



Vern:
An Expose
By Edward T. Wimberley

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Dedication:

This book is dedicated to Darryl and Merrill who suffered mightily and needlessly at the hands of an emotionally distraught and ultimately sadistic mother. May the telling of this story help end her life-long reign of terror and bring them a measure of peace.

This book is likewise dedicated to Mack Suggs whose heroic advocacy on behalf of the Wimberley boys enabled them to persevere and survive a brutal childhood.

About The Author:

Edward Terrell Wimberley is a retired emeritus professor in ecology from Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, Florida. He was born in 1949 in St. Augustine, Florida and is a six-generation Floridian. This book tells the grueling story of his childhood which scarred him but did not defeat him. Terrell, or as he likes to be called “Terry,” left his home in Mayo, Florida to attend and graduate from Stetson University with a B.A. in psychology. He was also commissioned in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War but was discharged in 1973 as that war ended. Terry left Stetson to move to Pittsburgh where he attended Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. While in Pittsburgh Terry earned a Master of Social Work degree and a Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Pittsburgh. Terry served as pastor at Pine Creek Presbyterian Church and Hanover Presbyterian Church in the Pittsburgh area. Terry likewise served as assistant minister at the Riverside Church in New York and assistant minister at Bower Hill Church in Mount Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Terry’s clinical work included service as a psychotherapist at Northern Communities Mental Health in Pittsburgh and as a social worker and family therapist at Presbyterian University Hospital and the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh. In the early eighties Terry moved west and directed mental health centers for Samaritan Health System in the Sun Valley of Arizona before moving to Galveston, Texas where for eight years he directed the University of Texas Medical Branch Department of Social Work and served as assistant professor of preventive and community health. In 1989 Terry moved to Washington, DC to serve as a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellow. He worked in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the U.S. Senate. At the completion of the fellowship Terry and his family moved to Atlanta, Georgia where he served as Chair of the Department of Mental Health and Human Services and Director of the Gerontology Center at Georgia State University. In 1995 Terry moved for a final time to Southwest Florida where he became the founding dean and first faculty hire of the newly created Florida Gulf Coast University. He served there for 25 years before retiring and relocating to Aiken, South Carolina where he lives today with his wife Nancy. During his tenure in Southwest Florida Terry also served as a chaplain in a retirement community for almost 20 years. Terry has authored numerous articles in professional journals on a wide array of topics and has written four books. He is also the proud father of Tessa Wimberley, a psychologist on the staff of the Counseling Center at the University of Maryland.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to recognize the many people who assisted me in the writing of this book. I thank my wife and partner Nancy Wimberley for encouraging me to write this book and patiently reading and editing it over many iterations. I thank my brother Merrill for his willingness to read this book and help me complete it. I realize this was a painful process for him since it caused him to relive our long abusive experience. My long-term friend Anne Frick was also invaluable as she read several drafts of the manuscript and made many useful suggestions. One of my “hometown heroes” from my childhood, Jewel Barrington, also helped me greatly by reviewing the progress of my work and providing insight and feedback. One consistent insight I have garnered from working with all these people is the degree to which reading a story of abuse exacts a toll upon the reader. This story was a tough and brutal read for all of those who provided advice and insight. Consequently, I release this book with a warning to those who have been victims of abuse that this narrative may be excessively difficult to digest and may be a book that you should not read. However, for those who can and do read this book, I hope that the stories of courage and determination included herein more than compensates for the brutality and horror of the Wimberley boy’s childhood experience.

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Preface: Rationale

Given the nature of the story to follow I feel obligated to warn those who have experienced abuse to think carefully before proceeding with this book. The story herein is brutal and disturbing. I do not wish to cause any person harm from reading about the tribulations of my family. However, this is also a story of perseverance and redemption which is uplifting and worthwhile.

I have planned this book for at least the last ten years but have been repeatedly dissuaded from writing it. I am very sensitive to the problem of telling my story without preempting the stories of others. The problem is that this is the story of a family. The protagonists in this story are three young boys who all survived prolonged abuse throughout their childhood and adolescence. The perpetrators are their parents Vern and Edward, their grandparents Dave and Edith and the extended family and community who knew of their abuse and did nothing. The heroes of this story are the three survivors of this abuse - Darryl, Terrell and Merrill, and the many people who encouraged and sustained these boys through their long ordeal.

Had this abuse happened only to me then telling this story would have been a simple matter. Had I been born an “only-child” the task of telling who abused me, how and when they did these deeds and how I have overcome their ill-treatment would be straightforward because it would have been my narrative and only mine. The problem is I did not suffer through child abuse alone.

I was one of three boys - one of whom was my fraternal twin brother. We were abused together and separately and some of the worst treatment we endured involved the trauma of witnessing another brother or brothers being savaged by our sadistic mother Vern. Unavoidably the telling of my story of abuse requires relaying the experiences of my fellow-inmates detained

with me in our familial prison. Regardless of how I approach this story I can't speak of my experience without also speaking of theirs. In the interest of respecting my brother's voices, I have been reluctant to write this story fearing I would violate their privacy and further degrade their integrity.

I also procrastinated in telling this story hoping one of my other brothers would do it instead. In fact, I assumed my twin brother Darryl (a celebrated author) would have long ago told the story of Vern and her savage abuse of three sons. However, at age 70 my twin has yet to write of Vern and Edward, David and Edith and all the other characters associated with our story – people who played the roles of saints, sinners and the sacrificed. So, I am stepping in to fill the void and tell the family story as it pertains to child maltreatment within the Wimberley family.

In relaying this account, I have proceeded cautiously trying to speak for myself and insuring that, if possible, my brothers had an opportunity to see the account I present and help me edit and change the narrative to insure it is accurate and sensitive to their memories. The problem is that one of the consequences of our abuse is that I have long been estranged from my twin brother, Darryl, and am regrettably unable to let him review this manuscript as it was developed.

I am also cognizant of my cousins and Mother's family on the Morgan side of the family. The Morgan family have lionized my mother and her father Dave and have been threatening and discouraging of my effort to tell the story of David Pierpont Morgan and Vern Lamonice Morgan Wimberley as child abusers. Their story and mine have been shrouded in secrecy for fifty years and the purpose of that silence has been to save face for the Morgan clan, principally at my expense and that of my brothers Darryl and Merrill. The telling of this story will anger and

disappoint many of these relatives because I am violating the sacred family tenet of secrecy at all cost. Some secrets are just too costly to keep.

So ultimately the challenge of writing an account about our victimization is that there are many who don't want the story told or want it sanitized to insure they are not embarrassed or "outed." If I were to subscribe to this philosophy I would have never expressed myself or told our story, and the dirty family secret of our treatment would perish with me and my two brothers. The problem is that at 70 I am no longer willing to participate in the long-standing family cover-up of my parents' and grandparents' abusive misdeeds. This account will be frank and as accurate as possible. It will anger and alienate some in my home community and encourage others. My prayer is that my words will be as accurate and sensitive as possible and will not add insult to injury among the abused. Even so, I realize that this narrative will annoy many in my family and community.

Although I value being part of my extended family and community I will not have my right to free expression further curtailed and compromised in the interest of helping family and friends perpetrate the myth of the idyllic Wimberley and Morgan families. These two families with their secretiveness and long history of child mistreatment have contributed to generations of abused children and abusive parents. That legacy, however, is over and it ended with the Wimberley boys – Darryl, Terrell, and Merrill.

My name is Terrell Wimberley – you can call me "Terry" because that's how I prefer to be known. This is my story and my interpretation of what happened to me and my brothers within the bounds of my family. I tell my story hoping to avoid unduly speaking for or on behalf of my brothers. I will not however, arbitrarily silence my voice at the behest of anyone. I will tell the story of the Wimberley's and their abuse of three sons. I will do so based upon my history,

research, memory and perspective. If others disagree with this narrative they are free to write one of their own. If this account angers or saddens others who read it then “so be it.”

Prologue: Why?

A reasonable question for any reader to ask is why this manuscript and why now? The answer is that I am aging and won't be alive many years longer and I have a story to tell that I have carried in silence for a lifetime. My silence has been imposed upon me by my family who doesn't want to be embarrassed by the misdeeds of my parents. I have waited until both parents are dead to write this to spare them the pain of my revelations. But this story had to be told. Child abuse persists because the victims are persuaded to remain silent and in their silence the crime of child abuse is perpetuated. This is the case regardless of where it occurs.

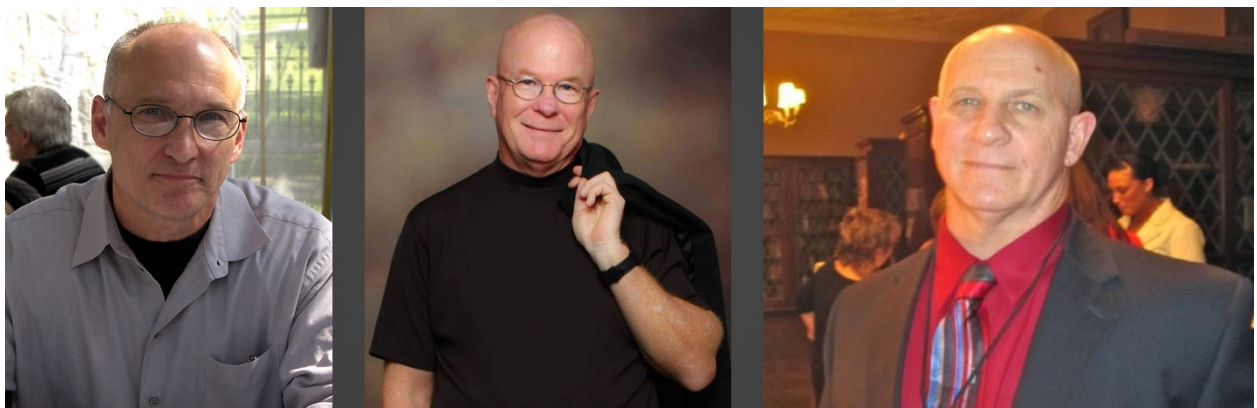
My mother was a sadistic child abuser who was enabled by my father who periodically participated in the abuse of his three sons. Throughout his lifetime dad had numerous opportunities to deal with his children and make amends during that period he did nothing. The damage to his sons is irreparable and has burdened each son, Darryl, Terrell and Merrill, with a lifetime of anxiety, pain and grief.

This is my last opportunity to tell our story regardless of who it angers or disappoints. This short book is divided into four sections. It begins with a presentation of how my mother and father wanted our family regarded in public "Such A Lovely Family" followed by the story of our abuse written from the perspectives of perpetrators and victims. The second part, "The Morgan Family" tells the story of my mother's family and her treatment therein. The third part of this book tells the stories of the "Hometown Heroes" who helped we three boys and enabled us to overcome our abuse. The final section – The End of An Era - explains my life after Mayo and abuse and in an epilogue describes the aftermath of the abuse of the Wimberley boys.

This book is written, in part, to present a full accounting of a hidden and unspeakable crime against three children and to celebrate the many people who helped the Wimberley boys

persevere in the face of appalling violence and evil. Hopefully those who read this narrative will discover the power of will, divine grace and the generosity of others who have transformed a horror story into a triumph of will and faith.

Part One: Such a Lovely Family



Chapter 1

The Wimberley's As They Wish to be Known

Have you met the Wimberley's yet? Well you should. They are a lovely family with three adorable well-behaved, and attractive children. Vern is gorgeous with her red hair and full figure, deep blue eyes and so very stylish! She even sews many of her attractive clothes from scratch. And her hands are simply exquisite, shapely and always adorned with deep red nail polish. And she's so very talented. She has a green thumb when it comes to gardening, she's a wonderful cook, has a beautiful voice, plays guitar, is very intelligent and ever so kind. Vern's a lot of fun to be around.

Speaking of which, you must visit Vern's nursery. She grew all those lovely plants and shrubs all by herself and she is ever so knowledgeable about landscaping. She will be happy to show you around and get her boys to help you landscape your home or business. You will be happy you did because not only is she good at what she does but she's cheap. You can afford her. She'll get Darryl and Terrell to dig all the holes for you and put down your mulch. If you need your bushes trimmed the boys can take care of that too for you and haul away the clippings – all for free.

Vern's husband Ed is a handsome guy; bright and hard working. He's very educated. He attended Emory University and earned degrees from the University of Florida and Valdosta State University in education. Students adore him and his fellow-teachers respect his wisdom. Ed is also a religious man. He is an ordained Southern Baptist minister and delivers terrific sermons. Don't worry though. Ed isn't a "holy-roller" or a "stick in the mud." Ed is a lot of fun with a great sense of humor. He dances, tells jokes and is a devastatingly funny impersonator.

Ed also maintains the family farm and breeds beef cows. He keeps those boys of his busy stretching barb wire fencing, feeding cows, hogs and chickens and mowing the homestead with – if you can believe it – push mowers! Those boys mow at least 10 acres of lawn every week when they aren't working for their mother in the nursery or putting in fence. Ed and Vern really knows how to get the best out of their boys. Country living is sure good for those Wimberley kids!

And who could forget the twins! Such handsome young men with a great story. They were born 39 hours apart! You have to feel for their poor mother! I can't imagine what she went through. But there they are, the eldest Darryl and Terrell. They don't look a bit alike. Ed says one of them must have been fathered by the postman and the other by the milk man. That's just the kind of thing Ed would say. He's such a "card"!

Vern and Ed have done such a good job raising those boys. Vern and Ed have taught them how to behave. They are always dressed so smartly and they are so very polite. They are "good" boys and so smart. Darryl takes after his daddy with his dark hair and Terrell is a throwback to his mother with his red hair and freckles. Such good boys!

And have you seen the youngest Merrill? This one is the pick of the litter isn't he with those blue eyes and blonde hair. Such a sweetheart and he dotes on his Mother and loves his brothers. Ed and Vern must be proud of their boys! They've done such a fine job raising these young men. It really says a lot about who Ed and Vern are that they could raise such well-behaved, intelligent and polite children. We can't think of any better family in our community. Wish there were more families like the Wimberley's in our world. It would be a better place for sure.

Chapter 2

A Horrible Human Being

Vern Lamonice Morgan Wimberley was a horrible human being who created a “house of horrors” in rural Lafayette County, Florida in the late 1950’s and throughout the sixties. Sadly, she too had been victimized by her father, but that victimhood never justified or absolved her from her cruelty and lack of regard for her children. Dead since 1969 she remains reviled. Her children have no remaining positive regard for her and her memory which comes in episodes of PTSD, anxiety, anger and fear is never greeted with more than anguish.

Her abuse knew no bounds. I was abused physically and verbally on a daily basis and on some days my twin brother and I were abused sexually also. I can think of no day living with her that one or all of us was not harmed. Our abuse was so frequent, in fact, that we just learned to accept being beaten and demeaned daily or sometimes even more frequently by our mother as our lot in life. The only thing we could be more sure of was that nobody was going to stop her or even lift a finger to do so. We were like chattel. Our bodies, minds and souls belonged to our parents and nobody in the community acted to end the abuse even though most everyone who knew us knew what was going on in our family. Chief among these cowards was our father who was frankly frightened of our mother, ambivalent about being a parent or husband and frequently would join her in abusing us – typically as a follow up to earlier beatings at Mother’s hands.

Although she treated us like animals she failed to appreciate that she too had become an animal herself, having become vengeful, self-absorbed and brutal. Yet she was not always like this. She had been, I am told, a kind and loving girl, until her brutal father and selfish mother beat and abused her into submission, guaranteeing that when she became a parent herself, she would visit the same hell on her kids that she had endured.

I think it's fair to say that nobody can blame her for her abuse at her father's and mother's hands. Nevertheless, it is unfair to forgive her for the torture and abuse of her children given her own history of abuse. Not every abuser has abused their children or spouses. I know because I'm one of those who "chose" not to perpetuate the cycle of abuse and have always endeavored to deal with my family in a kinder and gentler way. So, Mother's history of being an abuser is not absolved by her history of victimization. She had an opportunity to live differently and chose not to. She was and is accountable for her behavior and this narrative is in part meant to hold her responsible by telling the story of her abuse – the story that everyone in my family and community tried to hide, deny and bury. My brothers and I have suffered lifelong because of this "conspiracy of silence" and at long last I write to tell that story and expose my mother for the horrible human being she was.

I know her story better than anyone only because I befriended her solely to avoid being beaten or abused by whatever degree. She was born Vern Lamonice Morgan on April 1, 1927 in Mayo, Florida – April Fools Day. Her father was David Pierpont Morgan, III and her mother Edith Hendrix. People in the community knew Vern's father as "Dave" and regarded him as a hard and harsh man – boastful, arrogant, egotistical, selfish and exploitative of others when given the opportunity. He was also a womanizer and notoriously unfaithful to his wife.

Vern was a middle child in a large family consisting of 6 girls and 3 boys. Vern's oldest sister was Theresa who played the role of "parental child" in the family which meant she was third in "command" after Dave and Edith. Other sisters included Oneida, Frieda, Nell, and the youngest Catherine. Dave and Edith's three boys included the eldest Richard McDavid (Mack), David Pierpont, IV "D.P." and Sharold. In the Morgan clan boys were treated quite differently than the girls. The boys had privilege and ultimately property. The girls were of lesser value yet

(with exception of the oldest daughter, Theresa) and were used for hard manual labor on the farm and, at least in the case of my mother's story, were used for other purposes as well.

I heard Vern's story sitting next to the large stuffed green chair in our dining room. It was Mother's threadbare throne where she sat for hours on end, holding her Pall Mall cigarette in her right hand as a scepter and a coffee cup in her left hand. She sat there endlessly obsessing about how her father had worked her to death, abused her, neglected her health and on the evenings when she was out stoking logs into the brick ovens that cured tobacco in the barns, subjected her to late night visits and affections which were sexual in nature.

Sadly, it was these visits and affections that convinced Vern that she was "special" to her father, and it was his rejection of her in his later years that made her vindictive and vengeful. As Dave became feeble, he became increasingly cruel and manipulative of her affections, alternatively drawing her in and then rejecting her. For years Vern was strung-out and jerked-around like a puppet on a string by her father. He would reassuringly tell her he loved her and promised to include her in his will, only to later renege and say that she and her sisters were unimportant and all of his assets (more than a thousand acres of farmland) would go to his three sons and his eldest daughter. Everyone else would be left nothing. This news saddened and enraged Vern and she took her bile out on her children.

Every day in our household was born in bitterness and resentment and every hour seemed to demand an outlet for her anger; her three children. Of the three children, I was the middle child but only technically. I am a twin born thirty-nine hours after my older brother Darryl. We are fraternal twins born in St. Augustine, Florida in 1949. My younger brother Merrill was born in 1956 in Brooksville, Florida. While all three of us felt Vern's physical wrath and her non-stop emotional assault, Darryl took the worst of it – principally because her beatings enraged him and

the way he retaliated was in silence. She could not beat him long enough or hard enough to make him cry and in his silence communicated “f... you!” She received his message loud and clear and bore down on him the harder with whatever was at hand, belts, switches, cords, paddles, sticks or her hands. My brother Merrill and I have seen him beaten and bloodied many times, sometimes even being forced to strip naked before beating him from ankle to neck with long switches that would wrap around his body and cut his chest, abdomen and thighs. This practice of stripping and beating him was just part of the sexual abuse he endured while being physically tortured. That isn't to say that I too wasn't beaten in this way and to a lesser degree my younger brother, but what burns eternal in our memories is having been unwilling witnesses to her abuse of Darryl and how helpless we felt to stop it – though on two occasions I came perilously close to permanently ending her reign of terror by murdering her. Thankfully, I thought better of doing so on both occasions or I would frankly not have lived to tell our story.

Which begs the question of why, after all these years, am I finally putting this story to paper. I do so in part to permanently end the conspiracy of silence that has blanketed our suffering for these many years. Quite literally everyone who knew my family in our home county knew of our abuse, and with a lone exception (my father's friend Mack Suggs) chose to ignore it. Beyond his efforts, nobody said or did a thing about it. Even now, long after the death of my Morgan grandparents and all their children, I have been discouraged to tell this tale, and some have asserted that if I choose to chronicle what went on in our family I can expect to be permanently ostracized from the family – banished!

