

"All our old homes are gone until we come calling":

A Reading from Power in the Blood, a work in progress

Linda Tate

In many ways, this project began during two summers I spent at a farmhouse seven miles east of Murray, Kentucky, just twenty miles or so from where my grandmother, Fannie Tate, had been born and raised. When I arrived that first summer, I came with scant information—Fannie's maiden name, her place of birth, and her date of birth. The story that I have reconstructed in Power in the Blood evolved from that tiny scrap of information, gleaned from her death certificate. Since that time, this story has unfolded in the most amazing way, and I have traveled a journey I little expected. The majority of the book is "true" in the sense that it recounts people, names, dates, experiences, and even very small details that were passed to me either through written documentation or through oral history. By piecing together a wide variety of sources, I have been able to imagine--with quite a bit of accuracy, I believe--the lives of my ancestors.

While my book began as a search for my Native American ancestry, that journey became just one of several that helped me to identify my own place in the world, a result I did not--but probably should have--anticipated. My work on Power in the Blood has led me to a much deeper understanding of

- Cherokee colonization, intermarriage with whites, and escape from dominant society;
- the sorrowful tale of the inhabitants of the Land Between the Rivers (later, post-TVA, the Land Between the Lakes), a remote region in western Kentucky and Tennessee;
- the role that family violence and abuse plays on all family members for generations to come;
- the way in which my own life has been shaped by family events of the nineteenth century;

- silenced history, both LARGE, "public" history (via the Cherokees and the LBR) and "SMALL," PRIVATE history (family history);
- the power of breaking that silence;
- and the way in which scholarship and research could ultimately help to heal a generations-long legacy of family suffering and dislocation.

I like to think that, through my work, I've brought some of the family home again. What follows are selected excerpts from throughout the book. I begin with the opening poem, "The Journey."

The Journey

*In the map of my dreams,
I am always coming home.
Only here do I lose the way,
here where Fannie,
gone since I was five,
has been quietly living all along.*

*I pick my way carefully,
balance neatly on stones across Laura Furnace Creek,
search for the path.*

*I come to the house,
hidden by tall weeds and saplings,
overgrown bushes,
a thicket of sumac.*

*I open the door and step inside the dark house,
the dusty streams of light filtering
through the thick slats of venetian blinds.*

*I make my way down endless halls.
The winding journey of roads
echoes as I go where I have to go,
pulls me into a room of stone walls,
a womb of musk and damp.*

*She's busy at the mouth of the fireplace,
an old woman,
hunched on her stool,
squirrel and cornbread sizzling as*

they fall into the skillets.

*I stand safely
on the linoleum of the frame house,
yearn for the stones of the earthen cave.*

*She turns,
her skin craggy and old,
peers at me,
her face unflinching,
a hard wall against which I must push,
my joy sliced by the hurt of her leaving.*

*“Who are you?”
she asks.*

*“Don’t you know me?”
I reply.
“We used to dance in this kitchen.
You taught me to make cornbread.
You gave me the names for
muscadine,
sarvis,
bloodroot,
and
sassafras.
Don’t you know me?”*

*Her cold silence
measures the lines of my face,
weighs the light in my eyes,
the scrutiny of the ancestors,
their stories carved into one face peering out at me.*

*“I had a sweet girl baby once,”
she says.*

*“She’s been lost a long time.
But you look nothing like her.”*

“No. I don’t see her in you.”

*The old woman’s face
falls back to stone.
Her gaze drops.
She turns to the fire,
her silent back*

*the only message
left for me to read.*

LINDA'S STORY, 1988

On a cold day in March, I found myself on a snow-covered trail, making my way up a mountain I'd never seen before. It was the beginning of the season for the Mt. LeConte hiking lodge in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and all of the crew members were hiking up together that day. I was, by far, the least experienced hiker, and I quickly got left behind to fend for myself. The snow was coming down in thick, heavy flakes, muffling the mountain sounds I would come to know later. Even though I was lagging behind the others, I was doing pretty well until I hit Alum Cave, and then I was stumped. The snow was falling so hard that all the footprints were filled in, and I couldn't see how the others had made their way past this overhanging cliff. I could only make out two ways to go: up underneath the cliff or up over a tangled mess of tree roots. The ground underneath the cliff seemed steep, treacherously so, and I could not imagine taking that path. But the tree roots were encrusted with thick coats of ice, and since I didn't have crampons with me, it appeared to be an equally precarious way to go. Making matters worse was that just to the left of the trail, on the opposite side from the cliff path, the mountain dropped off precipitously. If I took a misstep, I'd go plummeting off the side, and that would be the end of me.

