah.

Mommy: [00:33:32] But, we went to a shelter at first, but yeah, they-- your brother's act like that was the best time of their life. They'd rather stay in the shelter than have a stable home.

Child: [00:33:42] The shelter that was a hotel.

Mommy: [00:33:44] Yeah.

Child: [00:33:45] Was that in Massachusetts?

Mommy: [00:33:47] No, that wasn't. That was in Menands.

Child: [00:33:51] Menands.

Mommy: [00:33:52] Yeah.

Child: [00:33:55] I remember always confusing it. And we'll have to get bussed early in the morning, right? So they gave you this property.

Mommy: [00:34:19] They didn't prepare me for it [home owning] and then it got taken away. But there, yeah. If it happened now, I could have been able to. I was a kid too. People don't realize I was-- not that I make excuses. I was a kid having kids and trying to be an adult. I was a kid. My first kid was at 16. How much do you really know at 16? Like, what do you really know about being a parent at 16? Then I had another kid at 17. What do you know at 17? What do you know at 18? What do you know At 19? You don't know. My brain was not even developed. I know this now because I'm 48 and I understand. The overwhelming sense of everything is-- at my mind, my mind and I can speak for myself at the age of 16. Everything seems intense and final. Everything seems not doable. I was a kid. I didn't grow. I grew up with Thaddeus. That's why a lot of times I asked what I believe. A lot of times I parented up to the age of what I knew.

And if I knew what I knew now, I would have did things differently. I would have because I would have had more. I would have been more grounded. I would have understood the concept of what it took to be a parent. I didn't understand I was 16, and then I had kids way back to back and back to back after that. So, yeah, I was a kid and no, I didn't know I had. No one taught me. Yeah. And that's not no one's fault. I chose to have kids. But that's a lot of the reason why I think the deficiency that happens with all of y'all is because I was a kid, and I believe this is my thoughts that I raised y'all to the point of what I knew as far as mentally of where I was. And that's the truth. It doesn't make it right, but that's the truth.

Child: [00:36:41] So what does that mean?

Mommy: [00:36:43] I said it. Yeah. I raise you to the point of where I was mentally and as a sixteen year old kid.

Child: [00:36:58] Okay. Oh.

Child: [00:37:06] Do you think that there's a desire to own property in this family?

Mommy: [00:37:13] Yes, I believe there's a desire to own property, I don't think the skill is there. Yeah. The skill. And the overwhelming sense of how do you get to a point to get there? What goals do you get to get there?

Child: [00:37:39] Like, not even the great aunts or the uncles.

Mommy: [00:37:42] Yeah, they all property-- Great Uncle H, Great Aunt S-- I thought you were just talk about us the siblings.

Child: [00:37:48] Well, yes, I was primarily talking you guys.

Mommy: [00:37:51] Yeah, they own property. Great Aunt S, Great Uncle H. Yes, they all own property. Great Aunt K owns her property, owns her house. Great Aunt R-- No, she rented when she passed away. Um, let me see. Yeah.

Child: [00:38:13] So the Haves. Did grandma own?

Mommy: [00:38:17] No.

Child: [00:38:51] If you feel up to talking about it. Do you mind walking me through grandma's death?

Mommy: [00:39:03] The time that she died? What I remember, I remember being woken up by my sister saying that-- Well, Auntie woke up. " Mommy is dead. I'm on my way to the nursing home". Um. You know, they're letting people in, and I remember I was the only one that saw my mother die. I mean not die. Sorry. Saw my mother dead and them preparing her, I remember

sitting there with her. I remember Mary bringing me right in the middle of the night, Mary getting there and picking me up and bringing me there. Um, and my sister was nowhere to be. None of my sisters with nowhere to be found. Well, Aunt A was in Georgia.

Mommy: [00:39:54] But I remember sitting with my mother and she just looked asleep and she just I the aid that came in there to prepare her like you not prepare her body, but like make sure that she was cleaned up and stuff. Um was Crying, I remember the aid crying. I remember I'm crying and I'm just sitting there with my mother. And I remember never seeing my sister. I don't know how she knew what happened But anyway, um, let's remember that. And I just remember leaving and coming home to you guys. It was I stayed with her for hours. Mary left me and then she came back to get me. Mary started crying. Mary was upset and was crying. remember Mary? And. Yeah, as I was sitting There And just being crushed like like I was in the Twilight Zone, like my mother's really gone like, I don't know, it was just a weird feeling of the final of She's not here. So I just sat with her for a little bit. And yeah, that's what I remember. And then I remember going back to you guys. I remember going in. It was like, Am like I, Auntie would Know, Auntie is really good with time. It probably was like, Uh, I want to say one a.m.. And I remember leaving the nursing home around. Oh, it was day. So I remember leaving maybe six or seven, and I don't quote me on that. But I just remember it was dark when I got there and it was the morning when I left. Yeah. Mm hmm. Yup, that's part I remember. And I don't know. As far as the funeral is concerned again, I um, it was just a whirlwind.

Child: [00:42:04] Um, how did you tell us?

Mommy: [00:42:12] Oh, I Don't remember I told you. I remember saying it, but I don't remember, I think you, you, you and me Bray was with me. Not you. I didn't go to you. I didn't go in. You didn't go to the the nursing home or anything, but you guys were sleeping with me. And when I got the thing thing, I think you guys overheard it. And that's how you were able to tell, Um, you guys started crying and I remember you guys crying because I remember I'm getting up. I'm frantic at that point. I'm like, like, frantic and like, and um, autopilot. I have to get to the hospital. I have to get ready and you guys heard it, and I believe that that's how you, your siblings know Your brothers And sisters know. Cause you guys were in the bed with me when I got the call because you guys would some sleep with me all the time. Yeah, and that's how it went. That's yeah.[silence] The funeral that was beyond crazy. Because it was fighting over the money and fighting over. [quietly] Everything as far as getting the money to pay for it. So. Auntie and Aunt A, they're competitiveness. I just sat in awe, but then I got I get when I get really nervous, I start crying and laughing. I remember crying and laughing at the funeral. And I remember him going with their little pettiness. Auntie and Aunt A. [mutters] And then they buried her.