The truth is that my brothers and I were effectively estranged from my mother's family (meaning her brothers and sisters) long ago. We have always been on our own, orphaned from meaningful and loving parents or a supportive extended family. We have been forced to not only

endure the horror of our childhood, but to carry that secret to our graves. I am no longer willing to comply with those expectations believing that the best way to stop child abuse is to talk about it. I also write this book out of a sense of justice. The public needs to know what Vern Wimberley did to her children and, although she no longer lives in this world, be held accountable for her deeds. I personally hold her, my father and my community accountable for allowing her to terrorize her children and leave them with emotional scars that led to a lifetime of suffering.

Yet despite these reasons, there is a more pressing reason to write this book and that is to relay the stories of the many individuals who mostly were not related to me or my brothers who provided respite and at times encouragement in the face of my mother's endless and ongoing anger and abuse. This book will tell their stories and celebrate the ways in which their kind and thoughtful actions, while not stopping my abusive mother, served to provide us with moments of respite and hope that ultimately sustained us and helped us to not be abusive in our adult relationships. This is their story also, and within this narrative they are the heroic figures that served to prevent us from being completely consumed and destroyed by the horrible human being that was our mother.

Chapter 3

Mother

I suppose it was an accepted part of the southern culture of her time – something passed down from her mother who was a cold-fish in her own right – but Vern never allowed us to call her by any name other than “Mother.” Mom or Mama were strictly disallowed and any attempt to use those terms as endearing as they may have been intended could result in a slap across the face. Vern was “Mother” and that alone. Any other title was considered a sign of disrespect.

Mother was a cold and distant title - imperious, aloof, threatening and powerful. It was a name Vern adopted and a role she learned from her domineering and icy mother, Edith Morgan. Vern demanded respect and honor from us principally because she didn't feel she got it anywhere else in her life. Sadly, it never occurred to her that extorting respect and honor with a belt, a whip or with demeaning words only produced pretense not genuine respect and regard. She remained clueless to the end that we regarded her with dishonor, disrespect and fear and ultimately loathing. What natural affection and love we boys held for our mother was daily wrenched from us by her endless cruelty and her unwillingness to say or communicate anything to or about us that wasn't ultimately pejorative, accusatory and demeaning. We obeyed her, feared her and constantly monitored her demeanor but love for her disappeared by our preschool years. In my eyes Mother was my keeper and enemy and those terms became synonymous with the title “Mother.”

I believe that things would have gone better in our family if others in Mother's environment had taken her seriously. Few did. She had a good friend Irma Masters who lived in Hastings where at one time my family resided and there were a few people she grew up with who thought she was talented (she ran a nursery and did flower arrangement) and kind (as she could

be to those outside of the family). People (especially men) noticed Mother. She was very pretty with a red hair and a full-figure. She was, however, frequently ridiculed - sometimes in front of our faces - for dressing scandalously and wearing homemade “short-shorts” that displayed her ample bottom to the point of not covering it all. Prior to the era of “short-shorts” Mother would saunter around the farm and in public with part of her fanny hanging out from her shorts. It was an embarrassing sight.

This display, however wasn't accidental. Mother enjoyed displaying her body and was purposeful in her sensual exhibitions. She was fully aware that her homemade shorts were revealing and lurid. Men paid attention and at least one my uncles made a point of dropping by the house unannounced to leer at her and visit. These visits left me uncomfortable, because Mother didn't discourage his visits in my father's absence and appeared to be actively seeking attention. Throughout my childhood years I was aware of my mother's blatant sexuality – not only in public but at home where she sometimes paraded around the house in her panties or nude in the presence of her adolescent sons. I was profoundly confused and disturbed by these behaviors and always assumed she was involved with men outside of the house.

This issue of sexual expression and fidelity eventually became a major bone of contention between my parents. After we twins were born my father, Edward or “Ed”, had moved us all over North Florida as he worked as a parts manager for automobile dealerships in Trenton, High Springs and Brooksville, Florida. We lived in Hastings twice where dad worked for Stanton Motors, a local Ford dealership. Frequent moves at an early age made it difficult for Darryl and I to make and sustain friendships. However, two stints in Hasting for a period of 3 years allowed us to make some school friendships and Hastings provided my mother her very first social outlet beyond rural Mayo in Lafayette County. After my younger brother Merrill was

born, there was a need for more income so my father “allowed” my mother to begin work in nearby St. Augustine as a “waitress.” Vern got a job in the coffee shop of the Ponce de Leon Hotel (modern day site of Flagler College) where she made a little extra money, got away from her children and met interesting people from distant places. She found herself “stimulated” for the first time in her adult life. She was happiest living in Hastings and working in St. Augustine. Ideally her happiness should have translated into less abuse of her children at home. Sadly, that was not the case.

Once I started school it became clear that I had problems with reading and math. Later it would be discovered that I have an attention deficit disorder and suffer with dyslexia. In those days, I was considered a lazy student so one of my teachers decided to discipline me by keeping me after school to clean black boards and do extra homework. Occasionally she would also paddle me. After keeping me at school for as long as she was able she would send me home to mother with a note explaining my poor study habits and deportment, asking mother to assist her in motivating me to be a better student. Mother complied and when I got home she would whip me and send me to my room until my father came home from work and then he would take a belt to me. This went on for many, many days. Ultimately I became depressed having been caught up in this ceaseless cycle of frustration, failure and repeated punishment.

I was hospitalized twice in the second grade for pneumonia and during those hospitalizations was evaluated by a psychologist who concluded that I was depressed and was being abused. I remember that my parents were called to school after the report was completed and - based upon what I had shared with the psychologist - my teacher and my mother were identified as my abusers. My teacher at the time was subsequently disciplined and then

reassigned. I am sure that Mother was confronted with this finding by school officials during that visit to the school principal's office. I will have more to say of this later.

My days in Hastings were good to the degree I had a few friends, but generally family life was brutal. Mother treated her sons like living "dress up" dolls that she could display as testimony to her own parenting skills. She paraded her children about as if to communicate to the community what a fine mother she was and how her intelligence and talent were reflected in her "model" children. Mother was obsessed with this. It was in Hastings that Mother mastered her talent for projecting herself as a kind, attractive, vivacious and talented woman with the adorable children. However, at home, Mother was a "bat-out-of-Hell" who terrorized us mercilessly. Our only respite from this abuse was her evening work at the Ponce de Leon Hotel and the effusiveness with which she regularly returned after each shift.

My father on the other hand was threatened by my mother. She was bright and strong willed and he could not control her. When she began working in St. Augustine her burgeoning independence and self-confidence disturbed him and he began to worry that she might attract other men. His fears were not unjustified. Mother was a flirt and always enjoyed the wandering eyes of available men. Likewise, as her working days grew in numbers so did her social skills and her wardrobe. Her attire become more and more flattering and alluring and downright "sexy" in a time when such expression was discouraged.

Dad became threatened and it was during this time he made two important changes to his life. He became religious and began pursuing ordination as a Baptist Minister. Later he gave up drinking alcohol. Dad was never a problem drinker but he associated drinking with going to dances (which Mother loved) and dances provided a venue for Vern to flirt and flaunt – both of which dad disapproved of.

Ultimately dad arrived at a decision which would destroy Vern's fragile sense of self and transform her from an abusive mother into a sadist. He decided to leave Hastings and St. Johns County and return to Lafayette County (Mayo, FL) where he and Mother had both grown up. He intended to reoccupy the 200-acre farm he had inherited with his sister from his father Henry Edward "Tink" Wimberley. The reasons for this move were at the time unclear.

Mother didn't want to move home because she wanted a life of her own and realized she could never realize life on her terms if she returned to the site where she had experienced child abuse and the exploitation by her despotic father David Pierpont Morgan, III. Moreover, leaving Hastings meant abandoning her friends and her emerging social life in St. Johns County as well as giving up her prized waitress job at the Ponce de Leon Hotel and the money and autonomy that came with it. Dad was not ignorant of what he was doing to her. For him moving back to Mayo insured a quiet life in a closed community where he felt safest. The move also served to thwart Vern's growing independence and stymie flirting and flaunting among interested men – or so he thought.

In effect, dad exiled Vern and her three children to one of the most rural and isolated counties in Florida, set her up in a drafty and primitive farm house on the old Wimberley homestead, and left her to cope with her parents and family and care for three boys while dad remained in Hastings working for Stanton Motors. Moving the family to Mayo freed up the weekdays for dad to be foot-loose and fancy-free of parental and spousal obligations. He only came to Mayo on the weekends and spent the bulk of his newly-found free time how and with whom he chose.

My mother suspected he was having an affair and regularly accused him of infidelity. I can't recall if she had any concrete evidence to that effect but I used to hear them argue and

would hear her claim she smelled the perfume of other women on his clothes and had also found lipstick stains. Meanwhile while dad was living in Hastings during our first three years in Lafayette County, I remember Mother flirting with local men as well as receiving periodic visits from an uncle who would make disturbing comments about my mother's ample bosom and bottom; comments she appeared to relish and encourage. Even as a fourth grader, I knew these comments and my mother's responses were wrong and I was alarmed. It was about that time she began parading around the house nude or nearly nude. I found this very upsetting.

Despite these sexual concerns and the growing distrust between my parents, the major issue we children coped with was my mother's rage and her dangerously erratic behavior. Mother was furious at dad for dragging her away from her friends and her work to be isolated on the farm with three sons. She was also furious for having to deal with her manipulative and abusive father who lived nearby and tormented her. Finally, she was infuriated with having been abandoned by my father on a rural farm living in truly primitive conditions. There was no indoor plumbing in the house when we moved in. We used an outhouse and our water came from a hand pump in the kitchen. The heat for the home emanated from a single fireplace and no wood had been cut to fuel that fireplace.

The winter of 1959-60 was our first year living on the farm and it was by any measure brutal. We endured days on end of temperatures dipping into the low teens in the morning and only climbing to the mid-thirties during the day. We were cold and despite our daily treks to the woods around our home to collect firewood, we quietly shivered day in and out. Meanwhile dad was residing in our old well heated and insulated home in Hastings enjoying central heating and comfort. We, by comparison, lived in a century old home made of pine with noticeable cracks in

the floors and the walls that allowed the cold air outside to penetrate and permeate us to the core. We were cold, poor, isolated and miserable and mother was quite literally “pissed” at our father. Since dad lived at a distance and was beyond the reach of Mother’s anger, she took her wrath out on us.

As young children Mother worked us as if we were “grown men” and whatever she assigned our workmanship was never acceptable. Our daily routines began with chores that simply could not be performed to her satisfaction which in turn justified daily beatings – usually with a leather belt or a long, thick switch that cut and stung. Our bodies were constantly cut, bruised and welted by her whipping and never fully healed before new beatings delivered new bruises and abrasions.

Isolated as she was on the farm which she resented living on she had no productive outlet to elevate her beyond her misery. Mother had no job to turn to and no friends to speak of other than family who – other than Vern – were reluctant to stand up to their domineering patriarch (Dave). Angry and isolated Vern lashed out and in the process very nearly destroyed the lives of her children. She nor my father ever realized what they were ultimately doing. The abuse only ended as we left home and ultimately when I physically put a halt to it.

Coming home from Stetson University to spend the summer semester of 1968 in Mayo, I found myself at age 19 attacked anew by Vern. Having achieved a level of independence and self-sustenance in DeLand I was no longer willing to tolerate the beatings and the abuse – and being hit enraged me. So, when my mother dug her long nails in the corner of my mouth and twisted it, followed by a swing at my back with a belt I lost it. I can’t remember what provoked her attack but by then it could have been anything or nothing. She just needed the thinnest of excuses to attack. When the belt came toward me I snatched it from her, wrapped it around her neck and threatened to strangle her with it unless the abuse stopped completely. I was livid, out

of control and ready to kill her. Dad went for his pistol and we had a standoff on the front porch for several minutes during which I unleashed my pent-up fury. I insisted the beatings stop then and there threatening and if they ever touched me or my brothers again with a switch, stick, belt or hand that somebody was going to die and the first of those somebody's was going to be Vern followed by Edward if he didn't back down and leave me the hell alone. On that day and in that moment, I stopped their abuse of me and threatened to return home and bodily intervene to insure my younger brother was never abused again.

Trancelike, I left home that day with nothing but a few clothes in a bag. I hitchhiked back to Stetson to begin my next academic year. It was still early summer when I returned and the kindly Stetson University groundskeeper Harold Harper gave me a job and arranged for me to stay in the dorms until the fall semester began. At that point I was fully emancipated from my parents and never lived in Mayo or on the farm again. It was during this period that I entered into an ill-advised seven-year marriage that served to make me more independent from my family but ultimately produced a painful divorce after I graduated from seminary in 1975.

After that fateful day on the front porch of our home in Mayo, it was almost a year before I heard anything from my father and I never heard anything from Mother. I remember getting a call from dad saying Mother was in recovery at Alachua General Hospital in Gainesville for surgery to remove a brain tumor. When I finally visited, Mother was "not herself" and suffered seizures. Soon thereafter in 1969 she died in a nursing home in The Advent Christian Village near Live Oak, Florida. My brothers and I attended the funeral while Mothers' sisters raided her bedroom and absconded with jewelry and clothes. I remember the squabbling over my Mother's possessions like vultures converging on carrion. My brothers and I remained stoic throughout the

funeral and reception. We didn't cry. The wicked witch was dead and it had not happened soon enough. We were free but we were damaged. It would take a lifetime to discover how badly.

Chapter 4

Edward

What became obvious to all of us boys as we grew older was that my parents didn't want the responsibility of children. In fact, I think the only reason my father married my mother on April 28, 1944 was because she was pregnant. I say that because I remember my mother saying she had a miscarriage before giving birth to her first child in 1946. It would seem mother was pregnant when she married my father and soon lost that pregnancy only to become pregnant again in 1945 before delivering her only daughter Karen Lamonice Wimberley at Lakeshore Hospital in Lake City, Florida on December 21, 1946. Karen died 18 hours later on December 22, 1946. The cause of her death as listed by a Dr. Howell was "prematurity." My father never spoke of this matter and would share no details. In fact, This was a taboo topic in our home right up to my father's death on July 19, 2013. He refused to talk about the death (as had my mother beyond her grief that she had no daughters – only sons) and never explained why in the ensuing years he had never marked her grave with a gravestone. This literally unspeakable death set the stage for the subsequent birth of twins in 1949 and another son in 1955 – none of whom were the daughters my mother was attempting to birth and frankly none of which were wanted.

Dad was essentially an absentee father, even when he lived in the same house with us. Nevertheless, the worst years were the first three years we moved to Mayo and the farm. My brother Darryl and I were 8 at the time and Merrill was 3. Dad was staying in our old home in Hastings that he rented from his employer Chris Stanton. It was meagerly furnished after the family moved to Mayo, but dad enjoyed the quiet of the place without the responsibilities of children and an endlessly nagging wife. In truth, he needed to be living 116 miles away from his family to earn the money to pay the bills. However, he was relieved of spousal and parental

responsibilities. He used the time to prepare himself for ordination as a Baptist minister – a calling he had experienced some years before the family left for Mayo and the farm. He was also obsessed with what he viewed as “the communist threat” and devoured publications from the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities. Sadly, dad had been taken in by the rhetoric of former chairman Joseph McCarthy and religiously followed the proceedings of that committee. In retrospect, I find it ironic that during these days of exile from his family in Lafayette County that dad was preoccupied with “light” – his pursuit of ordination as a Baptist minister, while simultaneously delving into the “darkness” of Joseph McCarthy’s witch-hunts for communist conspirators.

Meanwhile over in Mayo, my Mother’s perspective on dad’s life in Hastings was that he was “fooling around.” When he returned to Mayo for the weekends she would regularly accuse him of infidelity. In fact, those weekends were typically chaotic and argumentative as the two of them bickered over infidelity, money, and the “boys.” Money was always a problem in our home. There was often not enough money for food, electricity or heating fuel. During the first three years on the farm I was principally responsible for keeping wild game and fish on the table for us all. We ate a lot of squirrels, rabbits and ducks and with a lake on the property I caught and trapped a lot of bluegills, bass and catfish. Thankfully Mother’s brother D.P. Jr. helped us by bringing beef and pork from time to time as did her youngest brother Sharold who also brought meat, venison, corn and vegetables that helped us supplement our own vegetable garden.

Calls from creditors was a daily hassle. I dreaded picking up the phone to receive them and since our telephone service involved a “party line” I would often be aware that our neighbor down the road from us had undoubtedly heard some of these threatening calls. When dad would come home on weekends the two of them would sit down and prioritize the bills deciding which

bills would be paid this months and which would wait. These sit-downs would often turn into arguments typically involving Mother accusing dad of not doing enough to support his family and not allowing her to go outside the home to work. Work had become important for her in Hastings and it had led to a dramatic elevation in her self-esteem. The Mayo move had robbed her of both here sense of self-worth and a paycheck and all because dad had shipped her off to Mayo to run the farm and take care of “the boys.” In this way, we three boys embodied the single largest impediment preventing Mother from realizing independence and self-worth. Not surprisingly she blamed her husband and her boys for her miserable predicament and never missed an opportunity to take her wrath out on all the males in her family.

Dad never grasped any of this. He was quite literally dense as a brick about what was going on in his marriage and his family. Perhaps his inaptitude in this regard could be blamed on being self-absorbed or distracted by more interesting things in his life – perhaps. I think not. Dad’s insensitivity to the needs and values of people around him was aggravated by his paucity of basic social graces. Dad could often be hugely embarrassing in social settings. He was notorious for his use of off-color and embarrassing words and statements in public or telling a joke that was racially or ethnically offensive. He was completely tone-deaf in this regard and embodied the adage “you can dress him up but you can’t take him out.” Mother, by comparison, was a social-animal with remarkable people skills. She enjoyed being in the company of others and dad’s sometimes “oafish” behavior not only embarrassed her but drove a wedge between them.

I believe that the heart of dad’s problem was that he was totally psychologically impenetrable and profoundly unempathetic. He was an automobile parts manager. He understood numbers and classification systems. He was logical to a flaw and a whiz in science and math.

Art, literature, the humanities on the other hand held no interest for him and completely baffled him.

Consider this case-in-point example of dad's psychological illiteracy. Three years after we moved to the farm dad left Hastings and joined us in Mayo. During that time he enrolled at Lake City Community College and took an introductory English literature course. The class was assigned the classic novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Goldman. This book befuddled dad and he didn't know how to write a report on it and was worried about failing the class. I was 12 years old at the time and had picked up a copy of *Lord of the Flies* in the county library and read it. One evening as dad sat at the kitchen table struggling to write the report I asked him what was wrong. He said, I just don't understand the purpose of this stupid book. I remember telling him that I had read it and went on to explain the premise and plot of the book. He listened and wrote his report – in part reflecting my insights. Upon submitting the report to the instructor, he was surprised to learn he had aced the assignment. This experience reminded me that when it came to human interactions, emotions, values and feelings dad was inept. His mind worked in the world of science, math and “obedience.” It was this latter trait of his that led him in to the Baptist ministry since obedience stood at the heart of Southern Baptist theology and practice.

Dad's need for obedience made it even more frustrating that his wife Vern would not “obey him.” There has never been any doubt in my mind that this couple was hopelessly mismatched. Dad could be very social and outgoing but was never sure of himself. While bright and well educated (B.S. Florida, M.Ed. Valdosta State) particularly in comparison to people living around him in rural North Florida, dad lacked the social graces to be comfortable among more up and coming people. Mother was much less educated with only a high school diploma but her social skills were much more developed than dad's and she longed to improve her

education, lifestyle, economic status and social standing. These interests were diametrically opposite my father's interests. They were people who in a better situation would have gone in separate directions. However, in the situation my brothers and I endured, theirs was a relationship that inevitably led to conflict and demanded scapegoats. We three became the focal point of our parent's anger and dissatisfaction.

Mother was the principal perpetrator of abuse and violence toward us and dad was a secondary abuser who followed Mother's abuse with that of his own – mostly to thwart criticism if he didn't "support her" in her judgments. And sometimes dad would be a perpetrator in his own right, usually fueled by his unresolved anger with Vern. In these moments he would lash out typically with hard slaps to our faces or a fist slammed into our backs – right between the shoulder blades. His anger was also fueled by his lack of patience, a trait that sadly all three of children have inherited from him. He was terrible at accurately communicating what he expected of us and when we failed to meet his expectations he would berate us using insulting and derogatory language –calling us "stupid," "idiot," "dumbass," and of course "lazy." He particularly liked to ridicule us by comparing us to some of the poorest and in his mind the dumbest people in our community. This included comparing us to some who he called "mentally retarded" or "queer." When raising his voice and humiliating us didn't achieve whatever he wanted then he resorted to the slaps with the front or back of his hand and punches. Of course, we in no way appreciated his abuse but at least in comparison to Mothers his was occasional and while painful wasn't the outright torture mother dealt out.