After some consideration, I decided to pull myself up over the tree roots, an ordeal which took thirty minutes or thereabouts. Later, I'd learn that the cliff path is the only way to go and that no one in her right mind would pull herself over the tree roots. But I made it, and I went on. The trail got steeper and steeper, the sheer drop-offs more and more numerous, cable hand-holds appearing now on a much too regular basis. Still I kept on, because the day was growing longer, and the snow was growing thicker. My fear, which had been mounting steadily since the Alum

Cave scare, was finally relieved when I saw a man coming toward me on the trail. John, the winter caretaker at the lodge, had been sent to find me, and he'd come bearing a thermos of hot chocolate. I was still a mile from the summit, but while I remained cold and tired, I was no longer scared.

When we got to the top, I learned that it was eight below Fahrenheit, with no wind chill figured in. Eight inches of snow had fallen as I had hiked up the mountain. LeConte's a station for the National Weather Service, but beyond these official figures, it was simply bitterly cold, and as we didn't yet have new barrels of kerosene, the annual airlift of supplies still being two or three days off, we had to conserve what little fuel we did have. The kitchen, just up the hill from my cabin, was so cold that when we accidentally spilled water on the floor, water we'd hauled up in buckets from the spring, it froze instantly on contact, our own little ice rink right there where we cooked and ate. On the way back to my cabin, I went to use the pit toilets and discovered a dead mouse next to my foot, a frozen corpse caught in the midst of scurrying for food. When I finally returned to my room, only to discover a boomer squirrel that had died trying to burrow its way into the warmth of my mattress, I seriously reconsidered the wisdom of taking this job.

That night, as I myself burrowed into this warmth, snuggled under my down sleeping bag, listened to the flames licking the inside of the black kerosene stove, I thought about what had brought me here. That hike up the mountain had been long, hard, cold--frightening too, much of the way. But it had given me hours of silence and solitude, plenty of time to meditate on this journey so far from the sterile walls of the university. What the hell was I doing here, nearly alone on top of this mountain? What did I think I'd find up here in this cold retreat?

If you had asked me then why I had taken the job at LeConte, I would have told you the wild and wonderful story of my grandmother Fannie. She had always been on the edge of my

vision, moving past me, up close to me, a shadow flickering so faintly that if I turned to look she would fly away again. She had died when I was five, but she was always coming around, haunting my dreams, teasing at the edges of my heart. In those short years before she died, my grandmother chanted the mantra of her past in one solitary sentence, called out over and over again: "My mama was a little Indian." Just as my grandmother's shadow danced at the edge of sight, so too the whispered knowledge of our Cherokee past called to me, a gossamer thread linking us to an ancient time. But no matter how I had strained to hear, the tale had remained outside my reach, just on the margin of blood. What had happened to our Indian name? Where had it gone?

One night before I took the first steps of this journey, just before I went to LeConte, a new friend I was getting to know said to me, "What's your story, Linda?"

I laughed and said, "Oh, I don't have a story."

"Everyone has a story," he said. "What's yours?"

I laughed again, told him I didn't have one, nothing interesting or out of the ordinary, nothing worth telling. At the time, I believed it--or wanted to believe it. But once I began listening, paying attention, I began to hear the stories of the past, of those who went before me, and little by little, I began to say my own story.

The journey back took me to places I never imagined were there; whispered stories I could still hear if I could somehow learn to listen; faces and lives, names and dates that could live again for me, play out the story of generations. All those who went before me, who extended back for generations behind my father, behind even his mother, stretching far, far back into the early nineteenth century--all those ancient voices were waiting for me.