Child: [00:45:16] Yeah. I remember I remember being awake, but I thought that you didn't know that I was awake. Because the next day, because I wound up dozing off after you left and then the next day I woke up to go take a shower. You said grandma died. I said, I know.

Mommy: [00:45:47] I remember you guys being with me. You and your sister closet in age to you-- and I don't remember saying that, but I believe I said it. Yeah. Yeah. That's when we used to live on Paulding on top of your third eldest brother.

Child: [00:46:13] And then that night, I feel like that was the first night. Um, I went like trick or treating?

Mommy: [00:46:23] Yeah. Yeah, cause she died on, um, the thirty first. Yeah,

[...]

Mommy: [00:46:36] Yeah, yeah, that's what I let my you know.

Child: [00:46:56] And then Thanksgiving soon followed.

Mommy: [00:46:58] Yeah,

Child: [00:46:58] So Aunt A was around... that was such a weird Thanksgiving.

Mommy: [00:47:05] Uncle was at my house, Uncle . [laughs] I think about Uncle because he was saying some crazy stuff and Aunt A was like, What are you talking about? We're your sisters
[laughs]

Child: [00:47:22] What was he saying?

Mommy: [00:47:24] He said something very inappropriate not to not to come at us. But he said something inappropriate, like just like in reference to a woman. And Aunt A, I never forget. I laughed so hard, she said, What are you talking about? We are adults. It was acting like we were Like, so prissy that we could talk inappropriate with our brother. Not inappropriate in the like. Oh my god, incest or something. But she said what in the hell are you talking about? {hearty laugh} Are you talking about we're your sisters. And Uncle said I don't give a fuck. [laughs through her words] I miss him. He was my brother-- boy. I don't give a F. Do you remember when Uncle said that Juan's father was a faggot? And he said, Don't say that. He said, Your father is a faggot, and he was about to fight him. I said, Uncle, you need to go home. Stop saying that-- "he is. He's a fucking faggot". That's what he said.

Child: [00:48:32] Oh my gosh. So many Of the boys almost fought Uncle .

Mommy: [00:48:40] Who else you think fought Uncle? [...] They we're holding him back of because he Uncle knows his father and Uncle knows Juan. But that's what he was saying.

Child: [00:49:02] Oh, that was the time

Mommy: [00:49:04] Yeah. To Juan--, "your father's a fucking faggot".

Child: [00:49:15] Hmm. And that's what caused my brother never after that day-- he used to come around all the time and then he got all hurt up like that whole thing, and that's what caused the whole separation there.

Child: [00:49:29] Because he was saying his father was a slur,

Mommy: [00:49:32] A faggot, and then the boys was holding him back like "Uncle stop, chill, chill Uncle. You're being disrespectful". Whether he's a faggot or not, that's you. Don't say that to somebody. You know, why would you say that? That's I mean, even whatever.

Child: [00:49:47] Even that's what made him think that his father's gay?

Mommy: [00:49:52] I don't know.

Mommy: [00:49:54] I don't know. He knows his father. And I guess it's him. I think he beat up his father, Uncle, had a fight with his father. But I think he was saying it as a not as being gay, as being like to hurt, like to say nigger-- if a white person, called us a nigger. It wasn't as if that person was gay or anything. It was a person like,

Child: [00:50:19] Like emasculating.

Mommy: [00:50:20] Yeah, he was trying to. Yeah-- whether he is or not. What does that have anything to do with nowadays? I mean, I was a lot ignorant, conservative, in a lot of my views. Now I'm not. But what does that have to do anything? Why, even though I got to stop myself from saying that when I'm mad at certain people I say it too and I know when I start saying it, it's like, why are you saying that? That's very ignorant. Like, you sound dumb? But I'm trying to hurt them, but what is it showing ignorance, though? But that's what we were taught. That's how you hurt. I was taught in my generation to hurt a man is to say something like something dumb like that. And it's hard to reprogram you from the foolishness to stop. But we were not taught, right? God, we weren't. We were not taught. Right.

Child: [00:51:22] Right.

Child: [00:51:24] And also, there are ways that you can read somebody

Mommy: [00:51:27] Without being like that. Why do you have to-- that's showing you lost. If you got to do and you've got to put somebody down like that you lost.

Child: [00:51:35] And but and also there's ways that you can put somebody down and like, put them, make them feel the worst that they ever have.

Mommy: [00:51:43] without using that

Child: [00:51:44] And not use that Type of term. I feel like if you just attack their character.

Mommy: [00:51:55] Yeah. It's just ignorant.

Child: [00:51:57] Yeah.

Mommy: [00:52:01] Well, that's what happened, I think, yeah, yeah.

Child: [00:52:05] And then he got all hurt up,

Mommy: [00:52:09] Just like Zara. Ok. Uncle might have a reason to be hurt. Uncle Had more a legitimate reason to have been hurt than Zara.

Child: [00:52:17] Well, what was his reason?