When dad died in 2013 I performed his funeral and wrote this obituary on his behalf which in part reads as follows

"Rev. Wimberley was greatly beloved by his family and by the community. He was an unfailingly fair and generous man who gave of his time and energy to serve those in need,

regardless of religious background or affiliation. He will also be remembered for his remarkable wit and warm sense of humor.”

What makes these words remarkable is their veracity and their incompleteness. The man of whom I eulogized was Amos Edward Wimberley – our father. However, this was the Amos Edward Wimberley the public knew. My father was at his best in the classroom, in church and in the community. He was a great person and citizen outside of the house. He could be patient, kind, thoughtful, humorous (though sometimes inappropriate), and charming when on the job or out and about in the community. People adored my father. This is a trait he shared with my mother who also well received on the whole outside of home.

However, when Edward and Vern returned home and dealt with their “boys” they exhibited none of the qualities that made the community love them. They were combative, angry, impatient, even vengeful with their children – and they were cheap. Granted, money was tight and it was expensive taking care of three boys. Yet beyond the financial constraints was a clear resentment they didn’t mind communicating on a regular basis regarding being obligated to support the needs of three boys. They hated spending money on clothes or in some cases even food. From the moment we moved to Mayo my twin and I became responsible for buying all our clothes and shoes. I began working in the tobacco fields at age 8 and earning all my school clothes and spending money for a year during each summer break. The two of them refused to support any school activities we were involved in either. Mandatory school field trips to St. Augustine or Jacksonville were always trying because assuming we were allowed to participate at all, we would find ourselves traveling with our classmates with exactly one dime in our pocket for lunch when the trip meal costs ran \$2.00. I remember on one trip to St. Augustine’s Fort de San Marco in 1957 being sent away with my twin with two dimes between us – prompting our teacher to give us a dollar each for lunch. When my mother later learned what our teacher had

done, rather than thank her she drove to the school and berated the teacher for interfering in her family and embarrassing her in front of her children. Then she drove us home and beat us for accepting the money.

Dad was complicit in this event also. He could have given us money for the trip but chose not to. He didn't want to put any more money into us than he could help and like my mother he was embarrassed that someone in the community had learned how cheap he and Vern were. It wasn't just being outed in the community for being cheap that bothered him it was the fact that someone in the public knew the degree to which they resented supporting their children and this insight contradicted the mythical family he and Vern presented to the public – driven by pride, generosity and love. Dad and Mother were motivated in their revenge against us because we had unwittingly let the cat out of the bag revealing that Vern and Edward were terrible parents.

The hard truth about Edward throughout his entire life and well beyond our childhood was that Edward prioritized what Edward wanted over all else. Edward wanted to be loved and respected in the community so he did what it took to make that happen. The community and the church got the best of Edward Wimberley. His family got the worst he had to give such that when he died he was celebrated in the community and isolated from his sons. I loved dad throughout his life and was proud to do his funeral but I was conflicted knowing that the “wonderful” man people celebrated publicly was “woefully lacking” as a father and as a husband.

Chapter 5

Darryl and Terrell

Because Darryl and I were twins most everybody – including our parents – expected us to dress alike and be alike. As fraternal twins, we were diametrically opposites. We were born more than a day apart. My twin was born on December 19, 1949 and I clambered into the world a full 39 hours after my older brother on December 20. It is interesting to note that three years earlier our sister Karen had been born on December 21. Darryl was born with dark hair and a darker complexion. I was fair skinned and red haired. Darryl was moody, introspective and aggressive in his relationship with me. I was shy, tentative and comparatively passive in my relationship with Darryl. Darryl was clearly the alpha male among we three boys. He had an incessant need to be in control of all that was going on around him and he needed Merrill and I to essentially pledge fealty to him.

Not surprisingly, Darryl became increasingly aggressive and violent toward Merrill and me as he grew older and became the target of Mother's rage. Most of Darryl's rage was verbal. He had to be right about any imaginable topic and would brow-beat and derogatorily insult and curse anyone who disagreed with him. When it came to dealing with Mother, Darryl and I stood in unity around one thing: we would do all we could within our power to shield Merrill from Mother's wrath, to include assuming blame for acts that Mother sought retribution for that had been committed by Merrill.

It took little to set Mother off, in fact the very act of sweating could bring down her vengeance. I realize that sounds ridiculous and in truth it is but that was our reality. Memories of this were recently revived when I received a picture dating back to first grade in Hastings. In that picture Darryl and I are dressed alike and we are at a birthday party for one of our classmates. I

had forgotten that party but one look at the picture brought it back in detail. As children, we had only one birthday party celebrating our birthdays and attended precious few parties as children. The picture I received was from one of those parties and my first memory in looking at it is that when we got home Mother whipped us both because we had sweated while at the party. Keep in mind this was the fifties in humid North Florida and the party was held outside in a back yard. It is inconceivable that any person could be outside in the spring or summer in the humid St. Johns River valley and not perspire.

As preposterous as Mother's premise sounds we boys were expected to not sweat. In fact, she was so paranoid about us contracting polio that she would go berserk and whip us for having perspired at all. Throughout each day she would check for sweat by placing her hand beneath our shirts and if she felt moisture she would beat us. In her mind, she was protecting us from polio but in fact her behavior was bizarre and wholly unrealistic. What makes her behavior even more unhinged is that the polio vaccine was developed in 1953 and by the time we were of school age vaccinations were widespread so there was no need to obsess about us contracting this illness. Ironically Mother was inconsistent in her enforcement of these "no sweat" rules. She beat us from 1955-1958 for sweating but when we moved to the farm in Mayo and she had to rely on our physical labor to sustain the family then sweating was alright and we ceased getting beaten for this reason.

The sad truth of the matter is that Mother didn't need a reason to beat her children. We were never sure what would set her off or what behavior of ours would lead to a whipping. We were only certain that it would come every day and that it would be vicious. Knowing that he was going to be beaten daily Darryl responded by pretty much doing what was required of him at home or school and increasingly withdrawing within himself. He buried his head in any book he

could find – particularly science fiction and he often spent time drawing in his room; always on the same topic – war. He would draw gruesome scenes with bullets, blood, stabbing, fire and as he drew he would make war sounds, particularly the sound of gunfire and bombs. As he became older he sought out football. He was undoubtedly the fastest runner anybody could remember seeing at our high school so football became a source of release and escape from home and a place he could safely express his anger.

Mother didn't want him to play but dad insisted that he be given that chance. However, the rule became that only one of the twins could be away from home at any time and the other one had to stay home on the farm to work. By then mother had started an ornamental nursery business and there were daily chores to be done as well as the cattle, chickens and hogs to be fed. I didn't mind staying home so Darryl could play football. I was terrible at football and I didn't like being hit or for that matter hitting. Later I would play basketball on the junior varsity team but I had no depth perception and was a truly terrible player.

Like Darryl, however, I was angry and was known to have a short fuse. During our first years in Mayo, first in elementary school and later in high school, I found myself being picked upon by some of my classmates for my red hair, for the way I dressed (wearing what my mother insisted I wear for church or for winter weather), for my glasses and so on. This was not really unusual since at this time boys of my age defined themselves in the school's pecking order in part by their willingness to fight. Whenever I was punched or provoked by another boy or by boys I would consistently fight back. I did not always win those fights but I always hurt whoever was goading me and seldom would any of them return for a second helping. What disturbed me most about those episodes and certainly disturbed those who observed them was the savagery with which I fought. I would quite literally go blindingly mad and flail the hell out of whoever I

was fighting – a display well beyond the occasion that had provoked the fight. I was aware of that and Darryl was also, and we understood who the true target of that anger was – Mother.

So, at an early age Darryl was displacing his anger in his drawings and on the sports field and I was getting into fights at school. I can't speak for Darryl, but by high school I became concerned that I would one day lose my temper and seriously hurt someone or worse. Thankfully this was a concern that never materialized, principally because by the time I finally left the house to go to college and later graduate school, I spent many years in psychotherapy. However as valuable as those efforts were, the most important deterrent to my rage was my Christian faith and what I learned in seminary and worship about forgiveness. To my knowledge Darryl never took advantage of those resources after leaving home. He went to the Air Force Academy and in the first year went through a brutal plebe experience during which nobody could “break” him – principally because he had grown up in a concentration camp styled family run by a sadist and his anger had guaranteed that Mother would never, ever break him.

Unfortunately, Mother broke all of us. She took normal loving talented and potentially happy children and she demeaned and destroyed us all at some very basic level – and our father not only sat by and watched this process unfold, he cheerfully participated in it. One of the lasting wounds we all left home with was widespread anxiety and anger management problems born out of a lifetime of daily nonstop abuse. Darryl, Merrill and I all suffer with all the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). While as an adult I have never struck anyone, especially a spouse or child I have fought the urge to do so when seriously provoked. I can't speak for whether Darryl has ever become physical with a family member of his own. Merrill has told me of the degree to which he sometimes struggled to keep from getting physical with someone when provoked. However, there is one way all three of us have been aggressive

and violent and that is with our words and in this way Darryl is far and away the most aggressive of all of us.

Imagine being submitted to arbitrary beatings every day as a child, preceded by an interrogation wherein anything you say to defend yourself is ignored, mocked, disregarded and used as fuel to increase the degree and duration of the violence that is to come. The typical theme of such interrogations is that Mother makes a charge often ill-founded or bogus, we declare our innocence, Mother declares we are liars and begins her beating until we admit the “truth,” the beating continues until we finally say what she wants to hear and then the beating is prolonged and escalated because we have “lied” to her (which we had not). Those experiences taught us several things. Firstly, truth is what Mother declares it to be, not what occurred. Secondly, a beating is inevitable so just get it over with. Thirdly, if telling the truth results in getting beaten then it’s better to just lie and at least try to avoid some the beatings.

In this manner, I think we all became obsessed with something called “the truth” which most folks realize can be an elusive thing, since it is often dependent upon circumstance and experience. All three of us have this remarkable capacity to be prosecutorial in our disagreements with others. We doggedly pursue what we understand to be true and verbally dismantle anyone who challenges us. This is not an attractive or engaging skill to have developed. Moreover, we all three employ this skill using loud and threatening tones. I think of what we do as a bitter legacy inherited from our mother who violently prosecuted us with the same voices we use and with the same philosophy that we are wrong, she is right and punishment and pain are on the way.

I call this learned behavior “verbal violence.” We each have the capacity to use our words to accomplish what we want to do with our fists – destroy other people. At the heart of this

behavior is the desire to never be criticized, principally because in the torture shop Mother ran we were mercilessly and unfairly criticized and emotionally demolished on a daily basis. When we escaped we never wanted to return to the torture shop again so criticism of any kind is something we feel a guttural need to defend ourselves against. None of us knew the difference between constructive and destructive criticism because we had only known criticism in its most destructive and demeaning manner. Consequently, we become verbally violent in defending ourselves and all three of us are bright enough and in possession of a deep vocabulary arsenal that we can use to browbeat and quite literally dismantle most critiques against us regardless of whether those criticisms are meritorious or not.

I have heard all three of us do this, but nobody is nearly as good at verbal violence as my brother Darryl. All those many, many beatings where Mother could never make him cry out produced a venomous verbal capacity that – when unleashed – is unrelenting, unrestrained and completely devastating. I would have to say that my own capacity for this kind of verbal violence is comparable to Darryl's but long ago I learned that to experience love, family and friends I had to discover other ways to deal with people. Having learned that lesson, I engage in verbal violence to a lesser degree. However, Darryl and I have used that weapon against one another since childhood and the impact of that violence has been pyrrhic.

I believe Darryl blames me for much of his abuse because he thinks I “cow-towed” to my mother and sold him out. On my part I have been verbally brutal with Darryl in retaliation for the consistently and incessantly demeaning and angry way in which he addresses me – typically accusing me of being a pathological liar, a fake, fool, idiot, patsy, hypocrite and coward. I never took any of those epithets lying down and was more than able to hold my own with him. More precisely, I was willing to push Darryl away so that I would no longer continue to suffer my

Mother's abuse delivered via my twin's verbal violence. Ultimately I became estranged from Darryl and for more than 20 years now I have not been the recipient of any more abuse from him. Sadly, in the interest of shielding myself from verbal abuse and violence I have forever lost a brother, my twin brother, a brother I loved and love. It's been a high price to pay for peace – much too high.

He's right though about my ingratiating myself to my mother. Once I figured out the beatings were arbitrary and endless I endeavored to figure out how to diminish their intensity and simply survive. I had listened to Mother's story over the years and came to understand that she simply did not want any of us children because we were "boys." She desperately wanted a daughter and didn't have one; so I decided I would figuratively speaking become her daughter. My mother needed someone to listen to her own sad and miserable story so I listened to her story as if I were her daughter. I also began to take on household roles that were typically feminine in that era. I cooked, I made the coffee, I ironed clothes and even learn to stitch a bit. I began to do things for her that lightened her load on the farm and these things helped a bit – just a bit.

The most productive thing I did was learning how to sit with her and get her to tell her story, the bulk of which I learned sitting at her feet beneath the big green stuffed chair in the dining room; her throne upon which she swilled coffee and chain-smoked cigarettes. It is during these long interludes that I learned what had happened to her at the hands of her abusive father and mother. It was here I heard stories of beatings, sexual abuse, miscarriage, infant death, her fickle brothers and sisters, my father's supposed infidelity, her father's blackmailing her affection with a promise of inheritance and more. It was a long sordid tale and one with no happy ending. However, when telling her stories she wasn't beating me or anyone else. I encouraged her to continue talking and to regard me as a sympathetic listener in hopes that she would treat

me more leniently. I was willing to say or do anything by the end of my home years to avoid or minimize abuse.

Darryl saw this behavior as traitorous. For him, I was the Kapo, the concentration camp prisoner who ingratiated himself to guards by ratting on the inmates. Throughout that period, I never protected myself at Darryl or Merrill's expense. In Darryl's eyes, however, I had been disloyal and consorted with the enemy. I believe that in our adult years after Mother died Darryl directed his anger against my father for not stopping Mother's abuse toward me for associating with the enemy. Darryl understandably needed a target for his rage so Dad and I were the recipients of his need for justice and retribution.

Whenever possible I defended dad, not because he was innocent (far from it), but rather because he was old and frail and forgiveness was the only reasonable way to bring closure to the long nightmare of our Mother's reign of terror. As for myself, I perceived Mother alive and well in Darryl's rage. Having stood up to Vern and stopped her from abusing me during my late adolescence, I was determined that I would also stop Darryl's abuse. Unfortunately, the only way to do so was to escalate the degree of verbal violence to a level even he was unwilling to endure. It was either that or physically pounding him, and that was clearly not an option. I feared my anger particularly since the incident where I had taken my mother's belt from her hand and threatened to strangle her. And this was not the first time I had come close to taking her life.

When Darryl and I were twelve and on the playground near the church after Vacation Bible School, Darryl engaged in a wrestling match with one of the young boys. They weren't fighting; just playfully wrestling the way boys our age did in those days. Mother pulled up in the family car and saw what he was doing. She accused him of fighting. Darryl denied it saying that

he and his friend were just playing – which was true. Mother then accused him of being a liar, took him home and made him strip naked and stand by the smoke house.

She then stepped over to the gallberry bush and cut 8 or more switches – each five to six feet long. Gall berry bushes were strong and didn't break easily. They were also long and whip-like with nodes on alternate sides that would cut you when used as a whip. These switches would wrap all around your body flaying skin. Mother had a handful of these long tough switches signifying this beating was going to last a while. She started beating him bind the knees. This is a particularly painful place to beat someone since it is very tender and the switches make the skin burn and itch at the same time. This was useful because after the whipping walking would be painful. She worked on the back of Darryl's knees with the switch until the skin was open and he was bleeding. Throughout this ordeal, she screamed at him to admit he had lied. He said nothing and refused to cry out.

She then started working on his back and buttocks. The switch would wrap around his bod and cut his abdomen, his privates and his legs and neck. The beating had gone on for 20 minutes or more and his whole body was lacerated and bloodied. Undeterred and enraged, Mother kept at it with a hand full of long switches still unemployed. Seven year old Merrill and I stood at the window in the house looking out while Darryl took the worst beating we had ever seen – an image that haunts us to this day. I felt I had to do something to stop this torture.

I went to the bedroom and got my .22 caliber rifle and a box of shells. I loaded the rifle and aimed it at my mother's skull. She was no more than 20 feet away and I was a very good shot. I aimed at her skull, knowing this was a "kill-shot," and was about to squeeze the trigger when it occurred to me that I would be jailed for murder and nobody would care that Darryl was being tortured since parents in those days could do anything they wanted to their children

without penalty. So, I pulled up and decided I would wound her since that would stop the beating. I aimed for her knee knowing not only would that put her down but it would cripple her and she would not be able to get her hands on me again. Then it occurred to me that if I did that dad would beat me even worse than Darryl had been beaten. I couldn't have that either so at length I realized there was nothing I could reasonably do to help Darryl. I remember putting the gun away and just standing helplessly while Mother beat Darryl for at least another 20 minutes – only stopping when she ran out of switches and her arm became so sore she could not raise it any more.

Throughout the entire ordeal Darryl never cried. I believe it was that event that created the adult version of Darryl that I know now; someone full of rage with a deeply scarred and distorted sense of himself and those around him. That beating and its aftermath I believe created Darryl's tinderbox personality that most everyone who knows him has learned to walk on egg shells around to avoid setting him off.

The aftermath of that day and the cumulative impact of Mother's abuse on me and on all of us has been a lifetime of anxiety and fear. Despite having spent 20 years in counseling I still have to cope on a daily basis with its aftermath. For instance, most of my abuse at the hands of my mother occurred in the kitchen. Our job after each meal was to clean up which entailed hand washing all the pots, pans and dishes and silverware in scalding hot water. To this day I can grasp hot surfaces and tolerate hot water with little discomfort. However, in those childhood days, standing for more than an hour with my hands in hot water was painful. It also left me vulnerable.

Inevitably Mother would be standing over us and something was always wrong. Perhaps a glass had soap spots on it or a pan still had a minute remnant from the meal. She would run her

hand over a countertop and if she could feel any crumb whatsoever hell was coming. And of course there was her favorite reason for beating us as we washed dishes, the rugs beneath our feet and moisture on the kitchen floor.

Mother made us stand on flimsy cotton towels acting as rugs. If those rugs became crooked or wrinkled or if any water were to spill to the floor, even a few drops, while we washed then out came the belt or switch and she would beat the living hell out of us with our backs to her, the backs of our knees exposed and our hands in hot water. These beatings could go on for many, many minutes and sometimes an hour or more. They happened with great regularity but virtually always after big meals like on Sundays or holidays or birthdays. Big meals equaled being whipped in the kitchen.

To this day I have trouble cleaning up after meals in my own kitchen. I become anxious and find myself working feverishly to get the job over with as quickly as possible. I know that this anxiety is related to those beatings in our home kitchen as a child. I also know those days are over and that Mother is long-gone. Yet knowledge doesn't quell the anxiety I carry in my muscle memory. Some days cleaning up after meals is hardly a problem at all. On other days though, the anxiety is so deep that I just have to walk away from the kitchen to regain my composure – especially when cleaning up after large and involved meals requiring the use of many dishes, pots and utensils. Thankfully an automatic dishwasher really helps with this problem but at age 70 the pain and suffering I experienced as a child still lives on. I am fortunate, however, that in my later years the repercussions of childhood abuse are minimal. I attribute my success to not only years of psychotherapy and a theology of grace that has sustained me in my Christian faith for decades now, I also credit lifestyle changes that serve to allay my anxiety.

For most of my working career I have taken on the toughest and most stressful of management roles typically involving the restoration of broken and dysfunctional organizations and departments. I did so in the worlds of health care, higher education and ministry and in all these settings the capacity for organizational angst is immense. I learned I was very good at diagnosing and reviving organizations but at a very substantial cost to me. Over the years I have fired many, many employees who were dysfunctional, uncooperative or ill-suited for the work they were doing under my management. The process of firing people or disciplining them brings out some of the worst in people and in many cases I found myself vilified and, grieved against and sued over actions I have taken to reorganize departments and programs. My success at doing so allowed me wonderful employment and pay opportunities but it came at an enormous price as the constant anxiety elevated my blood pressure day and night.