As I began to sense their presence, I did everything in my power to invite them into my life. Just as I had immersed myself in books as a child, I now read books about people who lived in Kentucky and Tennessee, about Cherokees who lived in the Smoky Mountains. I traveled endless miles through Appalachia and its cousins--eastern and central Tennessee, northeastern Alabama, the Land Between the Lakes, southern Illinois. I buried myself in the dusty dank of archives and libraries, basement rooms in rural courthouses. I endured headache after headache as I wound through countless rolls of microfilm, eyes smarting by the end of each weary workday. I tramped through cemeteries, searched out old homesites, lived for two summers near my ancestral land. For the first time, I met countless distant relatives who began to recall the parts of the story they knew. I gathered every piece of the puzzle I could.

And slowly, quietly at first, but increasingly louder, until it was almost a roar, I began to hear those who went before. Those ancestors began to tell their story, the seeds of my own, and I listened as their voices wavered on the wind. My great-great-grandmother Louisiana Bybee Bullock began to tell her story, and I heard my grandmother Fannie's voice calling to me. My story and theirs mingle together in my mouth, one a thread in the next, a woven fabric of pain and persistence their legacy to me. Though it was difficult to listen, harder still to bear witness to their lives by lending my voice to theirs, in the end it was the only way I could set myself back on the path.

LOUISIANA'S STORY, 1902

Mama's up there on that hill, alying in that grave. Can't hardly believe she is gone. Seems like if I picture her to my mind, tucking that long, black hair up into her bonnet of a night, if I can just picture it to myself strong enough, bright enough, you know, I'll be able to call her back. Losing

George Ann the way we did and now Mama, well, it has just about broke my heart. It's been a hard scrabble life for all us Bybees and Bullocks, weren't hardly nothing keeping us going, but now with my mama gone and one of my girls passed with her and what happened all along, well, it is sometimes more than one woman can bear.

We brought George Ann home to be buried up on that hill next to Mama, next to Martha, next to that little baby of Ella's that died. That day we buried George Ann is burned on my memory, a cold, dampish day, adrizzing down on us, with the wet, musky leaves whipping about our feet, us stamping 'em down as we trudged up that hill. We buried George Ann in the old way, just like we did Mama. We put her in the ground underneath those twin white oaks, put a rock there to mark the place, but we didn't carve nothing, didn't mound no dirt on top of the grave like some of the others does around here. We buried her with her feet facing the setting sun, and we left that old rock there, knowing amongst ourselves who was buried there, her who we loved, and giving her back to the earth, letting her go in peace.

But I was weeping all through that day. Seems like that day is still crying tears in my heart. Tears trickling down my face, wetness in and out of these wrinkles, so much wet I couldn't tell if it were the rain or the tears agetting in my eyes, making it hard to see. With all what had happened to Ella and to her baby, losing Mama, and then George Ann just a few weeks later, I commenced to weeping, started up a weeping that did not end till some days after we put George Ann in the ground. It felt like I hadn't never grieved Mama dying nor what happened to Ella, losing that baby, all those hurts that had happened all along. When George Ann died, the tears started slipping out and rolling down my face, paying me no more mind than the breath coming in and out of me stops and tells me what it's adoining. I weeped the same as I took breath.

After we buried her up on the hill that day, nothing was ever quite the same with me again. I'd already been having my crazy spells, but now I just grew some restless, that's all I can name it. It'd be time to go to sleep at night, and we'd all bed down on the ticks, but no matter how tired I was, I couldn't take myself on off to sleep. My mind would start to working in the night. What got to playing in my mind more than anything was how I hadn't saved my girls, hadn't done enough for them. Pictures of Ella and her little baby would float through my mind. I'd think I was about going to drift off, and here'd come Ella that awful night I first gone crazy. I'd think about George Ann and losing her the way I did, wondering if I could have done something to keep her alive. I'd get to worrying so till I couldn't stand to be in the bed a second longer. I'd get up and go out to the smokehouse, find me the best ham we got out there, and start out over to Mary Jane and Leet's. The way everyone else in the family tells it this was proof positive that I was getting addled, losing my mind. But this was when I felt the clearest, I'll tell you that. Those nights I'd go out there and get a ham and start off to Mary Jane's cabin, I was fixing on a way to help my girls, to be some solace to 'em. It seemed a way to make things right. I still do this many a night, must seem almost like I'm walking in my sleep, like I don't know what I'm doing. But I do. I want to feed my girls, I want to keep 'em alive.