Mommy: [00:52:18] Well, because he thinks that the boys were taken up for Juan when they was Only telling him, "You're bugging. You're talking about his father. Stop Uncle. Stop Uncle. Stop!" [...] Juan was hurt, like he was like, like in tears, like, you're talking about my dad and then he wanted to fight him so bad. But he was. Juan was trying to so bad not to, like, disrespect me or disrespect Them, But he kept saying, and he kept antagonizing him saying that. And a lot of you know, his whole religion is, you know, they OK. Yes, I had Conservative views, but their views were way to the left.

Child: [00:53:16] Right, but I don't even know when you describe his head, whatever he was doing. I have a lot of Muslim friends that just that is not--

Mommy: [00:53:26] He's not Muslim, he was Muslim, he was five percent and then he was Christian. [laughs heartily]. Yeah, he wasn't None of it. Muslims do not believe that they're God, they believe that they're made in the image of God. Ok, I get that even Christians believe that they don't believe that they're almighty, that there's no Allah, they don't believe that there's not somebody higher than them. They don't. They pray. Then who are they praying to? If they believe that their God, they're praying to Allah, that which they call God, they're praying to him. They even practice, you know, The ones that really follow the Muslim Religion to the law. They practice praying every certain parts of the day so they believe in. If they thought that they were God, who do they think? Who are they praying to? They would be, Oh, hallelujah to myself? They're praying for somebody higher. He thought he was God. And. And then she thought he was God. Talk about he. I see you, God. Come back to me. That's why she didn't get him medical help. That's what did a lot of turning for me for medically and plus the stuff in my body, too. I'm not like, I feel that did a lot. I think it introduced the thought of, medically doing what I need to do for my body. But then when I had the scare, that's when it really made me like, It's not a joke. It's not at all. So no.

Appendix C.

This is the longest interview I conducted with Auntie. The omissions in this transcript are primarily moments when Auntie's husband inserts narrative on his lineage– with no relation to myself. While it is rich with its own history, it is not a lineage I have time or space to discuss right now. There are also moments when Auntie gets interrupted by burnt pizza and a phone call. These are considered non essential to the overall narrative and so those moments have been omitted for clarity purposes. I have also omitted the places where my Great Aunt C has lived. This is for her safety.

...

Child: [00:00:09] Do so do you. What do you know about our lineage?

Auntie: [00:00:14] What do you mean? What do I know about it?

Child: [00:00:15] Like or like, do you know anything about where we come from?

Auntie: [00:00:21] [...] We come from South Carolina. That, again, that's my grandparents that came from South Carolina. Anything prior to that, unfortunately, I do not know. I do not know I would have to get in touch with Great Aunt S, but I'm sure they unfortunately just lost her husband last week, so that might not be feasible at this time. But as far as I know, my grandfather

is from south South Carolina, Bath, South Carolina. They met down there. They had Shirley and Henry down there. Then they migrated up here because my grandfather needed to work and then all the rest of them was born up here in Albany. As far as ethnicity, I believe that my grandfather there is Indian that is within the family. From my grandfather's side, I don't know which tribe it is. Again, I would have to ask, I'm Shirley about that because she would probably know. Um, it's unfortunate because by the time I got to an age to really understand and because there was so many kids, I guess they didn't think it was really important to discuss lineage and heritage and things back in the past. They're just too busy trying to deal, trying to survive what was going on and the present with so many kids and housing and job issues and all that. So, you know. But it is very important. I never got an opportunity to meet my great grandmother I think it's-- because again, that was they were all down south. So there's that.

Child: [00:02:27] Did did Grandma ever talk about the past?

Auntie: [00:02:31] She talked about the past relative to herself, so she never talked about her grandparents or anything like that, so there was never any real leads to that. Aunt Rosetta before she passed away, she finally did get hooked up with cousins that was down south. But again, because they were dealing with, you know, so many children and dealing with, you know, emergent issues such as housing and all that they really didn't delve into the past. So she mainly talked about her childhood relative to her brothers and sisters. But that's about as far as it went into. Like Great Aunt J and Great Uncle D, all of those extended family members. But it didn't go past that.

[...]

Auntie: [00:03:57] But one interesting thing that you should know about you, about my aunts and uncles, including your grandmother. They were all born in the summertime, and that's because my grandmother said they didn't have anything to do in the wintertime. Hmm.

Child: [00:04:10] So who are you close to growing up?

Auntie: [00:04:14] I was close to Great Aunt R. That's who I was close to. Yeah, I liked her. She was just like everything that I thought that I could be. Um, because she was smart, she was beautiful, she was sassy, she had style. Yeah, I liked her a lot.

Child: [00:04:42] And even she didn't delve into the past?

Auntie: [00:04:44] She was trying to, but there was just like so many secrets. That's the one thing about this family is very riddled in secrecy. She was starting to get to the bottom of it, but then she then she got sick because one thing we found that like my grandmother, my grandmother, unfortunately, was an alcoholic, a closet alcoholic, and that she was just drink by herself in her room. And then you just see, like the transformation of what she kept going in her room and she never drank in front of us. But how you got like that? And yeah, so it was a lot of things going on. It was a lot of domestic violence between them. A lot of bad things that had

happened. There's a lot of secrecy that goes on in this family. So she was trying to get to the bottom of it to where we was going to have a big family reunion, but unfortunately she got sick and then nobody else picked up the mantle.

Child: [00:05:49] Well, when when did she get sick?

Auntie: [00:05:55] She's been gone. Maybe 15 years. Yeah, it's been about 15 years, 15, 18 years ago. Yeah, we've got I'm going to say, 15 years ago. Is she passed away..

Child: [00:06:17] So what stories get passed down?