It was only twenty years ago when I was working as one of a group of founding academic deans at the opening of Florida Gulf Coast University that I finally came to grips with the cost that anxiety related to my childhood abuse was exacting upon me. In 1996 I found myself in conflict with my provost who was ordering me to do things on her behalf that I believed to be unethical and frankly illegal. This person made every effort to have me fired and cost me considerable resources to sustain myself in the face of her assault. It was during that time that I sought out a psychologist who after listening to my story said to me: “Terry! You have PTSD! You have no business doing the kind of work you’ve been doing. If you want to survive you have to walk away from the stress of management.

Thankfully, I took his advice and shifted my career toward being a professor and a chaplain. In both roles I served others but with minimal stress. That decision has served me well and most of my days then on have been relatively anxiety free. I have even felt that I have

recovered some of my better traits from the time before I was abused. Innocence still eludes me but cheerfulness has not.

I have also gone through two divorces and am married for the third time. I am not proud of that but I understand that growing up with a sadistic mother didn't leave any of us Wimberley boys with the prerequisite skills and insights required to make good choices of partners. My first two wives were both ill-suited for me even though the first marriage lasted seven years and the second for thirty-three years. Thankfully my third marriage was to a woman who compliments me beautifully.

I would have wanted a happier life for Darryl also. He is a talented writer married to a steady, dependable and loving wife who has stood by his side and supported him for more than forty years. Darryl has two remarkable and successful children who have made wonderful lives for themselves. Darryl's books have sold well and he is an award-winning author. All these characteristics speak to his success in life. Yet he is estranged from his family of origin. Those and those who know him, including family, tread lightly in his presence fearing he will uncork on them and launch into a devastating and vicious tirade. He is a talented and accomplished man with a trip-wire temper.

What makes this most sad is that I remember when he was a sweet and kind young boy. A gentleman. A loving soul. A dreamer. It saddens and enrages me that Vern took that precious young boy and just destroyed him. This book recounts only some of the abuse he received and frankly not even the worst of it. Out of respect for him I won't speak of even more personal and enduring assaults upon his person.

That sweet boy is still there and his family and some of his friends have met that person. But that innocent young man is largely a shadow of his former self. What is most enraging is that

the perpetrator of the crimes against him was never named, charged nor punished and the abuse itself has become an embarrassment to my mother's family and something to be denied, ignored or buried. Realizing that life is unfair the telling of Darryl's experience in this book is my attempt to hold her and my father accountable for crimes against their children and particularly the assault upon my brother Darryl. This is not an attempt at vengeance and it won't undo the past. It is however my way of refusing to be silenced and an acknowledgement of the fact that something terribly wrong happened on our family farm when we were children. As unsavory as this tale is, it will be told.

In concluding this chapter I feel the need to make a confession. I have always resented the fact that our parents gave us names that rhymed: Darryl, Terrell and Merrill. I know some think this was endearing or cute on their part but I never liked my name. Part of the reason for that is as a twin I was never allowed to be an independent person. I was, and in the minds of many still am, merely an extension of my twin brother Darryl. Despite being fraternal twins that not only looked different but possessed very different personalities, Mother did everything she could to impose a singularity and uniformity on the two of us. Being Darryl was an impossible task for me to achieve. It did violence to my sense of self because it denied and even assaulted my independent personhood. I always wanted to be "myself" and not an appendage to my older and more talented twin. I was fortunate to attend Stetson University without Darryl so that I could begin to form my own identity. While there I was blessed that my roommate could not remember that my name was Terrell and called me "Terry" instead. I seized on that opportunity and that name and for the rest of my life have gone by the name "Terry." I was never ashamed of my given name but to be a person in my own right I needed a new name and one that didn't rhyme with those of my brothers.

Chapter 6

Merrill

I admit it. I was naïve. I thought when I had my showdown with Mother and dad back in the summer of 1968 that they would both wise up and quit abusing Merrill. Only recently did I discover that they had not. With Darryl and I gone they turned on Merrill. When I learned of this dad had died and of course Mother had been long dead. I was so furious and my tentative esteem for my father plummeted further. It's awful to admit but he was a coward and like my Mother a child abuser.

Darryl and I did all we could to protect Merrill and I assumed that since he was the youngest he would escape her wrath. The hard truth was she needed fresh meat to pound and when we left Merrill was it. Thankfully it didn't last long since she died in 1969. We boys all celebrated her passing and then turned to how we would deal with her collaborator – our father. I dealt with him by chewing him out and confronting him with his cowardice and his crimes. He couldn't run or hide and it turned out he was more frightened of me than he was of Vern. Only months after Vern's passing Edward remarried to a woman that was much more willing to comply with his expectations – something Vern never did. I didn't, however, let the new marriage deter me. I aggressively sought Edward out and made him confess his guilt in our abuse and apologize.

I was also angry with him for renegeing on his promise to help support his sons through college. We three had labored like slaves in Mother's nursery business and had spent countless hours digging holes and planting shrubs for her many landscape contracts. Moreover, all of the stock we sold retail or used for landscaping had been grown in propagation beds that we had planted. From rooting the nursery stock to transferring plants into pots to putting them in the

ground – all that labor had been ours. Mother was quite literally making money off the sweat equity of her boys and the we had been assured by our parents that some portion of those funds would be set aside to help us through college. Yet when the time came in our senior year of high school to start looking at colleges and universities, dad and Mother pulled the rug from beneath our feet and informed us we were on our own and if we wanted to go to college we should take out a loan. We were thunderstruck and asked what had happened to all the nursery money. Mother's answer was "I spent it," but never told us for what purposes it was spent. In retrospect, I realized that she had consistently underpriced her nursery plants and her landscape contracts and never included the labor costs provided by her boys, seemingly for free. Mother ultimately spent the proceeds from the nursery on things she fancied such as clothes, a sewing machine, makeup etc. There had never been any nursery money saved for her boys and there was never any intent to help us through college.

Darryl and I felt cheated and betrayed. Darryl's solution to college was to apply to the Air Force Academy where he was accepted. While a good student, I was not of Darryl's caliber and I had my heart set on going to the prestigious Baptist school in Florida – Stetson University. When I shared my desire with father he told me I wasn't smart enough to get in. Undaunted, I applied and was admitted along with a sizeable loan obligation.

For four years, I worked part time jobs and earned an Army scholarship that, along with a huge loan burden, put me through Stetson. During that entire period the extent of my father's contribution to my education was \$200, and he contributed that paltry sum with great reluctance. Later I would learn that he bragged to friends that he had put his son Terrell through Stetson. I was livid when I heard this.

When I finally got around to dressing dad down about his complicity in our child abuse, I also excoriated him for having abandoned his promise to help his boys through college and made him promise he would not similarly abandon Merrill when his turn came for college. At length dad apologized for his part in our abuse as well as failing to support Darryl and I when we went to college. He also said he would do better by Merrill and help him through college. I accepted his apology and believed he would follow through to help Merrill get an education and to protect him from further child abuse. I thought I had finally gotten him to see the error of his ways. As it turned out he only kept half of that promise. He did help Merrill earn a degree from Stetson but he did nothing to stop Merrill's abuse at Mother's hand.

It was only after his passing in 2013 that I discovered the degree to which dad had ignored Merrill's well-being. He had not only persisted in demeaning Merrill in the way he had with Darryl and me, he additionally put Merrill in the position of assisting him with Vern's care. In fact on one occasion Dad ordered Merrill to help his mother with toileting; forcing him to wipe the feces from his mother's bottom after she had soiled herself. Dad was clearly oblivious to the adverse impact such an experience would have upon a boy 12 and 13 years of age. It was a humiliating task – totally inappropriate for a young boy to be doing.

Dad wasted no time in getting remarried. Ignoring Merrill's need to grieve the loss of his mother dad directed his son to strictly adhere to the orders of his new young wife who did not know Merrill at all. These were trying times for Merrill. His new mother was completely inexperienced in parenting and Merrill rightfully resented her often arbitrary demands of him. Eager to stay in the good graces of his new bride dad abused Merrill whenever he felt Merrill was not fully following his new wife's orders or whenever he thought she was not showing sufficient respect. He even resorted to requiring Merrill to refer to her as "Mother" – showing

insensitivity to both the bile associated with that name and the reality that this young boy's "mother" had recently died. Dad exhibited the empathy of a stone.

I was unaware of all of this. Had I known I am sure I would have gone home and flayed the ever-living hell out of my father with the very belt he and my mother had brutalized us with. In retrospect I am grateful for my ignorance of Merrill's treatment since at that time I was generally unaware of the undercurrent of physical violence that I was suppressing. Had I acted on that reservoir of anger I might well have done to dad what I refrained from doing to Mother on two occasions. Even so, my response to dad's cowardice and disregard for his remaining son pales in comparison to Merrill's struggles following the deaths of his mother and father.

As it turns out Merrill was greatly traumatized by witnessing the sadistic beatings that Darryl and I experienced as well as his own beatings. Memories of those events would persist into late adulthood. Like me he would struggle with his rage toward his abusers fearing that he could become enraged and physically violent. Merrill was also gifted with an exceptionally analytical mind and a broad vocabulary that could be used productively in his work and community life. These skills, however, could also be employed to deliver devastating verbal assaults if provoked. This capacity for verbal violence which had been instilled in us by our abusive parents was yet another artifact from our long abusive interment that we three would have to struggle to contain.

Despite the abuse Merrill received from both of his parents, he revered his father. However, after dad's death in 2013 Merrill began to struggle with his grief and the magnitude of his father's deeds and misdeeds began to surface. Grieving is easier when you principally have positive memories and experiences to reflect upon. In this case dad's death provoked memories and experiences that had been long repressed and Merrill and perhaps for the first time in his

adult life he found himself reliving and coping with events that had occurred when he was a small child. It saddened me to see this fine man who was approaching his senior years having to cope with ugly memories and emotions that I wish he could have dealt with decades earlier – had it not been for his need to revere dad.

This begs the question of “In what regard should Edward and Vern be held?” The answer is complex. Edward Wimberley in many ways was an exceptionally fine man. He did so much good in the church, as an educator and in the community. He died a beloved man. Yet he died a man who was only known in part. Most didn’t know what happened in his home and to his children. Moreover, that’s what dad desired. He wanted to be liked and admired in the community so he hid this part of his life from the public to insure he would be liked. Was he a bad man? Generally speaking, I would answer no. Was he a bad father? I would say that where it counted most, keeping his children safe and taking care of them –he was a very poor father.

And what of Vern? I begin this book by describing her as a “horrible human being” based upon the sadistic fashion that she treated her children over many years. But was she always so terrible? I think not. I think that like Darryl, Merrill and me she was a good person who was savaged by her father and mother and became if you will “damaged.”

Having been victimized herself the question could be posed: Is she exempt of responsibility for her own abuse? I would assert “absolutely not!” I never had an inkling throughout her life that she was insane or mentally incapable of understanding the ramifications of her actions. People who knew her would also corroborate this assertion. She was a tortured soul but she had the capacity to know right from wrong and could choose to not act on her pain and anger to hurt her children. She made the choice to torture her children on virtually a daily basis. She is accountable for her actions. They cannot be blamed on her treatment at the hands of

her parents or blamed on a brain tumor diagnosed at the end of her life. Vern was sane, intelligent and thoughtful. She embodied dark forces that she had the power to contain but she not only chose to loosen them, she relished and enjoyed the pain she was inflicting.

We've probably all heard the adage of the parent about to punish their child "this is going to hurt me a lot more than it will hurt you." That didn't apply to Vern. She relished the opportunity to beat and humiliate her children. She loved the screams of pain, the welts that would form on our bodies under her fusillade and she loved the sight of our blood. She was a horrible human being because that was her choice. After dad's death those memories and that reality began to descend on Merrill and pain inflicted decades earlier appeared anew, fresh and horrible. Sadly, Merrill's mother was the embodiment of evil.

Part Two: The Morgan Family



(Vern Collage)

Chapter 7

Dave and Edith

Earlier in this narrative I referred to my mother Vern as a “terrible human being” which I recognize is a very harsh, though accurate, term. In making such an assertion, however, I can’t imagine the reader not wondering whether Vern had always been “horrible.” Personally, I think not. I believe that she was born happy but her joy was torn from her by her hypercritical and abusive parents; particularly her father Dave. In telling this story, blame should be assigned where it belongs, and in this case, the raging headwaters of the river of abuse and pain that washed over two generations of children began with the actions of Dave Morgan and his wife Edith.

David Pierpont Morgan, III was a man who considered himself and his family to be a superior breed to any other family around him. Perhaps it was because his family claimed lineage with the wealthy J.P. Morgan family (they were only distantly related) that led Dave and his wife Edith to adopt a true superiority complex when it came to those around him. In a world where the term elite was never applied, Dave thought of himself as elite which implied that his God-given superiority entitled him to run over or exploit anyone around him if it suited Dave Morgan’s agenda. In my growing up I learned there were many that regarded Dave with disdain and didn’t trust him in business transactions. Dave had a reputation for being stingy and disingenuous in his dealings. For Dave people, possessions and property were all tools for enriching and empowering himself.

Edith Hendrix, his wife and my grandmother, was a cold, caustic and hard woman. She did Dave’s bidding which including birthing nine children who became the labor base around which Dave amassed his wealth, that included several thousand acres of land and countless

livestock. Edith also served her husband by turning a blind eye to Dave's frequent infidelities which at one point produced an illegitimate son from a nearby housewife, born within days of one of Edith's daughters. Remarkably, the two so nearly resembled one another that they were forever regarded as siblings.

Essentially what Dave wanted Dave got even if it meant working his children to the bone to get it. He demanded their labor and their obedience in *all* things. Edith reinforced Dave's commands with a switch or belt and everyone in Dave's family surrendered their lives and identities to their totalitarian father. My mother's emotional problems began with Dave Morgan and mine stemmed from my Mother. So, in a perverted way, the source of my misery, the misery of my siblings and that of my mother, goes back to Dave Morgan whom all the grandchildren affectionately called Papa. I, however, did not share the family's endearing regard for my grandfather. In my mind Dave Morgan was a philander and abuser; pure and simple.

While all Dave's children were chattel for his discretionary use, the three boys were his princes who would carry on the family name (and one son - Mack - carried on Dave's womanizing ways). They would inherit Dave's wealth and carry on the Morgan name. The six girls, however, were another matter. From Dave Morgan's perspective, the "girls" were good for two purposes: working the farm and having babies. These were the times later feminists would decry but this world of chauvinism and abuse was the world my Mother grew up in.

I have heard Mother and her sisters complain of how hard Dave worked them, even sending them off to labor on neighboring farms for a fee (that went to Dave). My mother would also speak of physical abuse – beatings, slapping, punching. And then she spoke of midnight visits to see her at the tobacco barns when she was stoking the fire all night and Dave's sexual

attentions. Hearing these stories was just the beginning of my disdain for Dave Morgan and all things Morgan.

When he was an old man Dave would come to the farm to visit and perhaps fish in the pond near our front door. I would listen to him belittle and tease Mother, leading her on to think she would receive an inheritance from him. This promise was huge for Mother because it signified she was included in the family and was important. She sought signs from Dave that he loved her and that she was valued. Despite her best efforts and her highest hopes, Dave neither loved nor respected her. He was like cat toying with its prey. He delighted in torturing her and putting her in misery. These things I know because I observed them and after Dave left my brothers and I paid the price for his purposeful agitation of her.

Edith was equally cruel. She made my mother think she was fat, ugly and stupid. She put her down at every turn and constantly criticized how Vern was raising her boys, though not in regard to how she was abusing them. For Edith Vern was too soft on her boys. She wanted to see us have less, work more and be beaten more regularly. Edith had a true storm trooper mentality toward motherhood. She would also ridicule me for being soft and a “cry baby” after being whipped or beaten. I always thought Edith had a big engaging grin, laughing eyes and an assassin’s heart. She was no more than an extension of Dave Morgan’s toxic approach to life and family.

As I grew older I distanced myself from all of Mother’s family except her youngest brother Sharold whom I valued principally because he exhibited so few of the Morgan traits that had caused so much pain in my life and in the lives of my brothers. Even after Dave’s death I still detected a “Morgan Swag” among many of the remaining children – a sense of inflated self-worth and a lack of empathy toward others. I was also repelled by the efforts of cousins to

“lionize” Dave Morgan as if he were a decent and talented man. I had seen the real Dave Morgan in my home and heard his deeds from my mother, her sisters and friends and relatives in the community. For me elevating the legend of Dave Morgan made as much sense as snuggling with a rattlesnake. The bulk of the abuse my brothers and I endured began and ended at the feet of Dave Morgan. Ultimately I felt nothing for him but contempt.

Upon their deaths I had little feeling for either of my Morgan grandparents. I was never happy to be associated with the Morgan name and I distanced myself from cousins, aunts and uncles. I suffered with my mother as Dave’s will was executed and the three boys and eldest daughter Theresa were given vast tracks of land worth thousands. The six girls also received land – a total of six acres on the Suwannee River in separate plots – six acres divided among six girls. Each 3-acre plot was split between 3 daughters in joint ownership so that as time went on the process of splitting these plots between the daughters and their children would become increasingly difficult and ultimately impossible. To add insult to injury these plots were principally situated in a set of wetland gullies located along the edge of the Suwannee River. Given the configuration of these two 3-acre plots it was impossible to build any structure or even construct a dock down to the river. There was no level ground and given the flood history of the river there was no spot to safely build without risk of being washed away. In effect Dave had made this gift of six acres his final parting insult to the girls he exploited and abused. They wanted land so he complied, giving them the most unusable, worthless plots in his holdings while their brothers received landholdings worth thousands.

This parting insult ate at Mother’s heart until she died and for 20 years after her death I paid the taxes on that worthless property. I ultimately realized that with the deaths of all Dave’s children, it would be impossible to do anything useful with the property so I quit paying taxes

and it was eventually sold for the tax lien. None of the cousins involved had a thing to say about it which is just as well. Dave's inheritance to his daughters was a bitter pill that at length I refused to swallow any longer. In disposing of the property, I severed my last remaining tie with the Morgan family, enabling me to move on with my own life without being anchored by Mother's tortured past. Good riddance.

Chapter 8

Mack D. and D.P.

Mack D.

Richard McDavid “Mack” Morgan (named after his mother Edith’s brother) was the pride of the Morgan family and an authentic war hero who fought in the Battle of Bataan in World War II and, as a Japanese war prisoner, survived the Bataan Death March. Mack, also known as “Mack D.” based upon his middle name McDavid, returned from war a broken man suffering from PTSD, bipolar depression and alcoholism. He died in 1988 at the age of 69. Mack exerted a powerful influence throughout the Morgan family and particularly upon his sister Vern.

Mack was born on July 11, 1918 making him the oldest male child in the Morgan family. Mack was two years younger than his older sister Theresa who doted on Mack throughout his life even though Mack had a reputation of being something of a “bad boy” when it came to women and drink. Mack was also the “big brother” for all his other five sisters and they all looked up to him. Mack was an exceedingly handsome man with a booming voice and a commanding presence.

Mack enlisted in the Marine Corps immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. He was shipped out of San Diego to the Luzon region of the Philippines and was on the island of Corregidor during the Japanese invasion of the Philippines and the notorious Battle of Bataan. The siege of Corregidor and the Bataan peninsula began on January 7, 1942 so by the time Mack arrived at the front the Battle of Bataan had been raging for months. On April 9, 1942, the U.S. commander of forces in the Philippines Army Major General Edward P. King surrendered his forces to Japanese General Masaharu Homma - doing so against the orders of his commanders, Generals Douglas MacArthur and Johnathan Wainwright. Thus,

began one of the worst atrocities in the history of modern warfare as the Japanese imprisoned and enslaved some 12,000 Americans and 63,000 Filipinos prisoners of war. This event has subsequently been called the Bataan Death March. Mack Morgan was one of the American soldiers who survived this ordeal.