It seems like I can't make nothing right, can't do nothing for my younguns or their babies. Never did stand up to George, and here now I've lost my girl and that baby and my own mama. And that breaks my heart more than anything. Try as I might, I can't call Mama back to me. I search for her face, I call out for her touch. But all I see is Ella and that dead baby, the fevered face of George Ann. Their faces push my mama away. Seems like if I can just cry out to where she could hear she'd come flying back to me, back here to rock her oldest girl in her arms,

“Shush, shush, Lucy-girl, hush on down. It’s all right, baby.” Oh, how I long for her to cradle me in her arms and rock me so.

But she’s gone, and I’m alone. Whenever I think of my mama, I think of those nights lying in that cabin near Dover when I was a girl, when we had just come from off there in Jackson County. I’d be lying on that straw tick, having trouble going to sleep even then, tossing and turning, whether it was the hot stickiness of July that was keeping me awake or whether I was shivering in the cold of the year, just a thin little quilt to keep me warm. I’m sure I made a heap of noise, and it must have bothered Mama and Daddy, but Mama would just say, “Hush on down, Lucy-girl. Just gentle down, sweet one.” Nothing to it, and off I would go to sleep, Mama’s comforting voice sounding in my mind.

Maybe that’s why it was always her nighttime ritual in my cabin here with George that I call back to my mind even now. When I think of Mama, I picture her putting on that long gown of hers and then taking her long, long, dark hair, winding it tight, and tying it all up in a nightcap. She was an old, old woman when she died, that sweet and lovely Nancy Bybee, and I surely would give anything to see her tie that hair up again one more time.

FANNIE'S STORY, 1928

Sometime after I’d been noticing those preaching tents and hearing the Lord calling my voice, we were playing in Cairo, Illinois, and it got to raining so bad that we had to shut down the carnival for a day. We had a free spot of time, and I wandered on over to that Billy Sunday revival just like I’d always been doing that.

That Thursday night I slipped into Sunday’s tent turned my life upside down and inside out, set me on the right track, the road that would lead me to God. I’d been getting under conviction, passing by those tents as we jumped from town to town. But that night when I went

into that tent, I had no idea what was in store. I got there right as the service was starting. I slipped into the back where no one would see me, where I could watch what was going on but not be noticed, you know. At first, there was a whole lot of music. It was something to hear all right. All kinds of instruments up there, you know--a piano, of course, but also a guitar and a harmonica and a banjo, and I don't know what all. I hadn't never seen nothing like it at Crocketts Creek or Union Grove. And they were singing, all kinds of hymns that wasn't a bit hard to catch on to. Since they traveled all around like they did, they didn't have no hymnals, and they just got to singing songs that lots of folks already knew, just livelier 'em up some, and then too they'd sing songs that was easy to learn right then and there. We sung a good long time that night, and I sure did enjoy it, but the song that I remember more than anything else was "Power in the Blood." God'd been working on me already, I told you that, and I'd been thinking I didn't have nothing to give over to God, 'cause I just didn't think Jesus had laid down and died for a sinner like me. All the things I done--all the men I'd gone with all those years, the way I'd left off from Beech Bluff and left my girls behind, running off with Zach in the middle of the night on that motorcycle, that wild carnival crowd I was running with--well, I just didn't see how God could set me right after all I done.

But I listened to the words of that song, and I begun to sing it along with them. "There is power, power, wonder-working power / In the blood of the Lamb." We sang it over and over and tears begin to stream down my face. I was feeling the hand of God working on me, reaching down into my heart, touching me, softening me up, making me ready to hear what Billy Sunday was gonna have to say. After a time of singing and praying and shouting, everybody sort of settled down when Billy Sunday took the stage, got up there behind the pulpit. It was hot and sticky that night, one of those July nights in southern Illinois down along the river when the rain

that's been coming down all day ain't done a thing to cool off the air, but instead has just made it stickier, hotter even, if you could believe that's possible. The air was close and thick in that tent, and like most of the other ladies around me, I'd already picked up one of those paper fans they'd had laying in the seat when I got there. It wasn't one of those funeral home fans like you get at most churches now; it was a special Billy Sunday fan, proclaiming the blessings of God, and I had it for the longest time, reminding me of the day the Lord reached out and claimed me for his own.