Auntie: [00:06:21] It's basically like stuff like when they was younger, when they were talking about like Christmas and like, you know, fun times when stuff that I remember as a child, like my grandfather, he used to play. He used to play the lottery a lot. And so like one fond memory I have, like when I used to go to their house is that when he sent you to the store, you want to go to the store! And I didn't care if it was a blizzard outside because my grandfather had this stutter and he would go, Uh, Uh, Brender- Brender, go to the store for your grandmother and like, he'll give you a \$20 bill and tell you to go to the store and get like an RC soda and a loaf of bread. And you can keep the change. Now. Bread was like 50 cents, a soda was a quarter. He gave you a twenty dollar bill! I broke my neck. I used to keep my coat on and sit next to the door and wait. And my grandfather, He loved, loved, loved Football. He loved football. So he spent a lot of time in his room with a big old TV watching his sports, and you couldn't mess with him with his

sports. So like when we was like being loud in the living room, he would scream out "Y'all shut up all that noise out there! Y'all shut up all that noise." If he had to come out in that living room, somebody's going to get it. Somebody is going to get a beating. Now. One time my cousin Teacup was singing Hello Rusty Jones and pulled her dress up over her head, and she had a big safety pin in her underwear. And she kept she kept screaming and hollering, and my grandfather came out of that room with that belt. We was like this. He smacked her on the butt. She went and told she went and told Great Aunt C. And she tried to fuss with him. That's not one thing that you do with my grandfather. You would've done smacked you too. Yeah, he didn't play that. He was a big old guy. Yeah, he was very protective of his daughters. And that, yes, Great Aunt C, I guess, when her husband had put his hands on her. My grandfather went up there and let's just say, Oh, it didn't work out too well. He wound up. He wound up beating the crap out of him. Him and Great Uncle H went up there.

Auntie: [00:08:57] So my grandfather didn't have much education, but he worked for construction. It's the same path that Great Uncle H took, but Great Uncle M, he was the first one to graduate from college. He went to Ithaca College and he had his bachelors. So they used to make fun of him a lot. That was the one thing like in this family that if you talked to a certain way, you were always considered white. We had the haves and the have nots, and unfortunately, my mother was on the side of the have nots, so she was treated a little differently. One reason why education is important to me personally because my mother was said to be in special education, and so she wasn't able to finish high school because she had some learning disabilities and things. But it was good to know that her daughter, you know, could, you know, finish, finish

well and then bring up the next generation, which is you guys to have college degrees and things. So you guys really come from her the fact that she had a learning disability. You know, they didn't think much of her. But this the lineage that we come through says that we can't and we do. So that's the one thing I kind of smile about that. I know that she was proud of that.

Child: [00:10:36] How do you how do you differentiate between the haves and have nots? What is it? What is it like material things?

Auntie: [00:10:45] It was definitely material things. It was, you know, they were married. You know, she wasn't. Lifestyle. You know, she couldn't drive. They could. And it wasn't just her. It was Great Aunt J, Great Uncle P, Great Aunt C. You know, they had low wage paying jobs. They worked for the state. You know, they seemingly, and I say, seemingly had a better life, but then when you pull back the sheet, you realize that no, no, that's not the case at all.

Child: [00:11:29] So what do you mean work for the state?

Auntie: [00:11:31] Work for the state of New York. So back then, working for the state of New York was like the biggest thing when you got into work for the state. So even if you was the secretary at the state, that was better persay, you might want to check your pizza.

Auntie: [00:26:34] Um, but yeah. So basically, um, our family just seemed like when my grandmother, so after my grandfather died, he he died when I was in sixth grade. Well, actually, I

was graduating from sixth grade. The day of my graduation he died actually. So my grandmother used to host a lot of different things like Thanksgiving and Christmas and different things, and she was basically the glue that, you know, brought people together. And then once she died, then people kind of went their separate ways. There was a lot of, um, a lot of rifts in the family about funeral and money and insurance policies and things of that nature. A lot of it probably wasn't true, but you know, when people just sensationalize things and they don't get the correct information and they just embellish those that really are not educated in finding out it's like, if the story sounds good, then we're going to go with it versus let them go, do my own homework and just ask. Again, this family does work in a shroud of secrecy instead of just being up front and asking, you know, is one plus one two? You know, so that's when there are a lot of rifts became, you know, came with the family. People just kind of stayed in their own little clusters and kind of went on from there. You know, then when Great Aunt R started trying to pull people together, you know, we came they, you know, the sisters and things came. But again, I mean, that's trying to happen now, you know, on Katherine reached out to me and, you know, trying to get us to get back together, you know, the rest of us because there's only four left. There's Great Aunt S, there's Great Aunt K, Great Uncle P, and I think our Great Aunt C is still alive. Nobody's heard from her. She's in [...] somewhere. I think

Child: [00:28:49] [...], I thought, she was in [...]

Auntie: [00:28:50] [...]. She started in [...], but then she moved to [...]. So just trying to get them together. It's been a slow process because again, it's a lot of horrible stories that have been passed

down from one generation to the next. It's so and so's sleeping with this person, and this one was born out of it. You know, all those kind of stories instead of getting the real truth. You know, just passing down stories instead of just really digging in and seeing what really happened, you know? So that's that

Auntie: [00:29:31] We saw something similar to that with with

Auntie: [00:29:35] Grandma's funeral. Yeah, yeah. You know, it's a very painful, painful event, very painful myself. As the oldest, you know, I did what I could, and it was nothing like what anybody thought, but no one ever came and asked me about it. No one, without getting into all that, someone came and made up whatever story they wanted to make up and just spread instead of taking, picking up the phone and asking me What's going on? Just took her side. So I basically separated by myself.