The Imperial Japanese Army assembled some 80,000 prisoners and began the process of marching them 85 miles over rugged terrain across the Bataan peninsula toward a rail head at Capas and then onward another nine miles to Camp O'Donnell. This forced march occurred over a period of six days during which prisoners were given a single meager rice meal. Over the course of these six days, prisoners were brutalized and murdered as they were marched into exhaustion. Throughout the march between 5,000 and 18,000 Filipino and somewhere between 500 and 650 Americans died. Mack D. was fortunate to have been one of the survivors. Upon completion of the Death March Mack was interred in a Japanese prison camp where he was tortured and starved until his liberation of February 21, 1945.

Mack returned to Lafayette County Florida after the war as a shadow of the man he had once been. Gaunt and depressed it took months for Mack to return to regain his strength and vigor. During this interval, he was pampered by his sisters. His mother Edith was also instrumental in his recovery though she adopted a sterner approach believing that men were expected to “buckle up” and “snap-back” to even life’s harshest trials. Dave Morgan was also stern but forgiving in his expectations of Mack. Clearly Mack had endured hell and returned from the ordeal but it was virtually impossible for anyone in the family to be fully empathetic because nobody could remotely imagine what he had been through.

When Mack regained his strength and confidence and began to drink to excess, carouse with women and father illegitimate children, condemnation was withheld because “boys will be

boys.” After all Mack, was a genuine war hero and should be given some slack. For Mack “slack given” was “slack abused” and for the rest of Mack’s life his family deferred to his wishes and appetites through episodes of mania, depression, inebriation, marital discord and spousal abuse. Mack never overcame his experiences on Bataan and for the rest of his life he was a slow-moving train wreck that nobody could halt nor avert their eyes from. Vern worshiped Mack but along with everyone else in her family worried about his drunkenness and his fits of depression, mania and his physical violence toward his wife Frances who he nicknamed “Scrappy” based upon her willingness to fight back when being beaten.

One incident regarding Mack stands out in my mind when my mother’s concern for him reached an apex. It was late one afternoon in 1961 and Mother had the television on and tuned to WJXT in Jacksonville. She was watching a soap opera (probably *The Guiding Light*) when the program was interrupted to report that someone at Cecil Field of the Jacksonville Naval Air Station had commandeered a small airplane and was “buzzing” the airfield at a very low altitude.

At the time Mack was working as an aircraft mechanic at Cecil Field and was also drinking very heavily. So, when Mother saw the news report she immediately said “Mack is flying that plane” and she was correct. Eventually Mack ran short on fuel and had to land the plane whereupon he was immediately arrested and carried away. That stunt would eventually cost him his job and his marriage failed soon thereafter. Mack would live the rest of his life alone, estranged from Frances and his two sons, and periodically institutionalized for depression and alcoholism. He would die at 69 a fallen war hero whose fall had been gradual, painful and in plain sight of his loving family.

My mother was close to Mack but his instability and pathos served to exacerbate her own fragile emotional state. His visits would leave her depressed and irritable and following his stunt

and Cecil Field she became deeply depressed. Depression was a serious issue in the Morgan family. Mack D. suffered life-long with bipolar depression which was exacerbated by his horrific war experience. Vern also struggled with bouts of depression though she was never medicated appropriately. Several sisters were also treated for depression to include Oneida, Nell and Frieda. Mack's younger brother D.P. also suffered with severe depression.

David Pierpont, IV (D.P.)

David Pierpont Morgan IV or D.P. was two years younger than his older brother Mack and would have undoubtedly served in WWII with Mack had it not been for a tractor accident that injured him when he was still a young man. So, while Mack was serving in the Pacific D.P. helped his father run the family farm that produced tobacco, corn, melons, hay, swine, beef and chickens. D.P. eventually met Lee Hunt from nearby Branford and they married. The couple occupied two hundred acres near the Morgan family homestead in Lafayette County and got into the dairy business; an occupation D.P. would stick with for the rest of his life.

D.P. looked very much like his father David Pierpont, III (Dave) and possessed a similar stern persona. But unlike his father who was ruthless in his relationships with others, D.P. was kind though chronically depressed. My memories of D.P. revolve around his sadness and the sameness of his life. Day in and day out D.P. would rise well before sunrise to bring his cows to the barn to milk and in the late afternoon repeat the process only to collapse in bed late at night for a short reprieve before beginning the process again and doing so seemingly endlessly.

That is not to say that D.P. didn't smile or laugh or enjoy his family. I have seen D.P. do all of that, but only episodically. D.P.'s underlying affect was depression and his daily existence was monotonous, boring and depressing. In fact, I don't recollect that he or his family ever took a vacation or got away from the farm for more than a day or two.

D.P.'s daily existence and his underlying emotional makeup made him a dour person to be around. Unfortunately, his wife's disposition was even more sour than his own. Lee was a chronically unhappy person, a vicious gossip and like her husband, a depressive. She was forever complaining about her life, her children and her husband. Nothing was ever right, good enough or fair enough for Lee and D.P. found himself nagged and endlessly criticized in her presence. I suppose D.P. took solace during his long hours in the barn because at least Lee wasn't there nagging him. However, at some point he would have to leave the barn and return into the house for supper and bed and Lee would always be waiting for him brimming with complaints and accusations and ever-ready to remind him of what an immense disappointment he was for her.

Mother loved and admired D.P. immensely and D.P. was instrumental in getting us through our first few years on the farm in Mayo. D.P. brought us beef and milk from his dairy, helped us set up fish traps and trout lines to catch fish, brought his tractor to our farm to help us plant a garden and was forever dropping by with fresh vegetables. Although his personality was stern and dour and his life and emotions were blunted by depression, he was unfailingly generous and supportive of his sister and her boys. Mother appreciated him and we loved him immensely.

D.P. had a son that was in school with Darryl and me. His name was Rodney Paul or "Rodney." Rodney was our closest playmate and cousin after moving to Mayo. Our friendship however was fractured because Rodney's mother would constantly browbeat the boy about his grades – which incidentally were not bad at all. However, she would daily make a point of comparing him and his grades to Darryl's and mine. This proved to be a destructive and completely unfair comparison. Ultimately, Lee's harangue over Rodney's grades drove a wedge between the Wimberley twins and him. During high school we drifted completely apart.

Lee was also divisive with her gossip. She delighted in ridiculing and criticizing Mother in our presence. The paradox of course is that her observations were accurate and true. Mother's shorts were too revealing, she smoked too many cigarettes, she was preoccupied with calling attention to herself and so on. Lee's critique was spot-on. The problem was that Vern was our mother and having her faults flaunted in front of us by our Aunt Lee embarrassed us even as Mother was embarrassing herself.

We boys all came to resent Lee for her cruel though accurate critiques of our mother. We were enduring enough unpleasantness at home without visiting D.P. and Lee to get a "second big helping" of guilt and embarrassment. I eventually chose to distance myself from D.P. and his family in the interest of sparing myself more disappointment and pain. It was one thing to know in my heart that my mother was damaged goods. I was an entirely other thing to have that reality rubbed in my face by my bitter aunt.

The Inheritance

In 1962 David Pierpont Morgan, III (my grandfather) placed my mother in an enormous impasse when he died and bequeathed virtually all his land to his three sons. His last will and testament forced Mother to confront Mack, D.P. and her youngest brother Sharold about the inequity of the arrangement. Her voice was joined by those of her sisters Nell and Oneida and after much back and forth the three boys agreed to pay a paltry sum to their sisters over a ten-year period. Memory serves me that they paid something like \$200 annually and that each of the three boys would send that money to two of their sisters.

D.P. agreed to pay this to my mother. While accepting these funds as her due, Mother resented the fact that even if he paid the entire sum of \$2,000, the hundreds of acres which he had inherited was worth substantially more than the paltry payment she and her sisters were

receiving. I remember that during several years when crops failed and the dairy business was slow D.P. had trouble paying Mother her “allotment.” In fact, I don’t believe he ever completed the ten-year payout he and his brothers had agreed to.

On numerous occasions Mother found herself in conflict with D.P. over these allotments. Her arguments with D.P. over money were difficult because she loved D.P. and appreciated how he had helped her family since moving to Mayo. She hated fighting with him over receipt of her meager allotments and in fact pressed D.P. to forego the allotments entirely and divide the land among his sisters. D.P. was of course unwilling to do that. Mother would similarly approach brothers Mack and Sharold and doing so was extremely painful since she loved and admired her war hero brother Mack and doted over her youngest brother Sharold. Ultimately, Mack, D.P. and Sharold disappointed Mother and her sisters by deciding to stand in solidarity; refusing to share their father’s inheritance with their six sisters. Mother was devastated and despondent.

Throughout this process Mother naively assumed that she could persuade her brothers to “do the right thing” and when they refused to make an equitable settlement she became increasingly bitter and enraged. Mother’s disappointment numbed and disabled her. Thereafter she sat upon her green “throne” in our dining room for hours at a time; chain smoking one Pall Mall cigarette after another, guzzling hot coffee and endlessly stewing over her father’s monumental insult. Mother never overcame the rejection and disappointment of her father’s will settlement. Her emotional state deteriorated and she was overcome with bitterness, anger and depression. She also became an increasingly malicious and dangerous threat to her children.

Within two years of Dave Morgan’s demise Mack had been forced to sell his inheritance to support his drinking habit. Likewise, D.P. also liquidated the bulk of his inheritance, only maintaining the dairy farm he had acquired prior to his father’s death. Five years after Dave

Morgan's death the only son who had maintained their inheritance was the youngest son Sharold who farmed on the original family farmstead and eventually generated profit for his family by getting into the chicken production business.

My mother witnessed the squandering of an inheritance that she believed should have rightfully belonged to her and to her sisters and became even more despondent. She isolated herself from D.P. and Mack though remaining attached to her younger brother Sharold. During my long conversations with Mother over that period I remember her overwhelming sense of feeling rejected, unloved and unappreciated. Amidst this angst over inheritance and worth Mother was blind to the fact that she was creating the very sense of being unloved, unappreciated, and rejected among her children that she lamented regarding her Morgan family. Depression, anger and a ceaseless preoccupation with long held abuses and grievances at the hands of her father and mother completely blinded Vern to what she was wreaking in her own family.

Chapter 9

Sisters

Mother and her sisters were some of the most beautiful young women to have ever emerged from Lafayette County. They were also continually bickering with one another and competing for their father's favor and their mother's support. The sole exception to the sisterly quarrels was the eldest Theresa born in 1916 two years before her brother Mack. Those two years made a huge difference in the Morgan household. As the family grew, the reigns of authority for rearing the children were delegated in part to Theresa who had little patience with her sisters' petty infighting.

Dave Morgan encouraged his daughters to compete with one another for his favor and actively manipulated one sister against another. This manipulation was most obvious to me during their adult years although my aunts and my mother have told me that Dave employed this technique throughout their childhood. My mother was a middle child, born in 1927. Beyond Theresa, she had two older sisters: Oneida born in 1921 and Frieda who was born in 1924. Behind Mother came the two youngest daughters, Guinell (Nell) born 1930 and Catherine who was born in 1931. The youngest sibling in her family was brother Sharold who was born in 1941. Sharold was only eight years older than Vern's twins.

Dave and Edith picked favorites among their daughters and at the top of the pecking order was Theresa, Frieda and the youngest daughter Catherine. Oneida was an obedient and quiet daughter and does not appear to have been particularly valued within the family – though she was close to Theresa. Meanwhile, my mother Vern and her sister Nell had a reputation for being spirited.

Among all the Morgan girls my mother Vern seems to have had a “bulls-eye” on her back when it came to drawing the ire and abuse of her father and mother. I have heard many accounts of whippings and brow-beating delivered by both of Vern’s parents and I have heard other sisters speak of being worked very hard on the farm and being the recipient of one of Dave or Edith’s scalding tirades. I have even heard them speak of being whipped by Dave and Edith. However, none of them seem to have endured what Vern did in the Morgan family.

The reason for this has largely escaped me beyond my suspicion that my “spirited” mother was “mouthy” and assertive – constantly challenging her parents in an era when challenging parental authority was totally unacceptable. I believe that her challenges to authority provoked her parents and resulted in her frequent and severe abuse. Throughout the years of watching my mother interact with her parents it seemed to me that her mother Edith didn’t like Vern, whereas her father had mixed feelings for his daughter that probably related to her stories of his late night visits to see her when she was stoking fuel to the tobacco barns.

During my long talks with my mother as a child about her growing-up she was quite clear about the nature of those visits and how she had assumed that by giving in to his desires that she would somehow elevate her status in the family. Bluntly said, I believe Dave sexually abused my Mother. I pretty much had to believe that since Mother had shared the story of those visits with me on numerous occasions. Realizing this, I wondered if he had been intimate with other daughters – after all he had a reputation as a womanizer and his daughters were all glamorously beautiful. I cannot make that definitive assertion in this story.

However, having become a social worker and a psychotherapist in the 1970’s I have worked with many victims of sexual abuse and learned that one of the lasting consequences of such mistreatment among women is a life-long problem with understanding appropriate sexuality

sometimes exhibited in hypersexuality and/or inappropriate sexual dress and expression. My mother displayed some of these characteristics with her short shorts, her vulgar display of her bottom and her breasts, parading through the house in panties or nude and her incessant flirting with men.

Others among her sisters were also overtly sexual in similar ways, leading me to wonder about whether my grandfather had been sexually inappropriate with them also. I was particularly concerned about my aunt Oneida who lived in a relationship where she and her two daughters were sexually and physically abused by her husband. I questioned whether her home experiences had led her to wed and remain wed to such an abusive man. While I have no concrete proof of such abuse among Mother's sisters, I do have her account which I heard on numerous occasions and which I have reason to trust. As for the other sisters, I can't be sure but I do wonder.

What I know for certain is Vern was considered a problem child and was worked to excess, physically beaten on a regular basis and was also the victim of sexual assault on at least one occasion. I am also sure that although she was loved by her sisters they viewed her with suspicion and stayed clear of her in the interest of not drawing the ire of Dave or Edith. The sole exceptions to this was her older sister Oneida, her younger sister Nell. I believe she was also accepted and liked by her three brothers.

Some years later I would have a conversation with a classmate of my Mother who described her as a poor student, distracted, something of a "wild-child" at school and, in his words, "obviously a very troubled young girl." Mother was not a good student and didn't finish high school. She may have very well had learning disabilities and since she was female her parents were not as invested in her education as they were for their sons. This former classmate of my mother also went on to describe her as "unhappy" and "damaged."

In my conversations about life during those years at home she told me she was desperate to escape her family and Lafayette County and saw my father as her “ticket out.” Based upon conversations with both parents over many years, I am quite sure my father was unaware that in marrying my mother that he had his “ticket punched.” Once they were married dad was forced to cope with Mother’s moodiness and agitation and realized that quite figuratively “he had bitten off more than he could chew.” At that point he began doing what he would always do – he withdrew from her leaving increasingly isolated and alone.

Mother interpreted dad’s behavior as abandonment. This would become a troubling theme punctuating her life. She had felt unwanted and unloved by her father and mother, unappreciated and unloved at school, abandoned by her husband, and distrusted by her sisters. Vern entered her adult life marginalized from any reliable support and from that foundation became a wife and mother. Troubled and tortured from the outset, the prognosis for Vern ever having a fruitful marriage and meaningful relationship with her children was dim from the outset.

Vern’s relationships with her sisters as an adult were entirely dictated by family considerations. All the girls married and had children. Theresa married a retired Navy diver and had a daughter. Oneida married a mechanic from Perry and had two daughters while Frieda married an Army paratrooper and they had a son and daughter. Nell married a funeral director and had a son and daughter while Catherine wed a naval officer and had three children – two daughters and a son.

Four of the sisters left home and formed stable and productive marriages to include improving their standard of living and their social status. However, two sisters – Oneida and Vern - became involved in troubled and abusive marriages. Onedia would be physically and

sexually assaulted by her husband and her daughters would also be molested. Oneida and her daughters spoke frankly of this to many within my family. Of course, the other family marred by abuse was my own Wimberley family. I never saw dad physically assault my mother or she him, but the violence against their children was constant and brutal.

Mother's sisters were well-aware that her marriage and Oneida's were troubled and they knew that children from those marriages were being abused. They said nothing to either Oneida or Mother about the abuse and did nothing to stop it. In fact, the very act of acknowledging abuse violated the Morgan credo of exceptionality. Morgan's were exceptional and not as base and venal as lesser families. It contradicted Morgan values to acknowledge such problems existed in their family and doing so not only eroded their claim to "uniqueness" it also opened the door for critiquing how Dave and Edith had raised their children, and that was a door better left closed.

Mother was keenly aware that her sisters looked down their noses at the two less affluent sisters with troubled marriages. Whenever we attended family reunions or visited Catherine and Frieda in Virginia where both of their husbands were stationed with the military, Mother would put us in our best clothes and she would wear her nicest outfits. We were not affluent by any means and in fact were having trouble paying our bills, but Mother would be damned if she was going to let her sisters see that. The competition for Dave's affection that had been engendered among the girls in childhood had now become a competition to see who was the loveliest, most cultured and affluent and who had the best behaved and smartest children. Given the academic and career track record of all the children born to the six Morgan girls, Vern's three boys stood out. But in the days when they were small children visiting their aunts for sisterly show-and-tell it was never clear whether the Wimberley boys would be productive and successful given the steady onslaught of their insecure mother against their bodies, minds and souls.

There was, however, one thing around which the Morgan girls found unity and that was their desire to influence their father to share the family inheritance equitably among all nine children to include the girls. One-by-one they approached their father to sweet-talk and cajole him into revising his will. One-by-one Dave toyed with them, promising them property and money, reassuring them they were loved and then reneging on his promises. In truth, he never intended to leave anything to his girls but he enjoyed manipulating their emotions and ultimately disappointing them. I observed much of this as child involving Mother and her sisters and even at that tender age realized how cruel his game was. Ultimately the Morgan girls were excluded and cast aside as was the “Morgan way.”

After Dave died and the will had been probated, the six sisters returned to their competitive “one-upmanship” of who had the most money, the nicest house, the prettiest clothes, the finest husband and the nicest children. Mother continued to play that game with her sisters – though halfheartedly. After her father’s will was read, the property distributed and squandered away, something darker emerged in mother and she became increasingly detached and combative with her siblings. Only Sharold remained close. Vern became increasingly consumed with grievances involving her husband and children and bore down on us with greater ferocity. Mother correctly realized that she had been rejected by her father solely because of her gender. This realization had a profoundly negative impact upon her, and I believe that final rejection robbed Mother of a future. Rejected and abandoned by virtually everyone that meant anything to her, Vern fell headfirst into that empty future that was her reality and she became depressed – really depressed.

Chapter 10

Wanda

Wanda Hendrix never had any idea that she was part of our story involving child abuse, and in fact she was only tangentially involved. Having grown up with my mother and her sisters she only came to visit us once and even this was a short visit. She was my mother's "famous" first cousin and the only member of Mother's family who had achieved fame. Wanda Hendrix was a celebrated Hollywood actress. My mother's envy of Wanda's fame and fleeting fortune served as a daily reminder of who Wanda was and what Vern was not. My mother's jealousy quite literally revolved around the fact that she thought of herself as more beautiful and talented than Wanda. So, she asked herself, how is it that Wanda became famous and I was left to languish on my family's farm in Lafayette County? In Vern's eyes this was an injustice that would gnaw at her gut throughout her life.

Wanda was in my mother's eyes the region's first "hometown hero" because she had managed to escape the bounds of North Florida and her family to achieve fame and fortune. My mother was fixated upon realizing the same life Wanda had achieved. Wanda's family came out of the Lafayette County area where her father, Sylvester "Mack" Hendrix, worked as a logger. Later Mack would move Wanda and her mother Mary Faircloth Hendrix to Jacksonville when Wanda was a teen. She attended school in Duval County and was eventually discovered by a studio recruiter who saw her perform at local talent show at the Jacksonville Little Theater. Wanda would go on to star in "Confidential Agent" with Charles Boyer, "Ride the Pink Horse" with Robert Montgomery and "Welcome Stranger" with Bing Crosby.

Wanda was born on November 3, 1928 making her about a year younger than my mother Vern. Vern knew Wanda well during her childhood because Mack would bring the family over

to Lafayette County to visit his sister Edith Hendrix Morgan and her family. Needless, to say Wanda was a stunningly beautiful woman. The six Morgan girls were likewise lovely and when Wanda became an actress my mother Vern and her sister Nell were encouraged that if this good fortune could befall Wanda then certainly it could happen to them too. After all they were every bit as lovely and talented as cousin Wanda! Or so they thought.