So up to the pulpit went Billy Sunday, and he begun talking and preaching, calling out the word of God. I don't remember a whole lot of what he said, it was more like I was in some kind of a trance. The Lord laid heavy on my heart; I got under conviction in a way that I needed to, heavy, hot, tears beginning to slide down the inside of me. Oh, I knew God wanted me then. I knew my rambling days had to come to an end. I sat there thinking, "This can't be. The only thing I've got keeping me alive is that carnival, I've got to keep on working. Ain't no other way for me to live."

But while Billy Sunday was talking, God was working on my heart, and he just kept saying over and over to me, "You got to leave that Princess Olga, Fannie. You can't work on that show no longer."

I wrestled and struggled. Heard some of what Billy Sunday was saying, but heard more what was going on in my heart. My heart got to pounding with all what was going on inside me, I got to where I could hardly stand to sit there a minute longer, didn't know what was going to happen me, how I was going to take care of myself, but by the time Billy Sunday asked that piano player to come back up to the front and he started up with the invitation, well I knew I was done for and that I was gonna have to go on down to the front.

The pianist started to play a slow, mournful song down real low, and one of the singers come up to the front and begun to sing along, real quiet like, so you could still hear Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday, he called out, "All heads bowed. All eyes closed. Listen to the voice of Jesus tonight, brother. Let him talk to you tonight, dear sister."

And the singer, he sang these words, "Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling / Calling for you and for me. / See by the portals he's watching and waiting / Calling, oh, sinner, come home."

I thought of my babies, my Grace and my Effie and my Georgie. Sometimes, though they don't believe a word of it now, I did miss them so much my heart would almost get to breaking for them, but I'd just gather myself together and get on with the business at hand. I had to take care of myself, had to stay alive, and I just didn't have the luxury of feeling sorry for myself, thinking all those sad thoughts of home. So when the singer sung those words--"Come home"--ooh, I thought of my girls. Missing 'em so much I couldn't hardly ever stand to think on it. Wondering what they was doing without their mama.

And Billy Sunday, he just kept on. "All heads bowed. All eyes closed. No one looking around. Ask yourself tonight, dear sister, are you right with the Lord? Oh, brother, if he come on a cloud of glory tonight and called his children home, would you fly up with him into heaven or you would be one of the many left behind, awailing and agnashing your teeth? You can fly on home to him tonight, dear sinner, all you got to do is ask him for his love and his mercy."

And still the singer went on singing. "Come home, Come home / Ye who are weary come home / Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling / Calling, oh, sinner, come home."

Oh, I *was* weary, that was the plain truth of it. I knew what the singer was singing. I missed my girls, I missed my mama, my heart was still breaking over losing my daddy all those

years ago. I wanted to go home, wanted to get there so badly. Didn't feel like I rightly had a home on earth to call my own anymore, nobody who cared about old Fannie, nobody who'd have to take me in. I'd been gone so long out of there and I'd done so many bad things I just didn't think none of 'em would ever take me in. But here Billy Sunday was saying that Jesus would, that the Lord would make a place for me and then I could be home in my heart.

And Billy Sunday, he just kept on. And that singer, he kept on. And the Lord, oh the Lord most of all, he kept on, working on me and telling me it was time to give it over to him.

I guess in the end God just laid so heavy on my heart that I didn't have no choice but to run on down to the altar. When I finally decided to go on down there, I flew out of my seat and got myself down there as fast as I could, I just kindly flung myself on that altar. I always have been an emotional woman, I guess you could say. I've always had that quick temper that could flare up, and I was always quick to take up with a man, and once I got the Lord working in me, I've always been one who wasn't afraid to shout out her blessing. And that night was no exception. It was the start of a lifetime of praising God and shouting out my salvation.