Auntie: [00:30:23] And we don't have to get into the story, but. Like what, what was what, who were taking, what sides were

Auntie: [00:30:36] It was basically, I'm going to tell you honestly, it was basically Ann being upset because she wanted to do whatever it was she felt she needed to do. She felt left out, not understanding that funerals are their business. Ok. So if somebody died, they might have been precious to you. But for them, that's a business. Ok, so they're not going to hold your loved one's body forever and ever amen until you get it right. Ok? When your grandmother died under 30,

first it was What are you going to do? What are you going to do? Snap, snap, snap. Let's move, move, move, move, move. You got to get this. Moving constantly, constantly was my first funeral ever. Ok, so I don't. I don't. I can tell you openly. I didn't know what I was doing. I had no clue. I just knew that I needed to get this done, and I had very little time to get it done. It was said that I stole insurance money. How are you going to do that? You ain't got nothing. I'm the one that paid for it. I didn't get help with anything. I'm one of four. But everything fell on me and that hurt me. And then to not only get not only did you promise that you would help that you would pay. No one did. No one contributed. None of her children did. None of them. It was just that, well, I don't have it well, I don't have it either. But yet it fell on me and I was resentful. I was because it fell on me. And then not only are you going to do that, you're going to run through the family and went and ran through the family that I stole insurance money from where? How long still something I didn't have, and I'm the one that came into my pocket and I paid for this. That meant you don't know how I paid for it. When I was at the funeral home, you told me that you were going to pay me back. I was told that and I was never paid back. To this day, not only do I have to bury my mother, just like it's your mother, too. I didn't have the opportunity to grieve. They didn't come to me as sisters and band together sisters that that ripped whatever little bit was ripped us apart because Ann had a hidden agenda of, Oh, Brenda is doing this, Brenda is doing that. Brenda is doing the other. You think I was having a good time burying my mother? No, that was not a good time. So had you sucked that down for years? I wasn't being talked to because of something that somebody else said. Come to find out. None of that happened. Imagine your brother and sister look you in your face and don't say two words to you and you've done nothing wrong. My my nephew spoke to me, my own sister just looked me in my face,

didn't say a word to me. Because she felt that the other sister was right. Then come to find out all its, you know, all I found out that she was lying.

Auntie: [00:33:42] Yeah, but I was still hurt by that. No one asked me anything. Great Aunt J was going to send up balloons and my mother's name, that's still my mother, I'm still her oldest child. Well, you wasn't invited. They're so willing to gravitate to the bad and not the good. But, you know, you choke a lot down in this family until you just can't anymore and you're just stuffed and you just won't. So things that I learned from it is a I'm not having a funeral be. I have my own life insurance policy just enough to cremate me and throw me at the wig store and see, I don't want anybody gathering for me. If you really love me and care about me, you'll know me now. You'll come and see me now. You'll talk to me on the phone now. Once I'm dead, I'm. I don't hear you disappointed I. You really want to get to know me, get to know me now, well, I've got my mind, you know, that's what I learned from it. That whole, you know, plotting around and I'm going to take out the \$100000 life insurance policies. I'm not doing any of that. I'm not leaving my kids anything. You're telling you straight up. I'm not, because guess what? If you've learned anything about me, you know that education is very important to me. And if you haven't learned from me at all throughout this, what makes me think that you're going to take the two dollars I leave you and that you're going to do it, you're going to do something appropriate with it? You haven't been doing it.

Auntie: [00:35:24] Did you waiting for me to die for it so you can get rich? Quick dollar? No. No. I'm not doing that. I'm not here to make you rich, I'm here to deposit wisdom to you. You

know, times like this, when you can call me, we can talk about it. Let me challenge you this snap, because when I'm not here anymore, you can't hear my audible voice anymore. You'll be able to hear it from here or hear it from here. What is two dollars going to do for you? You get to benefit from my death. What? For what? To buy a pair of sneakers that you're not going to wear after a year? No, you're not going to have a funeral so that you can perform at funerals. Oh my God, my mother. How about when she was alive? You didn't care two cents about her. You can go see her. One thing about her? That's what I learned, I learned by watching the members of this family that if you really want to have a relationship with me, my phone number has been the same. I'm going to leave the door cracked. But if I find that I'm that I'm being used or something, I also know how to do this. There's a saying I learned from Facebook. It said, Yes, it's the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb, which is very true. People have it reversed. That blood is thicker than water. That part is true, but it's the blood of the covenant.

Auntie: [00:36:58] It's OK, it's yes, you are my nephew by blood, but if you choose to be do life with me and I do life with you, I accept you as who you are. You accept me as I am. We're doing life together. That's the blood of the covenant because you chose to be here, not because you're my nephew, but you think I'm just like a cool chick, you know, I think you're a cool guy. You know, I like hanging around you. You I. I don't get to just take little pieces of you and, you know, because you're my nephew or because I'm your aunt, you're supposed to do this. No, you do it because you want to do it. Understand. That's what that statement means. Not just because you're my family member, because I shouldn't be trying to take from you because of the simple fact that I'm your aunt. I'm not supposed to pervert that that relationship between aunt and nephew. Now,

sure, you have respect for me because of who I am, but let's not get it twisted, twisted. I don't get to get to abuse you because of why we don't do that. Because the same way, you wouldn't allow somebody else in the street to do that. You don't allow me to do that either, you know? Same difference. I wouldn't have let you do it to me. It's a split, and if you don't want to have a relationship, that's fine, but then when I die, don't be getting into my funeral service.

Child: [00:38:23] I got out there, but

Auntie: [00:38:27] I ain't seen you in the last 15 years. You don't know what I've been doing. How phony is that? What a liar. You don't know nothing about me. People do all the time. Oh my god, I can't believe they're gone. I don't know why this is upsetting your life. They add nothing to your life and you had none of theirs. Everything. Oh, because that's your, aren't you? Do you think that that's a time to perform? No, because you're upsetting all the people that actually loved me. They got to watch you. Go somewhere.