Among all the Morgan girls, Vern and Nell were dreamers. Both wanted to become rich and famous and both needed – indeed demanded – to be the center of attention. Likewise, both girls were forever immature in their worldviews and life expectations. Their obsession with “being somebody” was unfortunately intertwined with Wanda Hendrix who served as their role model. It never occurred to either woman that “being Wanda” was not only an unattainable dream, it was destined to be a hopelessly romantic and ultimately disappointing quest. It’s worth remembering that both sisters married in their late teens at a time they were ill-educated and juvenile. They were blinded to the fact that Wanda’s life was not all glitz and glitter and that happiness did not automatically accompany fame.

Wanda would famously marry the war hero Audie Murphy but that marriage proved most destructive. Murphy suffered with what we would now call PTSD and was physically and emotionally abusive of Wanda, at one point threatening her at gunpoint. This relationship left young Wanda traumatized and she treated her pain and anxiety with alcohol. By the time I met her in 1962 she was a fragile alcoholic. Wanda and Murphy divorced and she dated an array of famous Hollywood actors to include Tony Curtis, Robert Boyle, Neil Larsen, Eddie Fisher, Jerry Lazar and others. Eventually Wanda remarried in 1954, this time to actor Robert Stack’s brother James – a wealthy sportsman. Sadly, this marriage only lasted four years and in 1958 Stack filed for Divorce charging Wanda with “extreme cruelty.”

Wanda's life went further downhill thereafter. Her drinking and emotional problems interfered with her landing film or television roles. In 1969 she married for a third time to Italian financier and oil company executive Steve La Monte. Ten years later she was divorced by La Monte and in that same year diagnosed with a debilitating chronic respiratory condition. Wanda died alone and childless in 1981 at the age of 52.

While Wanda's rise to stardom was dramatic and exciting, her life was torturous and miserable. My mother was well-aware of the ups-and-downs of her cousin's career having followed Wanda closely via news from her uncle Mack. Wanda was the Morgan family's celebrity and they lionized her as they did all other descendants of the Morgan and Hendrix line by focusing upon the glitz, glamor and fame while ignoring everything negative or troubling. This approach reinforced the myth of Morgan family exceptionalism as compared to other families. Their family "exceptionality" justified prioritizing family desires and aspirations above those of all others and in my mother's case produced a serious conflict. If her family was so very exceptional (as demonstrated by Wanda's great attainment), then what had happened to Mother? She often wondered why she had been destined to live a most unexceptional life.

While Mother was jealous of her cousin's success her principal angst revolved around the fact that she was not living the life she wanted. She needed attention and was getting none. She needed to be accomplished and she had not even finished high school. Vern desired wealth and privilege but was poor and governed by the desires of her ineffectual husband and her manipulative and abusive father. She desired independence and she was saddled with three boys. And finally, she desired life in an affluent and interesting community and she lived in a drafty farmhouse in Mayo, Florida.

These disparities frustrated and angered Mother, even as she sought to imitate her cousin with her attire, makeup and hairstyle. She felt “sexy” and wanted to be considered beautiful and desirable. Yet her sexuality was largely lost on her increasingly boring and bland husband. She wanted other men to see and value her and I think in her mind she imagined herself involved with some of the “stars” her cousin Wanda had been seen with. Of course, this was entirely the product of Vern’s fantasy world. She would dress to be noticed and was noticed and admired by men but none were rich or famous or handsome. Instead they were “bubbas” from Mayo or “spudsters” (people who grow potatoes) from Hastings; common men with a common interest in leering at women who were “on the make.” In her dress and deportment my mother was quite often “on the make” in that she had a deep desire to turn men’s heads. I never knew if her behavior went beyond that but I was well-aware of how she acted out her Wanda Hendrix fantasies in her “look,” her clothes, her makeup and in her flirtatiousness with men.

As I reflect upon my mother’s fantasy life, it occurs to me that she was never thankful for what she had. She was only fixated upon what she did not have. Had she been able or willing to adopt a different worldview she might have noticed that she had much to be proud of. She had three terrific children and lived in a beautiful region of Florida. She had friends who loved her and several sisters that she was close to. Although he was found lacking in a variety of skills and attributes, her husband loved her and did his best to provide for her. Mother was also blessed with beauty, sociability, a fine voice and a gift for horticulture and landscape design. Even a cursory inventory of Vern and her situation suggests that had she been willing to experience gratitude for what she possessed in her life she would not have been nearly as miserable.

Sadly, that was not the Vern Wimberley we knew. Our Vern, our Mother approached life solely from the perspective of what she lacked and never in terms of the blessings that

surrounded her. For Vern, the cup of life she had been served was forever half empty and becoming increasingly emptier.

Part Three: Hometown Heroes



(Catherine, Nell & Vern)

Chapter 11

Mack

Mack Suggs was in many respects a most unusual hero. He had grown up with my mother and knew her history. Much later in life – after I had grown up and become a father – Mack shared what he knew of Vern Morgan. He said she was always a troubled child coming from a difficult family where her father Dave Morgan ruled like a dictator. He told me that my mother was an unhappy child who struggled at home and at school and that he thought that when she met my father she considered him to be her bus ticket out of her troubled family. The young woman he recounted in this conversation very much matched what I had learned from Mother during those long talks at her feet in her “green chair” throne. Mother was 17 years old when she married my father – a tender young age. To put this in perspective, however, in rural Lafayette County Florida it was not unusual for young men and women to get married right after high school graduation and this was true even through the 1960’s when I graduated from Lafayette High School. While not unusual Mother’s situation was different in that she didn’t finish school. She married young, was pregnant early, suffered a miscarriage that was followed by the death of her firstborn, a daughter, whom, as I am told, survived for only three days.

Why my father married Vern is a mystery to me. They were never very compatible. I have to assume that the principal reason he was attracted to her was that she was very pretty and sensuous. I also think he married her because she became pregnant. Mack could not confirm this one way or another, but the very fact that he talked with me about Mother’s childhood was courageous since the code of ethics in our local community involves secrecy about what goes on in families. Mack told me the story of my mother and my father from the safety of his home in Tifton, Georgia and told me that what he had to say could never be repeated in Lafayette County,

Florida, and if it were, he would deny it. Mack was worried about getting on the wrong side of friends and family in Mayo, despite the fact he lived more than a hundred miles distant and did not travel to Mayo much anymore. This unwritten but accepted code of secrecy that Mack was alluding to is demonic to the degree that it perpetuates child abuse. Mack's willingness to confront and violate that code is just one of the many reasons he is heroic.

Mack Suggs was a tall gangly even goofy man who was entirely lovable and transparent in an era when polite Southern society engendered deceit and "decent hypocrisy." Mack taught me Sunday School, was the chapter leader of our local Royal Ambassadors (a Baptist version of Boy Scouts). He enthusiastically sang in the choir at Mayo Baptist Church with a big booming voice that was often out of tune and lacking syncopation. He enjoyed life, his precious wife Sabie, his children, and The Lord Jesus who he freely and openly praised everywhere. He was a school teacher and he loved teaching, learning, his students and his fellow-educators.

Mack taught all three Wimberley boys and he was a particularly a blessing for Darryl and me in that he was the only single human being in our community that would acknowledge our abuse and the only person who made any effort to stop it. This is a very important statement of fact. Those of us who know child abuse or abuse of any kind at any age understand that such ill-treatment can only persist in secrecy. Secrecy is necessary for abuse to continue. For the abused this secrecy can create a sense of unreality because if nobody will acknowledge or verify that abuse is occurring then, in the mind of the abused, perhaps abuse isn't occurring and maybe this is just a figment of imagination. This was particularly the case in my community in the fifties and sixties. Corporal punishment was rampant. Almost all my classmates were being smacked, whipped, paddled or beaten. Some of my classmates and cousins were getting abused much worse than me. One neighbor living a mile from our farm used to be beaten by his alcoholic

father with a hog whip consisting of a piece of conveyor belt cut two inches wide and four feet long, attached to a yard-long wooden handle fashioned from the end of a garden hoe. This whip would cut, bruise and even break ribs. My classmate used to come to school with his back and buttocks so scarred, bruised and bloodied that the gym teacher would excuse him from physical education in school.

In regard to our own abuse, we knew our mother was way out of line. We knew that daily beating, non-stop harangues, doses of tabasco sauce squirted or spooned into our mouths, enemas administered that were not needed beyond Mother's desire to give them, belts hung on every door handle ready to be used, cut switches in every room, long claw-like finger nails that were inserted into lips and noses to twist, pinch and inflict pain – we knew this was not normal or appropriate. But did it rise to the level of true abuse when the kid a mile over was being beaten with a hog whip?

These are the questions abused children think about and what they need is some objective person in their life to hear their story, acknowledge their victimhood and if possible do something about the abuse. Mack Suggs was the only person in my childhood who stood up for us, acknowledged our pain and sought to alleviate it. He was not however the only person who was aware of the problem. My brothers and I went to gym classes and dressed out with the other students. Our classmates saw the cuts and abrasions on our backs and our legs and we saw theirs. Coaches, physical education teachers and educators across our local schools saw the signs of child abuse every day and did nothing, in part because of a “spare the rod, spoil the child” mentality that was reinforced from the pulpit of virtually every church in the community. They also shared the philosophy that “children were to be seen and not heard” (meaning we had no voice to defend ourselves) and were the property of our parents to be treated as they saw fit.

Mack did not accept these values or these conventions. Children were precious gifts of a loving God in Mack's eyes and should never be abused or treated like chattel. Mack listened to children like Darryl and Terrell and he understood our story well before we uttered a word. He could tell on the basis of my school performance that I had severe learning disabilities thwarting a good mind and he could see in my interactions with my father and mother at church, school and in the community that I lived in terror. Mack knew all of that before I told him what was happening to us at home. Likewise, as talented and gifted a student as my twin brother Darryl was, he sensed Darryl's rage and witnessed the cuts and bruises Mother was inflicting upon him with an accelerating viciousness.

Mack did the unthinkable and unforgiveable in my home community. He met with my father, sat him down, told him what he was witnessing and what he had heard and asked my father to stop Mother from further abusing us. I am quite sure this was not the first time someone had approached dad about our abuse. When living in Hastings just prior to our move to Mayo I was hospitalized for a second time with pneumonia at Flagler Memorial Hospital in St. Augustine. While there my combative behavior, tearfulness and depressed mood became of concern to my caregivers, as did my habit of literally fighting to escape any nurse or physician who tried to give me a shot. At the time it quite literally took four people to hold me down for an injection. Recognizing that this behavior was aberrant, my attending physician referred me to a psychologist for an evaluation. The psychologist concluded that I was depressed and the cause of that depression was abuse at school and home. That report got my third-grade teacher re-assigned and I can't help but wonder if having that abuse reported to the school and presented to my parents in a school conference was not a factor in our leaving Hastings soon thereafter.

These are questions that will never be answered. However, I know what happened when Mack sat down with my father. Mack and dad had been friends for a long, long time. They were both active in the Baptist church, they taught together in the local school, they lunched and visited with one another. Mack had a very good relationship with dad and he assumed when he talked to him about our abuse that he could persuade Ed to intervene to protect us from Mother. As I noted earlier, Mack had grown up with Mother and had realized that for a variety of reasons (her own abuse, immaturity, anger issues) she was not prepared for parenting. Mack assumed that dad realized Mother had these issues also, so in his mind a “man-to-man” sit-down with Ed would get him to see the light and act on behalf of his boys.

Sadly, Mack’s conversation with dad went ballistic. Dad was furious that Mack would insert himself in his business. He insisted that Mack was wrong and that he and Vern had the right to deal with their children as they wished and that Mack should keep his nose out of it. Then dad stormed away, told Mack their friendship was over and never spoke to Mack again beyond what was minimally required to work with him at school.

This conversation appears to have happened when Darryl and I were in the eighth grade. Over the next four years the violence in our home dramatically escalated. Dad had the opportunity to curtail those truly horrific years of suffering but chose not to. I suspect that he didn’t believe Vern was abusing us, perhaps because even though he lived in the house he disassociated himself from what was happening under his roof. He didn’t want to know the brutality of the whippings nor the cumulative impact of daily “browbeating” and demeaning attacks. Dad also didn’t want to acknowledge that his marriage was failing. If he did something about the abuse then he might end up in divorce, which at the time “wasn’t Baptist.” Finally, I am sure dad felt shame after Mack’s meeting with him realizing that it was not Vern alone who

was abusing his boys, he knew he was guilty also. Ultimately dad did what dad always did when confronted with personal issues and failings - he pretended nothing was wrong and wrapped himself in the warm blanket of denial.

Years later after Mother's death I confronted dad with all of this and over the years he grudgingly acknowledged he had screwed-up regarding our abuse. He gave me a half-hearted apology for it all. On more than one occasion I urged him to reach out to Darryl, acknowledge his guilt in the abuse and apologize to the boy that was abused the worst. Not surprisingly, Dad never did that and Darryl was lost as a son to my father long, long before he ever passed away.

But Mack was not done with helping Darryl and me after that long futile conversation with my father. He helped me with my self-confidence in school and helped me begin to work around my learning disabilities – even though in the 1960's educators had not learned about dyslexia or attention deficit disorder (ADD). Mack had observed that my parents had encouraged a destructive “competition” for grades between Darryl and me that was not helping me learn. He helped me grasp the hard truth that I lacked my twin's intellectual skills but that I was still very smart and could be a successful learner. His counsel and assistance made it possible for me to separate from my relationship with Darryl and to begin learning in my own way and at my own pace. A bachelor's degree, two masters and a Ph.D. plus a forty-year career as an academic, author and pastor is reasonable evidence that Mack's influence upon my life was profound. I am quite certain that without Mack Suggs in my life I would not have survived the horror of my family and would have never experienced the wonderful life and family that I enjoy now. And all of this was made possible because Mack had the courage to name the crime of abuse and to seek reasonable resolution – always doing so lovingly, respectfully, graciously and persuasively.

Chapter 12

Shelly and Jewel

It was my great good fortune that there was a large and productive lake on our farm where I escaped from my mother in stolen hours to fish and paddle beyond her earshot and sight. I loved to fish but the principle draw of the lake was the silence and distance from my mother. She could not beat me or berate me in the boat on the lake so I made my way there on every occasion I could. I also went there to avoid my brother Darryl who in his teens began to speak to me in the same derogatory and berating tone as my mother and my father. I needed to get away from all the angst and threat from my family and alone in that boat I was safe. However, I wasn't a good fisherman until I had the good fortune of meeting Shelley Sullivan and Jewel Barrington.

Neither of these women knew what was going on in our home. In fact, I was able to go fishing with them because Mother was eager to connect with these two lovely and accomplished women. She invited them out to fish on the lake, and when they came out, they asked if I would like to join them and of course I was thrilled to do so. Jewel was married to Jimmy Barrington an official with the U.S.D.A. and a member of First Methodist Church. That church sat across the street from Mayo Baptist Church where I attended. My father was friendly with Jimmy and my mother liked Jewel and I think wanted to know her better. Shelly Sullivan owned a restaurant in Mayo that at the time was a nice place to dine. She was outgoing and had known Mother for a while. So, isolated as she was on the farm with her boys, I think Mother hoped inviting Shelly and Jewel out to fish might open the door for a social outlet that she desperately needed.

Though the friendship between these two women and Mother never materialized, a brief but important bond resulted between them and me. I was still a young boy of 9 or 10 when these episodic fishing trips to the farm occurred. Even though I had been brutalized since birth I still

had a loving heart and disposition. I needed the kindness and nurturing of these women in my life and my mother was not to be relied upon for affection or nurture. Shelly and Jewel on the other hand were young and accomplished women with kind hearts and a lot of patience.

I wanted to learn how to fish and particularly needed help with finding fish, learning what types of fish occupied the various environs of the lake, what bait worked best for which fish and finally, I needed help learning how to cast a line with rod and reel. Learning from Shelly and Jewel was easy since they were terrific anglers. Also, they fished from a boat that was much larger and more powerful than the small plywood row boat I used.

I was a quick learner and those occasional forays into the lake made me a much more productive angler, a skill and sport I have employed life-long. My principal memory, however, of being with these dear women is the peace and safety I felt being with them. They were unaware but they provided me with much needed respite from my abuse. They also helped me develop an identity of myself independent of my twin. My mother and father encouraged a destructive competition between my twin brother Darry and me. As I matured, I sought to find my own identity, voice and meaning. By Shelly and Jewel taking me alone out to fish they allowed me to have an identity of my own – even if or a few hours. These women provided a nurturing feminine space for me to visit and those visits were formative.

Developmental psychologists talk about the importance of nurturing presences in the early development of children. It is vital that there be at least a few reliable sources of such nurture for the child to learn how to bond effectively to other people and to learn how to love and be loved. Clearly in our family Mother could not be reliably counted upon to demonstrate warmth and love – nor for that matter could dad. Of course, there were moments when Mother exhibited kindness and perhaps love but those moments could be shattered in a heartbeat by

another thought or emotion and a tender touch or a smile could be transformed into a slap, a punch or a snarl. I learned early on not to trust what my Mother extended as love or affection. All such demonstrations were tentative and insincere. I learned it was dangerous to trust motherly love and risky to be close enough to her to be the target of her next rage-filled outburst.

However, when I was with Shelly and Jewel, I felt safe and affirmed and important. Shelly and Jewel were not the only women who nurtured me growing up. When we lived in Hastings, Mother's good friend Irma Masters was unbelievably kind and loving to Darryl and me. We called her "Aunt Irma." There were brief moments when my mother's sisters were also nurturing – especially Nell and Oneida. However, I found all of Mother's sisters to be insecure and with the exception of Oneida, they all aggressively disciplined their children – sometimes to excess. Consequently, I didn't trust their affections any more than I trusted those of my Mother.

Fortunately, there were other women who nurtured me. Jackie Hart taught me to love music and gave me confidence about singing. Annette Croft taught Sunday School and instructed me about God's grace and love. She taught me that I was loved by God and to trust that love and love myself. Cora Freeman, grandmother of a Hastings classmate, taught me in the third grade and was sensitive to my learning disabilities and my home situation. She uplifted my self-esteem and was gentle and warm. Her class was unfortunately only a year-long respite from many more frustrating years in school.

When we moved to Mayo in 1959 I found myself assigned to the class of one Frances Baggett, a young and attractive new teacher to the school who was married to one of our coaches, Leo Baggett. I had a crush on her right away and I'm sure she knew that. The Lafayette County Schools as it turned out were about a semester behind the curriculum being taught in St. Johns County where I had come from. This gave me a "leg up" on school in that what had been

taught in Hastings the semester before was now being taught in Mayo. For the first time ever I became a “good student” and Ms. Baggett encouraged me and helped me develop study skills and improve my self-esteem. She probably did no more with me than any other student but being in the presence of such a bright, warm and talented young teacher helped me gain some self-confidence and served to begin developing academic skills that eventually would lead me out of Mayo and out of bondage to Vern and Ed.

I could go on with a much longer list of hometown heroes in my life who made small contributions that produced big gains. School teachers like Edward McCray, Milton Ceraso, Curtis Hilton, and Bobbie Lee Murray come to mind. My pastor at Mayo Baptist Church, Harold Harlee, was a big help as were other blessed people in our community such as Barney Pearson, Gideon Jackson, Lena Pearson, and more. I was in great need of nurture and encouragement and I wasn't getting any of that at home, since home was an endless source of derision, pain and insults. Yet outside of home I found bits and pieces of what I needed to create a whole and happy self.

All these wonderful people helped me to fashion family support. Yet when it comes to sheer joy and happiness, nothing made me happier than knowing that Shelly and Jewel were bringing their boat to the lake and that I was going to be able to spend quiet and safe time fishing on the lake. These two wonderful women brought immense joy and respite and were never aware of the degree of their contributions to my well-being. Having successfully raised and beautiful and loving daughter of my own I have to honor all those people who demonstrated how to love, learn and parent. I didn't learn these skills from Vern nor even Ed. What I know of joy, love, hope and self-discipline I learned from quiet and unwitting examples of the likes of Shelly and Jewel.