I'll never forget the smell of that canvas at Billy Sunday's revival meeting, the feel of those bodies all jammed up together under a tent on a hot, sticky night, the wind flapping that canvas back and forth from time to time. It felt like home to me, is what I guess you could say. So I have just always said that I traded one tent for another.

LINDA'S STORY, 1998

As we set out to look for the cemetery, my friend Sue took a picture of me standing at the trail entrance, holding the TVA map. I look very self-assured, almost cocky, certain as I am that we'll just be able to walk right up to the cemetery and that I'm about to pay homage to my ancestors. We started with a rather leisurely stroll along the trail, and when we thought we'd hit

the right creek bed, we turned to the left and began looking for unmarked gravestones. Neither of us had ever looked for a small cluster of cemetery rocks in a wooded thicket, but we thought we'd know it when we saw it. It was June, ticks were everywhere, and we were also worried about encountering snakes. But we bushwhacked with abandon, our long sleeves and long pants legs clinging to our skin, sweat pouring down our faces and running into our eyes.

We finally came out to a clearing, and Sue was certain that this was where the homeplace had been and that the graves must be nearby. We looked and looked and looked. We'd probably been at it for three hours, and the day was creeping into early afternoon. Not the best time to be out in the brutal heat of this Kentucky June.

"You know," I finally said to Sue, "I believe the ancestors are saying I need some face time with other relatives." I told her I'd call the TVA and see if they had a family contact for the cemetery.

Sue is not one to be daunted, and it wasn't easy to convince her that we needed to quit. After all, she was headed home the next day, and she was looking forward to sharing the moment of discovery with me. I appreciated her camaraderie but told her it was time to head back to the farmhouse nevertheless.

I knew with absolute certainty that the ancestors were telling me that more had to happen. There I was. I'd done all the work I needed to. The paper work. The research. I'd followed maps all the way to western Kentucky. I'd even gotten myself within a few hundred yards of the place as I would discover later. But something inside told me that I needed to connect with real live people. Only then would I be able to come all the way home. I had to go beyond books, even beyond searching an anonymous forest before the entire story would be revealed to me.

* * *A couple of weeks later, after having located several distant relatives through a

series of seemingly miraculous coincidences, eleven of us gathered in the TVA parking lot, and we formed a caravan of three jeeps to head back into the cemetery. The TVA officials decided that the best way in would be to take the jeeps on the North-South Trail itself, a daunting prospect as this is only a hiking trail, just barely able to accommodate these wide vehicles. It had rained hard the night before, and the trail was muddy. The jeeps slid around, sending shock waves through us when there were drop offs and we threatened to leave the path. We were tossed from side to side, and I was in the jeep with the 87-year-old Ferbie, my grandmother's first cousin, a woman I'd just met that morning. She sat in the front seat, holding on tight, smiling, chattering, happy to be going to the cemetery for the first time in nearly forty years.

On this July day in 1996, we found the markers. Plain, simple stones, nearly covered by brush, branches, weeds. Nothing was scratched into the rocks. If you didn't know graves were there, you would have walked right by them. A more humble cemetery I had never seen.

Ferbie almost ran from the jeep to the graves. As soon as we had parked and she saw the hill, she knew just where she was. She darted and leapt with the speed and grace of a twenty-year-old girl, and when we all caught up with her, she was dashing from rock to rock, calling out the names of those who were buried there.

We posed for a picture, standing next to those plain rocks, eleven of us newly met, anciently connected.

* * *We spent that summer getting together, looking at photographs, telling stories, getting to know each other. The next summer, we staged the first-ever, large-scale reunion of folks who had descended from George and Louisiana. We had been delighted to discover that the cemetery still legally belonged to us and that we were free to clean it up, fence it in, erect markers, just about anything we wanted to do. The men spent the morning building a fence

around the cemetery, and the women worked on clearing away old brush and other debris from around the graves. We planted flowers at each rock that marks a grave, and we fashioned our own tombstones out of concrete.

Eighty of us gathered there in that tiny little cemetery, almost all of us descendants of the people who are buried there. Everyone agreed that George and Louisiana and George's sister Martha were there. Some thought that Louisiana's mother Nancy must be there too. Others thought George and Louisiana's daughter George Ann was buried there, and then some of the women went off by themselves and began to whisper about what had happened to their daughter Ella.