[00:39:05] So. That's my

Child: [00:39:07] Thoughts.

Child: [00:39:09] Can you walk me through the day of the funeral?

Auntie: [00:39:13] My mother's funeral? Mm hmm. Well, when I got there and was talking about some damn programs, I told her that Linda was bringing the programs. She was in this rush. What are you doing? The programs are already done. They're coming. I got to do this. I got to do that. Busy, busy, busy. I had asked everybody what you wanted on the program. Poochie wanted Laura to sing her song Fun, she's on the program. I forgot where I am on it because I can't remember it was. She just tried to be busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. And then I remember when she was up there speaking, I had a wonderful life. She just made it all about herself. She never spoke about my mother, and I remember looking at her, just wanting to kill her, wanting her to just I wanted the floor to open up and just eat her.

[00:40:11] "I had a good life in Atlanta. That's why I left from here". -- I just sitting there like that. I watched my mother's sisters that had nothing to do with my mother for years. You stood up and spoke at my mother's funeral. You wasn't there when my mother had to get her legs cut off. You wasn't there for any of that. I was. I don't remember getting a phone call from you supporting me. None of that. It was just like, you just wanted to be a part of it. I was disgusted. I was thoroughly disgusted. So one of the hardest days of my life, November 5th, was the hardest day of my life.

Auntie: [00:40:59] I had to watch my mother just be out here, stretched out while all these people didn't give a shit about her speak like they've been there, they've been through the thick and thin. You haven't been through anything. You know, not about her. Went to the repass, ate everything and put nothing in nothing. You asked me, do you need \$2? Nothing. I carried it on

my back. It took me a long time not to be bitter about it anymore because I was extraordinarily bitter, extraordinarily bitter because this was the final straw. Oh, yes. I was prepared to just not have anything to do with any of these family members anymore. Now I get it. Trying to to to hide the sun in your bosom and you're going to get burned too hot. So I was beyond her. Well. Took a long time to heal from that. So now when they reach out to me. All right. You know, I just want us to get together and it's nothing. I'll leave the door open. I'm only going to give as much as I get, though I'm not going to chase after you. I'm not going to do any of that. Like I said, if you were going to relationship with me, that's a two way street. I'm not going to work harder than you. I'm right here. And that goes for the aunts. My own children. Why I choose to lose my life doesn't matter if you're related to me by play, what does that mean? Okay.

Child: [00:43:06] So who spoke at the funeral?

[00:43:09] I think everybody.

Child: [00:43:13] It was just, you know, remembering different things.

Auntie: [00:43:22] Hmm. It was just such a blur. You don't even realize, you know, things that are happening to. Hindsight, because it's like a horrifying movie that's happening. Your mother is stretched across there and she's.

[00:43:45] She's gone. Yeah.

Auntie: [00:43:59] Grandma also like to have get together.

Child: [00:44:03] Who would she invite?

Auntie: [00:44:05] Well, she invited everybody. She invited everybody and her repeat offenders was on Great Aunt J, Great Uncle P. Great Uncle H, whoever wanted to crawl up in there and just, you know, the drinking and they just get so it was their get togethers was pretty freaking scary. Yes, man. It's a lot of alcoholism in his family. A lot of that going on, a lot of dysfunction like you just can't have a party without somebody being sized up. Know I do.

Child: [00:44:51] Ok.

Child: [00:44:53] Would she ever invite like the haves

Auntie: [00:44:58] She would like Great Aunt R would come. her and Great Aunt K she she never really got along with Great Aunt K? Not at all. Great Uncle M wasn't coming because he just he just wasn't.

Auntie: [00:45:13] That's the one who went to Ithaca College.

Auntie: [00:45:18] Yeah. The have nots for a little bit more, all a little bit more real with it. They wasn't trying to put on an air versus the haves where everything had to be just so like after a while, the have nots would be like looking hideous. Well, you saw. You know. I only could take so much of it, and then I would leave because just the alcoholism was very triggering for me, so I didn't like it, so I won't stay for that.

Child: [00:46:12] What's a what's a fond childhood

[00:46:13] Memory of yours? Childhood memory.

Auntie: [00:46:29] Christmas, as a young girl, there's just so many gifts and having candy out and fruit and mommy making dinner and stuff, being able to just hang out with her, everything was good until I like I said, I started seeing the alcohol. Then it's like. And playing hooky from school every now and again, we can play hooky from school, and she would take us to McDonald's.

[00:47:09] Was good fun times.

Child: [00:47:23] Kg Coke.

Auntie: [00:47:25] I thought so. Now I thought so now some of the dishes, like livers and onions. But I mean, nobody's livers and onions

Child: [00:47:40] Looking at me for it, that's what you do with

Auntie: [00:47:42] The liver and onions.

Child: [00:47:44] Did she ever pass down recipes?

Auntie: [00:47:49] Some of the things I did learn for her, but then I wound up treat tweet tweaking like she used to make potato salad so well, and then somebody somehow someway told her to put dill pickles in the potato salad. I'm like, Oh, who in the hell? So no, I learned it, but then I ain't putting no dill pickles. Nowhere. And I wound up putting relish. So it's like certain things I learned from her, like making chicken and rice. I like neck bones and rice chicken and noodles spaghetti. Learn to tweak it. I just thought to tweak it a little bit. So yeah, like I could make gravy from scratch like her. Yeah, I thought she could cook. Your mother will say something different. Yeah.

Child: [00:48:49] What what do you feel like she passed out?