Chapter 13

Mr. Clayton

Volumes could be written about the legendary Lafayette County teacher Clayton Dees. For me he was a teacher, father, grandfather and role model. In saying this I realize that I share these sentiments with countless other former students. Yet for me he is special to the degree that he taught me success in an arena I had struggled with before – reading and writing. Mr. Dees made language fun, principally by teaching us the logic of diagramming sentences. Those lessons unlocked the mysteries of English and ultimately enabled me to become the writer and author I am.

As important as those lessons were, however, his best lessons involved how to live the honorable and moral life. Mr. Clayton was a deeply religious man who was already in his sixties when I had him for a teacher. He was spry and managed to run a tight classroom without any “foolishness” from students. He was in no way an abusive man but in his era paddling students was still permitted and he judiciously used what he referred to as “the board of education” on “bottoms” that needed to be returned to their assigned seats. In his class the credo was “bottoms on your seats and faces forward.”

I remember one class where a student tested Mr. Clayton by leisurely getting up in the middle of a lecture to throw a single wad of paper into the corner trash can. He effectively distracted the class and was snickering about his success when 65-year-old Clayton Dees leapt over his oak desk, took three strides across the floor and nailed the student on his bottom before he could hide his butt on his desk seat. The wayward student was stunned as were we all and Mr. Clayton was a proud of himself as if he had bagged a deer with a slingshot. Clayton Dees didn't

have to do that kind of thing often because his classes were interesting and he commanded and received our respect.

Mr. Clayton was a role model to us all not just because he was passionate about teaching. He was a role model because he was unabashedly a man of faith and honor. My father, who was an ordained Baptist Minister when we moved to Mayo was in theory also a man of faith and honor. His credibility on those counts was a problem for me given the duplicity I had witnessed at home. Dad's faith and honor were for public display and exhortation. He was a good preacher and teacher and people looked up to him, but when he came home that honor and faith was degraded by his behavior and his tolerance if not encouragement of my mother's sadistic parenting.

Mr. Clayton was different. He talked of honor and faith in class and found literature for us to read that exemplified these values. When he returned home to his wife and children he was the same Clayton Dees that he had been for us. Many of my classmates were fortunate enough to have grown up in the community of Day, Florida where Mr. Clayton resided. They had worshiped with him since small children at Brewer Lake Baptist Church and had grown up with his children. For these Day students and for many of the rest of us who doted on this dear man, Clayton Dees was much more than a teacher. He was our grandfather, our beloved uncle and our role model.

Mr. Clayton also taught us how to take a risk. He would challenge us to think outside of the box when it came to language use and consider the many ways in which words could be employed. He also allowed us to respectfully disagree with him without penalizing us; a most unusual trait for teachers of that era. One day we were asked to spell and pronounce the word "rendezvous." Someone in the class raised a hand and made an effort to pronounce the word

and Mr. Clayton shook his head and said “No. This word is pronounced (phonetically) “wren-deez-vouse.” I raised my hand in disagreement and said “Mr. Dees that is a French word that should be pronounced “ron-day-voov” which of course is the correct pronunciation of the word. Mr. Dees would not accept that and until the last class I ever had with him rendezvous was pronounced “wren-deez-vouse.” He and I disagreed on this matter but there was no penalty to me for challenging the teacher on the pronunciation of this word. Had I done anything like that with my father or my mother I would have been slapped down and whipped. But here in the safety and nurture of Mr. Clayton’s class it was ok to politely disagree (even though from Mr. Clayton’s perspective I was wrong).

Sadly, in later years Clayton Dees developed dementia. I remember seeing him for the last time in my mid-twenties. It took him a few minutes to figure out who I was. At length, he came up with my name, “Terrell” and after a few more minutes he remembered “Darryl” then “Merrill.” Minutes later he looked at me as if a light switch had flipped in the back of his mind and he said “You boys were sure fine students! I’m happy to have taught you.” I was touched that this man in the twilight of his life and on the edge of cognitive oblivion still took the time to be thoughtful and affirming. That was the essence of Clayton Dees without whom I would have never considered writing and who encouraged me to question ideas and authority in the interest of learning.

Chapter 14

Sharold

Sharold Morgan was my mother's youngest brother and the brother she most adored. Adoring Sharold was easy. He was young and handsome when I knew him. Everybody loved Sharold and there was never any doubt that he was the pick of the Morgan litter. Sharold's brothers (D.P. and Mack) suffered with depression and Mack had a nasty alcohol problem that developed soon after WWII when he survived the Death March of Bataan. Mack was never the same after the war. D.P. ran a dairy and was married to a woman who was consistently unhappy regardless of what was going on around her. He could be kind but he was impatient and demanding like his father and those traits didn't appeal to me since I was suffering under the combined impatience and impossible expectations of both my parents.

I never cared much for Mother's sisters either. I saw a lot of Mother in most of them. Theresa, the eldest was stern and demanding like her mother Edith and she showed very little in the way of humor or affection to me. Oneida was married to a man who was physically abusing her and sexually assaulting her two daughters. Their family pain was worse than ours at home and it was pain that I could not additionally cope with. Frieda and Catherine both lived in the Richmond Hampton Roads area of Virginia. I enjoyed visiting them and their children but both were cold to me and very critical. The one sister I did like was Nell. Nell had married a funeral director and lived a bit more affluent life than the rest of her sisters. She lived in Central Florida and would visit Mother most often. Mother was happy in Nell's presence and they played like young girls together. I also like Nell because she was beautiful and vivacious.

Nell could have been a movie star – a preoccupation she shared with Mother. Both sisters emulated their first cousin actress Wanda Hendrix who married Audie Murphy the war hero.

Vern and Nell looked a lot like Wanda and when together they would often lament that they had not been discovered for film also. Mother was at her best when Nell was around if for no other reason that both were dreamers.

Nell had a quick temper, though, and I would see her lash out at her children with her sharp tongue. She would also regularly belittle her husband John in public and I disliked that also. My biggest problem with Nell, however, was that she was obsessed with wealth and playing the role of “big shot” and “money bags” when she visited. She engendered jealousy in my mother that would often leave Vern in an ill-temper once Nell left, and an ill-tempered Vern was a powder-house of pain ready to explode. Consequently, I learned to avoid time with Nell.

Sharold on the other hand was a “steady-Eddie,” warm, genuine, handsome and fun. He was honest and true and wanted to earn his sister’s favor. I remember when I was 8, soon after we moved to Mayo, I worked for my Uncle Sharold in tobacco for the very first time. My job was to “hand” tobacco leaves in groups of 3-4 leaves to a “stringer” who took cotton twine and affixed the leaves to a “tobacco stick” that was hung in the flu-fueled barn to cure. I started work at 6 a.m. and worked until 9 p.m. in the heat and in the afternoon handled wet tobacco. I was a little boy and had never experienced farm work before. I was unfamiliar with the routine of tobacco work (something I eventually would do every summer from age 8 to 18) and Sharold was scolding me all day long. By the end of the evening I had worked for 15 hours earning exactly \$1 and was covered head to toe with tobacco resin that is pure nicotine. By the time I got home I was exhausted and had nicotine poisoning. I was throwing up, had a crashing headache and was emotionally frazzled from being brow-beaten all day by Sharold.

Seeing me in this state Mother called Sharold and told him to come to our home right away. He lived on the family homestead four miles away so he was soon our doorstep. I watched

as my Mother excoriated him for treating her son in this manner – for working him like a man. Sharold was shocked to see me so ill and was terribly shaken to see his loving sister so angry with him. He apologized profusely and promised to never let that happen again. Thereafter I worked sparingly for Sharold and avoided being worked again as I had in that first tobacco season.

This episode stands out in my mind in part because it revealed the depth of Sharold's love for my mother and in part because of the hypocrisy of Mother's criticism of Sharold. Mother would work us to the bone on the farm and in the nursery from dawn to beyond dusk and berate, brow-beat and whip us throughout and that was alright. By comparison if Sharold works a neophyte tobacco hand too long and too hard out of ignorance and immaturity then that's wrong and an apology is in order. Of course, what makes one instance right and the other wrong in Mother's eyes is that her children are her property to treat as she wishes for good or ill. She felt a right to such discretion and what was wrong in her eyes was not our mistreatment but who had the authority to mistreat us. She, of course, possessed that right and nobody else.

After that event Sharold related to me differently. In truth I was fragile at 8 years of age. Most pictures of me from birth to age 8 show me wearing a very sad face because I was sad and very depressed given my living conditions and treatment. Sharold sensed something was going on with me and in the years that followed sought to discover what was wrong. I was frank with him about my abuse at Mother's hands. At first he didn't want to believe it because he loved and adored her. Later as he witnessed her abuse he didn't want to say anything because he didn't want to disrupt his relationship with his beloved sister.

Ultimately Sharold did what he could which was to listen and empathize. He would encourage me to hang in until I was old enough to leave. He also brought us closer to him and

his family and this relationship was comforting. Granted he was a Morgan and by-and-large everything “Morgan” had been harmful to me and my brothers. But Sharold was different than any of his other siblings. He was honest, empathetic, generous, patient and forgiving. These are traits I didn’t experience at home but were regular features of our relationship with Sharold.

A case in point is a “prodigal son” experience I had with Sharold when I was 13 or 14 years old. Sharold was growing watermelons down by the Suwannee River one summer and his crop was being destroyed by a feral boar eating the melons. Sharold gave me the responsibility of finding and killing that boar. He described the hog as a large black and white boar hog and he gave me his .22 cal. Springfield automatic rifle to find and kill the animal. This was a huge responsibility for me. Sharold had entrusted his best rifle to me and given me a truck to drive to the field and take care of that hog. I was excited to be given this job and proceeded to find the feral boar. I wanted to make my Uncle Sharold proud. So, I eased the truck up to the melon patch and started walking. Within twenty minutes I caught sight of a huge black and white hog, just as Sharold had described. The rifle came with a scope so I sighted the hog carefully, caught its shoulder in the cross hairs and with a single shot to the heart put this big hog down. My adrenalin surged as I strode the 30-yard distance to the animal. Then I flipped the hog over and that is when, to my horror and shame, I discovered my error. The hog I shot was not a boar but a sow with pigs. I had just killed my uncle’s prize sow. My heart sank and I drove back to Sharold just knowing was about to get the tongue lashing of a lifetime. I found Sharold and told him what happened, dreading the disappointment he would have with me. To my surprise Sharold asked me to meet him at the truck and take him to the hog – which I did. Upon seeing the dead sow Sharold asked me to help him get the animal in the truck to take to the house. Once home we skinned the hog and butchered it and I helped him prepare a fire. As the fire was heating up he

told me we were going to have a cookout tonight and we were to call everybody in our family and other nearby neighbors to come over for BBQ pork. That night we gathered by firelight and ate our fill of pork and had one of the most festive evenings I had ever experienced – and not a word was said to anyone about what had happened.

I felt like the prodigal son who had done something horrible but had been forgiven by his father. From that moment on Sharold didn't have a single harsh or critical word to say to me. He told me he loved me and was proud of me and believed in me and my brothers. I was dumbstruck by his forgiveness and his grace. For the first time that “prodigal son” story from scripture made sense and I learned what it felt like to be the recipient of forgiveness and grace from another person.

This would be Sharold's ongoing gift to me. Regardless of what I did or what was going on in my life thereafter Sharold accepted and loved me. He may not have always agreed with me or approved of my decisions but he was steadfast in his love and regard for me and for my brothers. His steadfast love and belief in me did much to help me become a man of faith and honor. My uncle Sharold embodied everything that my mother lacked and qualities that were disturbingly absent in my father. I would have liked him to have intervened to stop our abuse but he didn't feel he could do that. However, what he could do, namely love and respect us, he did to a remarkable degree. We boys are all eternally in his debt.

Part Four: The End of An Era



(Carolyn, Theresa, Lee, Catherine & Vern)

Chapter 15

Moving On

Darryl forged our parents name to an application to the Air Force Academy and was admitted in 1968. I applied for Stetson University even though my father said I was too dumb to get in. I was admitted and worked my way through Stetson University and married for the first time just prior to my mother's death. This marriage served to more firmly establish my independence from my Mayo family. When my new wife began working as school teacher this relationship produced some much-needed income. That said, I worked full time throughout my Stetson years while taking a full course load. Most of my work involved serving as an orderly at the local hospital and in local nursing homes. I also managed the audio-visual department at Stetson which kept me setting up AV equipment across the campus for classes throughout the day and night. My grades during my first two years were not spectacular principally because I had never taken a foreign language before and that was required at Stetson. I also struggled with math. The major obstacle I had to overcome during this period, however, was the stress of having been violently separated from my family, a pressure compounded by the debt I was amassing to pursue a degree. I felt alone and unsupported.

Surprisingly, after I married my grades improved dramatically despite the fact I was working more hours outside of my studies. My professors were encouraging me in my work, particularly those instructors in psychology and religion. It was within these studies that I began to consider pursuing graduate school in the ministry and social work. I was encouraged in this by many on the faculty and within the administration. My intent was to become a seminary trained clergyman in the Southern Baptist Church and move to Louisville, Kentucky where I would

attend Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and get a Masters of Social Work degree from the University of Louisville.

My career plans were however compromised by the Vietnam War draft. My twin brother had a very high draft number and he was in the Air Force Academy. I had a low number and had to enroll in ROTC in order to remain in school. I took advantage of that reality by applying for an ROTC scholarship that defrayed much of my college expense and gave me a small monthly stipend. I did my basic training at Fort Bragg in 1970 and during that experience I discovered that the level of harassment that recruits receive in training exacerbated my emotional issues stemming from my history of abuse. People did not speak of PTSD in this era but that was clearly my issue. People suffering with PTSD don't manage well in basic training.

Upon graduation, I was assigned to be an infantry officer but I succeeded in receiving a deferment to go to seminary. I feared being sent to Vietnam as an infantry officer because I felt my emotional state was too fragile for me to be an effective leader and I worried I would get soldiers killed if I was their commander. I was however comfortable with serving as a chaplain and that was the career route I was pursuing during my deferment. Unbeknown to me the Vietnam War would end while I was in seminary and I would never serve on active duty in the U.S. Army.

What I had not counted upon was the extent to which seminary education would force me to explore my history of abuse. Originally I was to have attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary that was the premier Baptist seminary at the time. However, before I graduated Stetson my pastor at First Baptist Church of Deland was fired for advocating the desegregation of the Volusia County schools. At the time, Southern Baptists opposed integration. I was profoundly uncomfortable with that stance so I switched denominational affiliation to the United

Presbyterian Church which was much more compatible to my values. I was fortunate to have been sponsored as a seminary student by local Glenwood Presbyterian Church and ultimately settled on broadening my horizons, leaving the South and moving to Pittsburgh with my wife to attend Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Pittsburgh Seminary required all new students to engage in pastoral counseling to insure their fitness for ministry. When I began my counseling my extensive history of abuse dominated each session along with the profound sense of unworthiness, guilt and anger that I had been carrying around on my shoulders and in my heart. I was encouraged to commit to an extensive regime of psychotherapy and I began that work in 1971. I would continue with that treatment on a weekly basis for six years.

The impact of that work was dramatic and extremely painful but the consequence of that effort was that I came to appreciate that I was not responsible for my abuse, my anger was appropriate to the degree that my person had been violated and harmed and that healing involved forgiving myself and to the degree possible forgiving my abusers. I also learned how to “thought-stop” painful memories and utilize breathing techniques to quell my bouts of anxiety. I found the behavioral techniques easiest to learn and apply. I also learned to forgive myself. Forgiving my abusers, on the other hand was much harder.

Throughout this period, I struggled with overcoming the theology of fear I had learned from my preacher father and his Baptist faith. Intuitively I knew this faith of self-hate and self-loathing was wrong. It had created the climate of blind obedience and tolerance of violence that contributed to my abuse and that of my brothers. What I learned in seminary was a kinder and gentler understanding of Christianity centered on the gospels built around forgiveness, divine

grace and love. I became, thereafter, a pastor devoted to spreading grace, love and forgiveness and this did much to assuage my troubled heart and soul.

I graduated seminary in 1975 having completed a Master of Divinity degree at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a Master of Social Work degree (MSW) from the University of Pittsburgh. I was surprised to learn that my family and emotional issues had prepared me to be an empathetic and effective psychotherapist and I had a gift for doing family therapy. It began to look like there was a silver lining to the history of abuse I had endured.

Upon completing graduate school and seminary I became pastor of a small rural church outside of Pittsburgh and simultaneously worked as a psychotherapist in a mental health center North of downtown Pittsburgh. I did that for two years before being recruited to move to Manhattan and be assistant minister at the prestigious Riverside Church in New York City. I had developed a reputation as being a good preacher so I took this opportunity to explore whether my career future was to be in mental health or in full-time ministry.

My first wife and I made the move to New York and within four weeks of our arrival I discovered she was having an affair with a young seminary student. I was devastated over this news which had come at a particularly bad time since the job at the Riverside Church had turned out to be extremely political and difficult. I became overwhelmed with personal and professional stress and after two months on the job I tendered my resignation and returned to an assistant minister position in the Mount Lebanon community south of Pittsburgh. My first marriage had ended in divorce and I felt like a failure. I was at the Bower Hill Church in Mt. Lebanon for a year and had just succeeded in healing from the divorce and the disappointing job experience in New York when the senior pastor I worked for was fired for marital infidelity. Since I had been hired by him and not the church session I too moved on and for a time moved out of ministry.

This era from moving to New York to leaving the Mount Lebanon church proved to be one of the most stressful eras to date and my anxiety skyrocketed. By then I realized that my anxiety issues stemmed from my abusive childhood where I had learned to constantly remain hypervigilant and resort to “fight or flight” responses in the face of threat. So, I sought out counseling again and continued my therapy for another three years.

During that period, I was hired first as a medical social worker by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center’s Presbyterian University Hospital and later as a senior psychiatric social worker for the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh medical school. I was single again in this period and used the time to become very effective as a family therapist and I started a Ph.D. program in health policy at Pitt. These were heady days and a period where I felt that I had effectively overcome the worst of my abuse. This was also the period during which I met my second wife and left Pittsburgh to move west to Tempe, Arizona.

This marriage lasted thirty-three years (the first had lasted for seven years). While there were many good periods the second marriage was problematic from the outset. I knew within weeks of marrying my second wife that she had issues that were going to be difficult to manage. She clearly suffered with debilitating emotional issues and was reluctant to seek treatment. Eventually our relationship became tortured and I found myself monitoring her behavior in the same way I had my mother, trying to avoid the periodic outbursts and erratic behavior that disrupted our lives. Throughout this period, I described myself as “the canary in the mine” – constantly monitoring her mood and behavior so I would be prepared when she lost control.

I persisted in my marriage. In 1982 I was awarded a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. After two years in Arizona we moved to the Lone Star State to take a position at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston. The salary was the highest I had

received to date and involved serving as Director of the Department of Social Work and Assistant Professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health. This would mark the beginning of an academic career that would last 38 years.

My wife had great difficulty adjusting to the move and I found myself fearing abandonment by her given her mental health issues. I was also subjected to great stress on the job. My career at UTMB was often fraught with organizational politics and angst. I was frequently anxious about work issues and returned home to cope with yet more anxiety regarding my wife's emotional stability. I feared we were going to be divorced and I couldn't face a second failed relationship. I felt like damaged goods because in effect I had been damaged. I struggled to keep the marriage together. I also beat myself up because it appeared that for a second time I had made a poor decision in picking a mate.

My daughter Tessa was born in 1989 while we were on a Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship in Washington, DC. This birth, while a blessing, marked the beginning of the end of my relationship with my second wife. Motherhood and my assumption of a parent role proved to be more stressful than our relationship could endure. We spent five years after the fellowship in Atlanta where I taught at Georgia State University and we then moved to Florida where I was one of the founding Deans at Florida Gulf Coast University. I remained at FGCU for 25 years during which time I endured many stressful periods and was first diagnosed with PTSD. Throughout that period my marital problems continued to fester and even though I changed my work environment to reduce stress, our family life became increasingly turbulent finally ending in divorce in 2012.

On a positive note, I did make one very significant changes in my life to deal with stress that involved returning to ministry as a chaplain at a local retirement community. For almost 20

years I worked at Moorings Park in Naples, Florida serving the needs of an affluent senior population. This work involving pastoral care, teaching and worship was profoundly invigorating and allowed me to distance myself from the toxic politics of the university. It also allowed me an opportunity to reflect and write. I published three books on ecology and ethics during my tenure as chaplain.