"That's her baby there, that's buried right next to George," they said in hushed tones. "That's George's baby."

No one disputed this claim. Everyone got quiet and sad, eyes downcast, voices low.

"Isn't it a shame what all happened back in that family?" someone said. "Poor, poor Ella. We'll never know what all she went through."

The one thing that was known without question, the one thing all the old-timers agreed on, is the exact location of George Washington Bullock's grave.

"Oh, yes," said Evelyn, "this is Great-Grandpa's grave. I know that for a fact."

Everyone agreed. There was no disputing that. George's grave got the biggest flowers. Everyone gathered around his grave respectfully, honoring him, but they all kept their distance as well. George still ruled the family with an iron hand nearly a century after his death.

No one was quite certain which grave was Louisiana's. It seemed to be off by itself a little, and while that grave got tended, it didn't call forth any particular reverence. It was George

they were worried about, George they paid homage to, George they still named their babies after, George who was still alive in this family so many generations later.

When George and Louisiana walked up that hill to put their daughter George Ann in the ground, Ella's baby nearby, they surely never imagined there would come a day when folks wouldn't know who they had buried there. No marks on the rock, no indications of who they had laid to rest.

A century later we were left with almost nothing but questions. How could we know who was buried there? How do you separate fact from fiction? How can you ever know?

Epilogue

Slowly but surely, I unraveled the tangled mass of stories all those relatives had shared with me. It was true what Theodore Roethke had said: "In a dark time the eye begins to see." I came back to the puzzle of the past, but now I had the inner strength to begin piecing it together. My journey to wholeness--which had begun ten years earlier when I had decided to hike up that mountain and look for Fannie--was coming to a close. I had taken so many winding sidepaths to search out the truth of our family. I had spent time in the mountains of my Cherokee ancestors. I had flown out to California and talked with my uncle Henry for hours about his experiences as the youngest child of Fannie, his abusive mother. In my academic guise, I had read book after book that would help me understand the economic, cultural, social underpinnings of my family's legacy. I had dwelled in dusty archives and talked with so many newly found relatives even I couldn't keep everyone straight. I'd found the old family cemetery and the broken shards of the old homeplace, that place of pain where it all began. And miraculously, I'd found Georgie, one of

the girls from Fannie's first family, and gone back again and again to spend the night in her little house in Rosiclare, curled up under her beautiful quilts.

All these wanderings, all these sidepaths, were necessary to the journey. But always, I had returned to the main path, the trail that would take me to myself. To do that, I'd have to know not just what happened to Georgie and Henry and my father, what Fannie's life had been, what terrors clutched at Louisiana's soul when she crawled up under her daughter's house in the middle of the night. I'd also have to know what had happened to me. And to do all of that, I would have to write the story down. Only then would I be able to walk away from that old family homeplace and begin to build my own.

When I began this project, I was aware of my own sense of historical incompleteness, but I had not yet let myself bring to consciousness my profound sense of personal incompleteness. While it has been gratifying to piece together part of the story regarding our Native American lineage and thus to counteract the cultural genocide to which we and others of Indian descent have been subject, it has been even more deeply satisfying to trace the underlying psychological, emotional, and spiritual story of my family, to recover the collective memory of the soul murder family members inflicted on one another. I wholeheartedly concur with Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan, who says "We make art out of our loss."

This has truly been a shared journey toward home. Academic research, oral history interviews, visits to original sites--all of these have been immensely helpful in reconstructing a story I thought was forever lost--but in those moments of unexplained serendipity, when archival research exploded into face-to-face reunions, I like to think I had some help from those who went before. The journey back to the past--and ultimately forward to a fully realized sense of self--is a "whole journey," as N. Scott Momaday tells us, and "it is made with the whole

memory, that experience of the mind which is legendary as well as historical, personal as well as cultural" (Way 4). Louisiana and Fannie found their power in the blood of Christ. I have found my own power by listening to the numinous pulsing of my own blood, hearing the whispering calls of ancestors and dreams in the middle of the night, by following the intimations of my imagination, the prescient trace calling me home.