Auntie: [00:48:54] I feel like she passed down tenacity and strength because it must be. It had to be very hard to raise kids and you are functionally illiterate. It must have been scary for her to have to hide that even though I knew it. I've been signing out, Dss forms all kinds of stuff ever since I was like eight years old. You know, trying to fit in in a world that didn't think that that

you were beautiful. You know, trying to do the best that you can do with very limited skills. But she was able to do, you know, the best that she could? I beginning, I've learned more about her since she's been gone than when she was alive. So. And when you know how to do better, you should do better when you know better, do better. You know.

Child: [00:50:02] How did you learn more now that she's gone?

Auntie: [00:50:06] Because I don't see her from I don't see her through a child's eye. I see her as an adult, as a person first and then as a woman and then having this awesome responsibility to be a mother. See, we look at our parents first as these godlike figures like they're going to figure it out, not realizing that they were children. They were people. They had dreams and aspirations and all that. And when you strip that away, the title of mother parent, this woman who is that person, well, they're a person. They bleed just like you. They had dreams and thoughts and all that, just like you. You know, I challenge everybody, you know, take your take your mother or father off of that godlike pedestal because you'll find that they're a person just like you, that with thoughts and dreams and all of that. That's why I know her better now. You know, and when you see that your dream is deferred or it's just not going to come to fruition, how that must feel. How stripped you must feel, how disappointing and depressing that must be. You know. But she went from being on social service to being a dietary aide up at Treason house and learning how to read. That was just people may think, you know, that's nothing, but that was everything to her, for her to be able to confess that to me, even though I've known it for years.

Child: [00:51:50] She confessed it?

Auntie: [00:51:51] She did it. Yeah, I remember we were on Sheridan Avenue when she said she wanted to talk to me about something. And she's like, You know, I don't read that well. Ok. She wanted to get this promotion at work, and she confessed it to them. That she couldn't read that while. And so she started going they had a program of a Teresain house that she started going to-- to learn how to read. Imagine that. You're over 40 years old telling your adult daughter that you can't read. That's humbling. But that showed me-- that took so much strength to do that.

Child: [00:52:43] You know,

Auntie: [00:52:45] For me to understand the importance of education and why is this so important to me? Why when people say, why do you do this? That's why. Because I know what it looks like when you don't. And why she made fun of me, but then secretly needed me.

Child: [00:53:13] Hmm. She'll make fun of you.

Auntie: [00:53:18] Yeah. Well, you talking all that white people talk. Don't worry, you would get it too, because she would just be-- "you talking like those white people.

[00:53:27] This and that and the other". Yeah.

Auntie: [00:53:35] But then when something came in the mail or something, you know, whatever she called me, come and read it and understand. She finally told me that she was she was proud of me, and she thanks me. It was the last conversation I had with her. Then she was gone. I didn't think I would ever hear those words from her. Because I didn't think that she was proud of me, she never said so.

Auntie: [00:54:35] I hope there's a fun part of this assignment, because I feel like I should go drink something.

Child: [00:54:39] Hmm. There is a fun part of this assignment. I think that this is one of those things where. Like, I feel like I'm doing like a like a profile on like. Each person in our family. I'm starting with you and then my mom and just sort of getting perspective on the way that y'all like, viewed grandma. And I'm trying to enter it through the funeral because I was there. I was at the funeral, but I only remember like bits and pieces because of a child like I remember like. And then also, I was quickly like after the after the what what's the what do you call the part when you eat, where you pass the repast? We got our food and we were told to leave. So I left. So I'm like trying to gain like a I'm trying to get a clearer picture of how the funeral went. And then how we got to where we are like, because I just don't know anything about

Auntie: [00:55:53] Like it was just so much dysfunction in this family. A lot of bup bup bup bup bup bup. And nobody really sits down and deals with the elephant in the room. That's another

thing I learned from this family as a young child. It's like, why don't you just ask them? I was always that kid. Why don't you just

Child: [00:56:12] Ask,

Auntie: [00:56:13] Why do we have to walk around the shroud of secrecy? So one of the things I do with my children is when I'm going to ask you something, I'm just going to ask him. I don't like dealing with the elephant in the room. I had to tiptoe around, you know, let's just deal with it. So a lot of times things was not told to me because I'm going to deal with this out in front right now because I don't do well with secrecy. Secret, secret, secret secret. Because I feel if you have to work in secret like that, something about you is not right. Something about you is not right. It's just not. And and it's a very toxic person, she always has been, always has been. Ever since I remember her, even that little little kid, she's always been a very toxic person, just like, just say, untruths, just all kinds of stuff. And I'm sure she got her own side. But from where I sit, you just said stuff just to keep the keep it juicy, you know, keep it juicy, you know, even through the even through the funeral, the whole thing, we're in for the funeral and then make no sense. You know, Brenda, you could do it, Brenda, you could do it as the oldest. That's what happens with the oldest.

Auntie: [00:57:33] It falls on the shoulders of the oldest person, and that just wasn't fair to me. It wasn't to tell me, Oh, I don't have it. What makes you think I have five children? Two? Nobody asked me that day. I was taken to court because my soon to be ex-husband told the court that I

had lost my mind and he wanted to take immediate custody of my kids. So on the day my mother died at three o'clock in the afternoon, I was at court fighting for custody for my kids. None of my sisters came to my aid. Now you try that burying your mother and fighting for your kids. Yeah, I was pissed off. Yes. I almost beat the crap out of hand at that funeral. Your mother went and got Tammy because I had enough of her. And her a genie. You should sit down there and just stir the pot, whatever, sound good. Throw it in and sound good. Sound good. Sound good. Poison, poison, poison. Poison poison because it's so salacious and so juicy and you just got to do it. Because it sounds kind of boring when you say, well, no, she didn't have a she had a very small insurance policy that was divvied up by the for between the four of us. That sounds pretty frickin boring, though, doesn't it? Wound up with what? When I went up with fifteen hundred dollars? Well, it's amazing because the funeral was over \$5000.