My life in Southwest Florida was often trying but I am pleased to report that throughout that period, and beyond, I never abused my daughter or wife even in the face of serious provocation. I helped my daughter complete her bachelor's degree, her masters and finally her Ph.D. in counseling psychology. I sometimes jest in saying that one of the benefits of having mental health issues in your child's family is that sometimes dealing with it can become a professional career. I am happy to report that while the stress of our household periodically distressed my daughter that her choice of profession was never an accommodation to her need for therapy. Tessa is amazingly resilient and healthy and she cares for her clients from a place of wellness and not from a place of need.

Some period after divorcing my second wife I married a remarkably lovely and emotionally stable woman – my dear wife Nancy. This is my third marriage and I am a bit embarrassed to have to acknowledge that. However, it is I am convinced this is my final and lasting marriage. Nancy and I have been married for six years. We have retired to Aiken, SC where we are near my wife's niece. Tessa has married a remarkable young man from Georgia and they reside in Maryland where Tessa works as a psychologist at the University of Maryland. Tessa's mother has also retired and resides comfortably in Gainesville, Florida.

I share this personal history to underscore that while my abuse at home scarred me and left me with anxiety and anger issues that I have been forced to manage as an adult, my life after

Mayo has been generally happy, productive and worthwhile. In fact, I would like to think that some of my best skills – empathy for others, persistence in the face of fear and anxiety, initiative, curiosity, compassion, humor and a desire for excellence – are all qualities I learned through the process of having been abused. This is not to say that I recommend abuse as means of character development – certainly not. I would however subscribe to the adage that “what doesn’t kill you makes you strong.” I am the person I am today because I rose out of a “hell-hole” of a family and I persevered. I like the person I am though I would never want to re-experience the trauma I have endured and would never wish to inflict this pain on anyone else. Even so, it is a paradox of my life that those things which have been most powerful, useful and meaningful in my life have all derived from surviving a history of child abuse.

Epilogue

Détente and Peace

Détente signifies the easing of hostility or strained relations. It does not denote peace but at least the fighting stops. Détente generally describes my relationship with my abusers. I am no longer in conflict with them – that part of my life is over and done. I am not however at peace with Vern and I don't believe I will be until some sacred day when I meet her in the presence of God.

That said there are many reasons to empathize with her situation and to appreciate the circumstances in her life that led her to be the miserable and sadistic person she became. Mother was physically and I believe sexually abused by her father. She suffered many health problems to include back problems, constant gastrointestinal distress that at was at one point diagnosed as Crohn's Disease and an ultimately fatal malignant brain tumor. She also suffered with profound depression and was unfortunately treated by her physician with endless prescriptions for the tranquilizer Librium which mother took in multiple doses. In fact there was not a time in our growing up that I cannot remember seeing bottles of those green and blue capsules in our medicine cabinet. In retrospect Mother was a prescription drug addict and this too must have contributed to her behavior.

I have forgiven Mother to the degree I am able for all of these life experiences that befell her from childhood until her demise. These were circumstance well beyond her control and for which she was not responsible. However, having said that she was ultimately responsible for her adult decisions and her moral choices. Many, many people have experienced hardship and abuse well beyond Vern's and have not resorted to violence against their children. Mother made a choice to daily torture her children and she did so with relish and outright pleasure. Such behavior is beyond immoral. It is nothing less than pure evil. To strike out at those you love out

of pain and desperation is unacceptable but fully human. To torture another human being for the pleasure of witnessing their agony is an act of evil. That evil I cannot and will not forgive. I can only hope that God can extend such forgiveness to Vern on our behalf for I am unwilling to do so. So, I have forgiven and not forgiven Mother. She is gone and only hurts us now through the trauma, memories, and post-traumatic stress that must be daily held at bay. I am clearly not at peace with Vern but we have arrived at détente.

Détente also describes my relationship with my twin. We fight no more but are not at peace and may never be. Thankfully I forgave my father while he lived and I am at peace with him. Likewise, I am at peace with my younger brother Merrill, my daughter Tessa and my beloved nieces and nephews. Among these important family members and my wife, I enjoy peace.

In writing this book I didn't search for peace and frankly I don't believe any of the abused ever find peace with their abusers. We settle for détente. What I hoped to have achieved in telling this tale is closure and a measure of accountability for my abusers and for family who have employed secrecy to extend our harm in the interest of protecting the family name. I also recount this story as a part of my family story and legacy – to remind everyone about the depths from which younger generations have arisen. However, the most important reason for writing this book is to celebrate the end of child abuse in our family. Mother's abuse dated back to her father but if the truth be known I would imagine that child abuse was a feature of Morgan family life for many generations. I am proud to acknowledge that it ended with me as well as with my brothers. I don't imagine that any of Darryl, Terrell or Merrill's children are likely to be child abusers principally because their parents sought to find better ways to be parents.

I have made every effort despite the difficulties I still struggle with regarding PTSD to not be abusive of anyone in my life – particularly my wife and daughter. Those efforts have met with success. Our children – Karissa, Todd, Sean, Jack, Morgan and Tessa – are all remarkably accomplished and emotionally healthy people. They live full lives and are generally happy and content. The story I tell in these pages is not their story, it is the story of their fathers that while recounted here will die when they die.

While Merrill, Darryl and I will at best achieve détente regarding our abusive parents, these grandchildren have the opportunity to be at peace. That realization is the best measure of justice that any of us could ask for given the actions of Edward and Vern. In the past talking about our abuse to a psychologist, friend or family member generated an immediate repercussion and a certain and sound beating. As a boy Merrill shared his abuse at Mother's hands with a neighbor family and when members of that family recounted his story to our father, Merrill ended up receiving one of the worst beatings of his life. When at age seven the psychologists report from my hospitalization in St. Augustine found its way to my school my parents blamed me for embarrassing them and most likely moved us to Mayo to avoid the public knowing of them as abusers. At seventy, telling the story of our parental abuse is required. At last there will be relief also and a measure of justice and peace.

Yet in this era of détente not only can I tell the tale of what happened in our home with impunity and safety, I can do so with reasonable assurance that this is the end of an era in which children will no longer be used as chattel and abused at the whim of their parents. More than détente, now is a time of peace that will be fully fulfilled when my brothers and I take our last breath. Before that time arrives, I hope family and friends will read this story and pledge to themselves to do whatever they can to build families of peace and love and eschew violence.

Photo Album



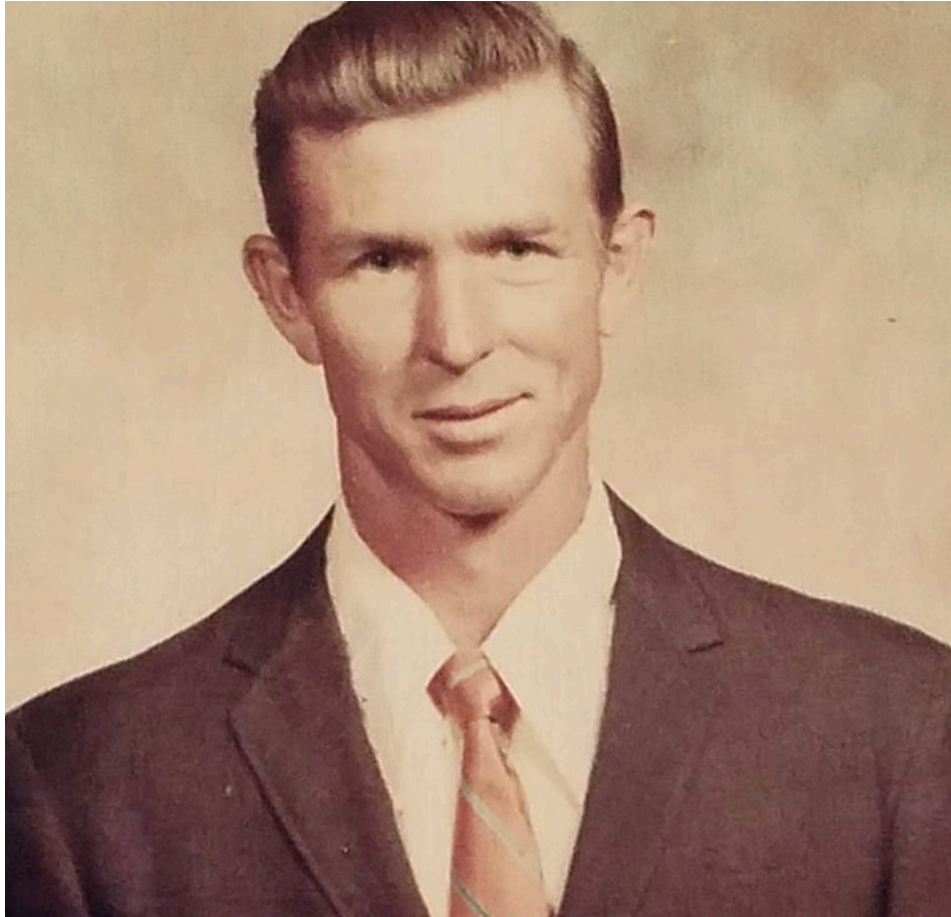
Mack Suggs



Clayton Dees



Shelly Sullivan
and
Jewel Barrington



Sharold Morgan



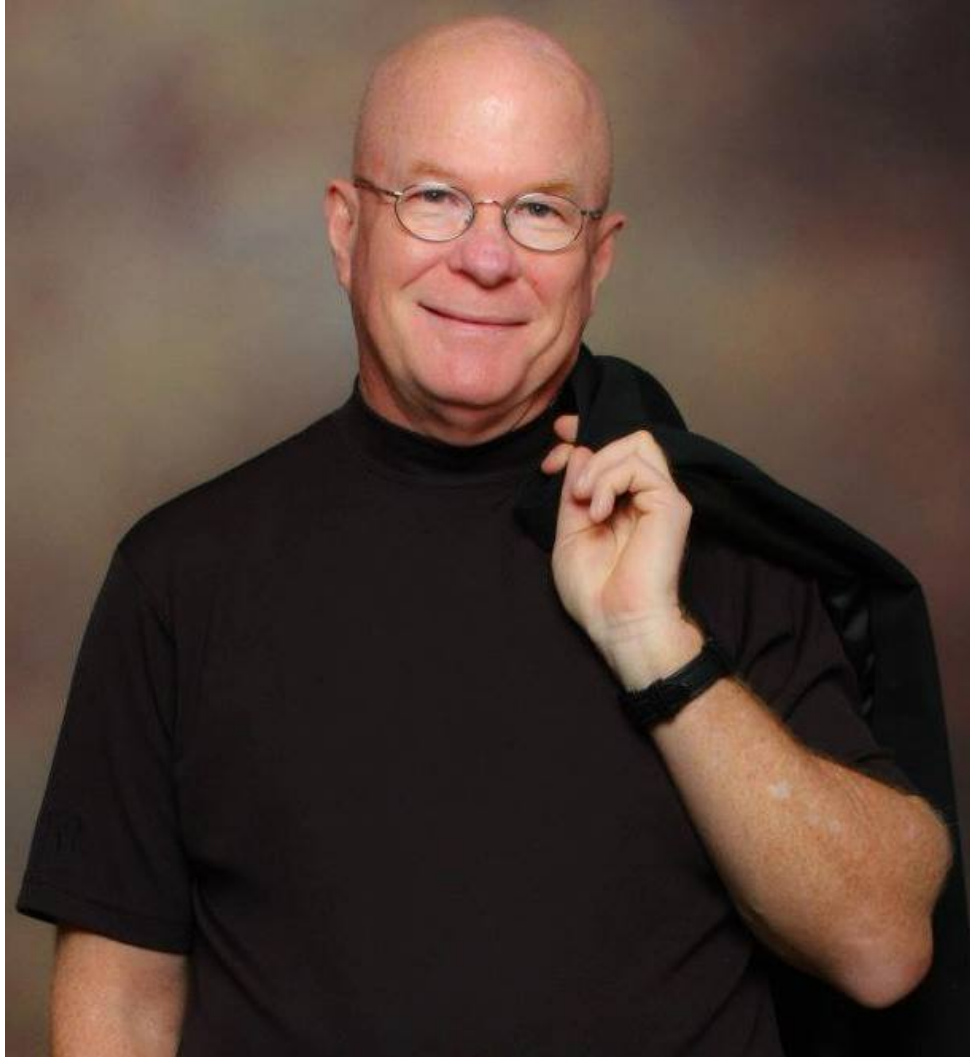
Wanda Hendrix



Darryl Wimberley



Merrill Wimberley



Terrell Wimberley

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THIS DOCUMENT HAS A LIGHT BACKGROUND ON TRUE WATERMARKED PAPER. HOLD TO LIGHT TO VERIFY FLORIDA WATERMARK.

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BUREAU of VITAL STATISTICS

State Board of Health
Bureau of Vital Statistics

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
FLORIDA

State File No. 23504
Registrar's No. 321

1. PLACE OF DEATH: (a) County <u>Columbia</u> District No. <u>10-01</u> (b) Precinct _____ Precinct No. _____ (c) City or Town <u>Lake City</u> City or Town No. <u>10-572</u> (d) Name of hospital or institution <u>Lake Shores Hospital</u> (If not in hospital or institution, write street number or location) (e) Length of stay: In hospital or institution <u>about 18 hrs.</u> At place of death <u>about 18 hours</u> (Specify whether years, months or days)		2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED (a) State <u>X</u> (b) County <u>X</u> (c) City or Town _____ (If outside city or town limits, write RURAL) (d) Street No. _____ (If rural, give location) (e) Citizen of Foreign country? <u>X</u> yes or no <u>43-515</u> If yes, name country _____	
3. FULL NAME OF DECEASED <u>Karen Lamonic Wimberley</u>			
3 (a) If veteran, name war <u>No</u> 3 (b) Social Security No. <u>None</u>		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION 20. Date of Death: Month <u>Dec.</u> Day <u>22</u> Year <u>1946</u> Hour _____ Minute _____ M.	
4. Sex <u>Female</u> 5. Color or race <u>White</u>		21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from <u>12-22-1946</u> To <u>12-22-1946</u> ; and that I last saw <u>her</u> alive on <u>12-22-1946</u> ; and that death occurred on the date and hour stated above.	
6 (b) Age of husband or wife, if alive _____ years		Immediate cause of death <u>permaternity</u>	
7. Birth date of deceased <u>Dec. 21, 1946</u> (month) (day) (year)		Due to _____ Due to _____	
8. Age: Years _____ Months _____ Days _____ If less than one day _____ 18 hrs. _____ min.		Other conditions (Include pregnancy within 3 months of death) _____	
9. Birthplace <u>Lake City, Florida</u> (City, town or county) (State or foreign country)		Major findings: <u>RED INK INDICATES INFORMATION SECURED AFTER ORIGINAL WAS FILED</u> (Give date of operation) _____ of autopsy _____	
10. Usual occupation <u>Infant</u>		Underline the cause to which death should be charged statistically.	
11. Industry or business _____		22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following: (a) (Probably) Accident, suicide, homicide (specify) _____ (b) Date of occurrence _____ (c) Where did injury occur? _____ (City or town) (County) (State) (d) Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place? _____ (Specify type of place)	
12. Name <u>Amos E. Wimberley</u>		(e) While at work? _____ (6) Means of injury _____	
13. Birthplace <u>Corbur, Fla.</u>		23. Signature <u>[Signature]</u> M. D. (a) Address <u>Lake City, Fla.</u> Date Signed <u>12/22/46</u>	
14. Maiden name <u>Vera Lamonic Morgan</u>			
15. Birthplace <u>Mayo, Fla.</u>			
16. Informant's Signature <u>[Signature]</u>			
17. Burial, cremation or removal? <u>Removal</u>			
18. (a) Date <u>Dec. 22, 1946</u> (b) Place <u>Mayo, Fla.</u>			
19. Funeral Director's Signature <u>[Signature]</u>			
20. (a) Address <u>Wilson Funeral Home, Lake City, Fla.</u>			
21. Filed <u>3-22-46</u> <u>[Signature]</u> Local Registrar			

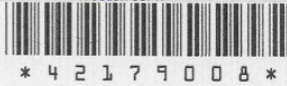
VOID IF ALTERED OR ERASED

VOID IF ALTERED OR ERASED

[Signature] State Registrar

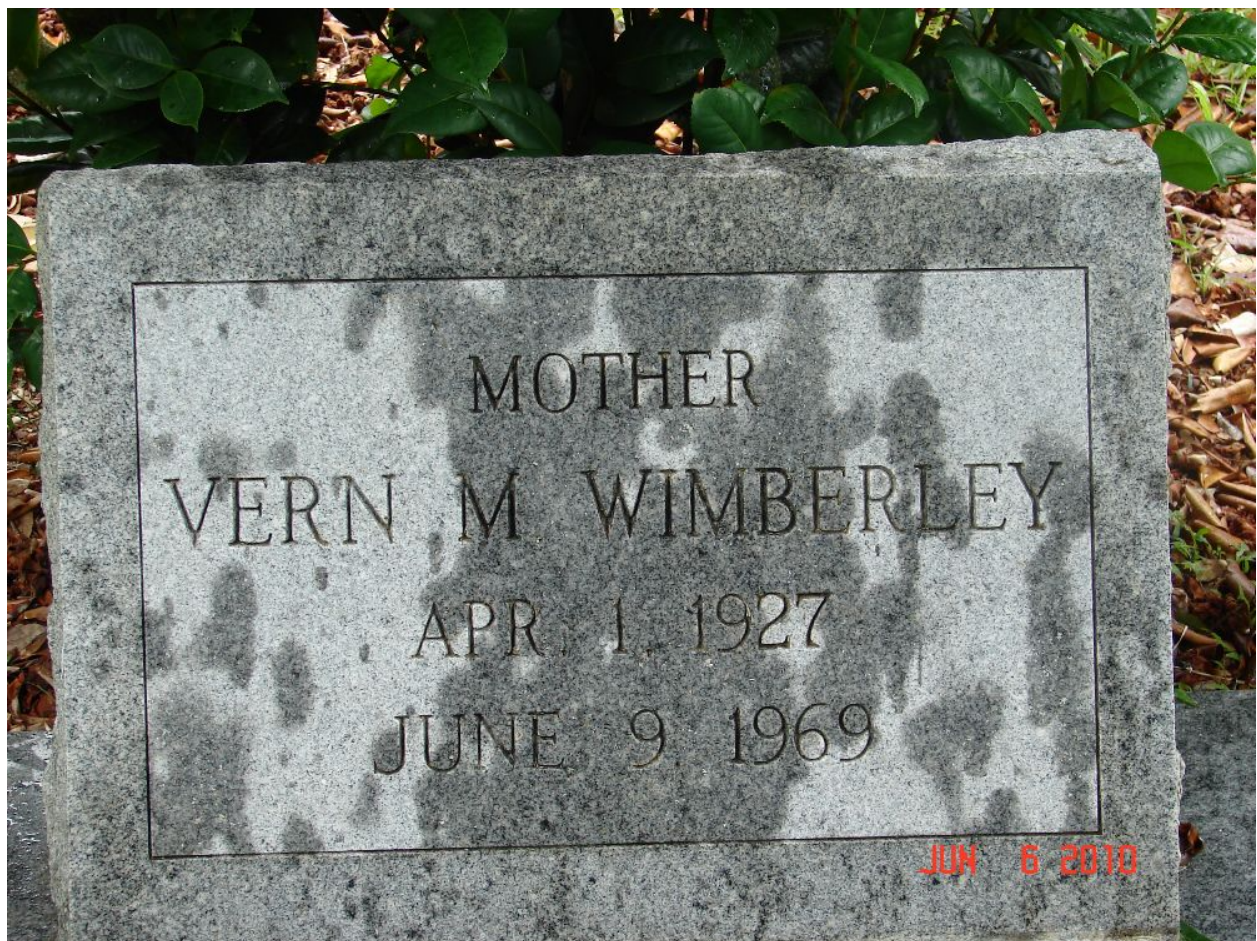
Date Issued: December 14, 2020
REQ: 2022186716

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DH FORM 1946 (03-13)
CERTIFICATION OF VITAL RECORD Florida HEALTH

Karen Lamonic Wimberley
12/21/46 - 12/22/46



Vern's Tombstone
Sand Pond Cemetery
Lafayette County, FL