



Accessibility

Memories of loud Saturday mornings with Johnny Guitar Watson playing in the background, the smell of thick-cut bacon with the rind on, butter melting on the shiny glaze of sugar on grits, soft scrambled eggs seasoned with salt and pepper, and oven-toasted toast with three perfect indentations of melted butter. That was a typical Saturday morning in Mary Zina's house—a southern grandmother from the piney woods of East Texas who passed down cherished southern values, impeccable cleaning habits, crisp ironed clothes, and Christian beliefs.

The desire to have a good life in the city while passing down values of family, community, and collaboration coexisted. After the deaths of the most important individuals in a family—the matriarch and patriarch—the question arises: what was all the work and sacrifice for? Was it to let years of ownership go to the highest bidder? To let strangers live in spaces where they have no investment? Was it to let families fight over money that will be gone within two weeks of inheritance? Where does the entitlement come from? Where do all the elaborate plans for property come from when no effort was made to earn it?

With the elder statesmen dying at such a rapid rate, feelings of selfishness arise. There is a longing to have recorded every moment, to remember every conversation, and to know more about family history. Their hard work continues to pay off in the lives of their descendants, but how it would be wonderful for them to see it.

In the historic Fifth Ward community, rich history stands resilient against the attempt to rename it as EaDo (cue eye roll). A year of trajectory shifts turned a short flight for a weekend of fun and educational experience into a life-changing event. From visiting D.C. for the Black Deaf Symposium to having one day to complete an application and getting accepted with a full scholarship into The Howard University.

Howard University challenged students to the core. Daily reminders of southern roots confronted assumptions of being ghetto, talking slow, and having undereducated opinions. Attending Howard's Chapel sparked a true mental shift, compelling students to question their entire Southern Christian faith. What was thought to be liberal thinking leaned more towards southern conservative beliefs. Life, education, and values had been shaped by a very white supremacist, exclusionary lens.

The remnants of slavery and Jim Crow intertwined into every aspect of life. Food deserts had become normalized. In Fifth Ward and Homestead, the only grocery options were Fiesta on Lyons and Lockwood. The "why" behind this was never questioned. The neighborhood store Allie's across from Collingsworth Apartments was overpriced and lacked healthy food options. College-educated, super-smart, yet uninformed individuals, even at 40, often didn't realize this. Howard held them accountable. Howard revealed that every time the booth was entered to vote straight Democrat, every time votes went to the Tanisha's or Jerome's without understanding their platform, every time a sticker from the church lady outside the poll location influenced the vote because she looked like a face that could be trusted—being so smart yet so DUMB!

Lack of knowledge in an age where information is at the fingertips raises the question repeatedly asked at the Black Deaf Symposium by the legendary John Lewis: **"If not you, then who? If not now, then when?"**

The importance of voting was instilled through family teachings. The blood shed for the right to vote was understood. However, much more remained untaught. There were no models on how to learn about politicians, let voices be heard, testify, or navigate civic duties like calling when the trash wasn't picked up or walking into a representative's office.

The question that plagues many minds: **The WHO is everyone, and the time is NOW.** Financial resources might be limited, but voting power, words, and community are abundant. This column vows to educate, bring laughter, make sense of those old sayings from grandmothers, and provide step-by-step guidance on how to make change happen.



Recipe of the Week: Grandma Mary Zina's Southern Grits

- Ingredients:**
- 1 cup of grits
 - 4 cups of water
 - 1 teaspoon of salt
 - 1 tablespoon of butter
 - Land O'Lakes butter (for topping)
 - 2 tablespoons of sugar
 - Thick-cut bacon with the rind on (can be found at B & W Meat Market) for serving
 - Soft scrambled eggs seasoned with salt and pepper (for serving)
 - Oven-toasted toast with melted butter (for serving)

- Instructions:**
1. Bring the water to a boil in a large pot.
 2. Add the salt and slowly stir in the grits.
 3. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring frequently, until the grits are thick and creamy (about 20-25 minutes).
 4. Add butter and stir well.
 5. Top with Land O'Lakes butter and sprinkle sugar on top to get that shiny glaze.
 6. For the toast, preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C). Butter your bread slices and place them on a baking sheet. Toast in the oven for about 10 minutes, or until golden brown and crispy.
 7. Serve hot with thick-cut bacon, soft scrambled eggs seasoned with salt and pepper, and oven-toasted toast with melted butter.

Enjoy a taste of Southern comfort just like we did in Grandma Mary Zina's kitchen!

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