Auntie: [00:59:23] How many people put to it? In order to break the break, the ground at Graceland was twelve hundred dollars to make this stuff up. They don't accept insurance. How did you think it was done? That's the part that hurts me. So while you are difficult to do and my life was so wonderful and it matter. You just come in here with your pocketbook. Meanwhile, everybody, everybody else, I eat me, I saw sweat on me. I went on about my way. My sisters conspired, except whatever they wanted, both of them. Decided not to speak to me for what I do. All I did was bury my mother. Oh, you just move so fast. What was I supposed to do with her? Try to keep you in the loop.[...] Sure about that. They didn't want no hard facts. They didn't want that because the hard facts is boring, their storage fees when someone dies. They're not. They're only going to hold their bodies so long. You've got to make these decisions like boom, boom,

boom, boom. The moment the caretaker comes there, undertaker comes and takes your loved one is boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

Auntie: [01:01:13] It's a business. You might be over there crying, but they're not you sitting over there. Oh my God, mom and dad. Yeah, but we got a package over here. You know, we got the going home package all the way down to the proper package. Would you owned up? And that's what happened. How much money you got. Running down the social service social service wouldn't help me. Who pocketed came out? I just put due payment arrangements. I haven't received a dime from any of my sisters or brothers to this day. Why mommy doesn't have a headstone? Gee, I can't afford it. I refuse to do it because I don't go to graveyards anyway, had it my way I would have cremated. You won't go to graveyards. Graveyards to do what? Talk to who. She's not there. Why would I go? You know, first one that really asked me my truth in all of this. You know, first one. I was I was beyond her when it came to my aid. A man right in there, he knew me 30 days. He came to my aid. He did nothing. I ain't got it. I didn't have it either. I had to figure it out. And then for you to spread so much poison through the family.

Auntie: [01:03:11] How is it fair to me and not one person picked up the phone and said, Brendan, is this true? One. How? So I suffered by myself. So, no, I won't be putting my my children through that. There will be no payouts. There'll be no funerals and caskets and all of that. Get some gas in a match lighting up. I have one on the hot. That's a hard that's a hard because it's hard, it's hard, even when you know somebody sitting there apologizing, you don't want hear that apology is insulting. It's insulting. It took me a long time to even hear it swam

deal with elephants in the room. You don't want you don't want me to confront it. Last person you need to tell is me because I will confront head on with it. I don't play that. I don't play the elephant in the room. Game No. No. I don't do Big Brother House. I don't even like the show. I don't. I don't even like I will not watch it. No, because secrets will destroy a family. It's what it's done here. It will destroy it. Could never get that back. You know, you just can't. Ann's not speaking to me right now. One to one good question. Let me know when you find out

Child: [01:05:11] And who do you know what's going

Auntie: [01:05:14] On with? I have no idea. And guess what? I don't care. Last time she called me for help when she was stuck in Atlanta, I told her flat out, I'm willing to get you up here. I don't know what happened down there. A whole bunch of stuff went on down there in Atlanta when she started losing her mind and carrying on. I said, But you can't stay with me. You cannot stay with me. So you won't be homeless if you get up here. Last thing. I won't even I will not even tolerate it and is not even a factor on my mind. She's not. If she had a funeral, I wouldn't have tendered what. She made it painfully clear to me that I mean nothing to her and I don't hate her. I'm literally indifferent. I'm literally indifferent. You are literally not. You are a non-factor, literally. I don't have to know you. I never knew I was going to get to this point. I don't hate her, I don't wish anything for her good or bad. I don't. You sometimes you do a little too much.

Child: [01:06:35] Has she seen a doctor?

Auntie: [01:06:37] He was reportedly, but Manny, I couldn't tell you that girl needs some professional help. This one woman told me when she was down in Atlanta, something about somebody put something in her drink or her weed or something, and that's how that was the results of it. She, you know, it exacerbated whatever was going on with her. I've seen her in a mental hospital in L.A. I'm gone down there. I've seen it. And [...] recently told me how basically, she said when she gets to when she turns 40, she's leaving, she's tired of raising kids, and that's it. And so that's what happened. She got up and left. And this was told to me recently.

Child: [01:07:21] So she had this plan.

Auntie: [01:07:22] Yeah. When she gets to 40, that's it.

Child: [01:07:27] I'm done with her underage kids. Yeah, what? What, whatever growing them. She Oh, I can't.

Auntie: [01:07:37] I can't debate that or what. I just don't. That's where I was the. I know I can't worry about. It's not my loss, it's not my game, it's not anything. No, I can't worry about people who just have no they just don't care about me, I just can't, can't worry about it. I take you where you at. You want to get to know me. I'll get to know you. We're doing life together, blah blah blah blah blah. Great. But I'm not going to let you hurt me all in the name of family. No, no. That can go to my own kids. Some kids, I'm real close to other kids. Not so much because I'm

not going to let you hurt me. Not in the name of family. No, I'm not going to let anybody do that.
That's what I've learned out of this

Child: [01:08:41] Family,

Auntie: [01:08:43] And it's not that I hate you because I don't hate anybody to be a real honest with you. I don't hate them. I don't even hate em with everything I should have done. I don't hate them. I don't. I offer her meaning I don't think about it. I don't sit up at night. If she call me right now, hey, how are you doing? Oh, OK, everything's good. All right. Well. I have no love for her, I have no hate for her. I just love her. Yes. Oh my.