

The Grammee Chronicles: It is what it is (installment 1)

My Grammee--the Queen of "It is what it is"--prepared me for life thusly...

--On getting old: "Getting old is hell."

--On child birth: "Chile, they tell you once you have the baby, you won't remember the pain. That's a lie. I remember every second of it. I was miserable." (She had FOUR children, though. Lol!)

--On mammograms: "Be prepared. They hurt. Shoo (she rarely used profanity), don't let anybody tell you anything different. And the bigger they are, the more it hurts. They squish them down between these plates until they're flat!"

--On support panty hose: (She CALLED me to tell me this. I was living in Atlanta by this time)--"Sharee, chile, these support hose. I don't know about these things. They got me so squeezed up in here, I can't feel my toes. And what if I have to use the bathroom. Such a-fightin' I had to do to get these things pulled up the first time. I'm not doing it again!"

Oh, this lady brought me so much joy!

My sis, Moni Tee, gave me the title, and I'm using it!

The Grammee Chronicles: Protection (installment 2)

CONTEXT: Grammee was the "typical" southerner and used sayings that made your head tilt to the side because—I don't know—that helps you figure stuff out? You know the ones I mean. You'll meet one of those sayings in this story. She was always fiercely protective of me. One of the reasons why is because people would stare at us ALL. THE. TIME. We were an interesting pairing. Here's this VERY light skinned (do NOT call her white; worst fuss out of your life) woman with this dark skinned child. She NEVER wanted people to get it twisted. So...

One day, she told me the story about a time when I was a toddler, and she and I were in the grocery store. I was singing to the top of my lungs, "Say it loud! I'm back and I'm proud!" Someone approached Grammee and asked her where she got the cute little black baby. Grammee replied, "I had her." The lady gasped. I inserted, a la James Brown, "baby, baby, baby. Baby, baby, baby!" Grammee, as she is cracking up laughing telling me this story, said, "Chile, that woman didn't know whether to chit (she didn't like saying "shit" so she would distort it this way) or go blind."

One of my favorite sayings: "They didn't know whether to shit or to go blind." I have NO idea what that means, and yet, it is SO appropriate in so many situations!

As a baby, I was clearly FINE with being black and proud. I became less so as I grew up and recognized myself as the dark skinned member of the family. Going out with Grammee sometimes made me uncomfortable because, did I say people stared at us ALL. THE. TIME?? But any time she saw someone staring, she made it a point to hold my hand. Still staring? She'd loop her arm in mine. STILL staring?? She'd hug my waist.

As a young adult, I was walking with her through a parking lot and she grabbed me and put her arm around my waist. I looked around. People staring. I said, "Grammee. You trying to get me killed out here having a white woman hugging up on me." She got LOUD, SOUTHERN, AND BLACK in the parking lot: "I DON'T KNOW WHY ANYBODY WOULD THINK THAT I'M WHITE" (as she rolled her grey eyes at me with her blonde hair fluffing about in a frenzy 🤔). I am AF.RI.CAN AMERICAN and YOU ARE MY GRANDCHILD." And she looked at the gawkers with steeled intent, hugged me closer, walked me through the parking lot and into the movie theater, and that was that.

She protected me. She protected me that way until I stopped caring about people staring. She protected me until she knew I was comfortable in my own skin. She protects me still.

The Grammee Chronicles: Vive la feminist revolution (installment 3)

My Grammee was the type of wife I still am baffled by. Like, who WANTS to take care of somebody like that? But she did. She took care of her house and husband. (She always said Papa never "let [her] want for anything. He always provided," so this was her part.) She would get up in the morning at the crack of dawn and start breakfast. By the time my Papa had made it to the kitchen, his coffee and his breakfast would be ready and waiting.

When I was in grad school, I stayed with Grammee and Papa, and so I got the same benefits as Papa. By the time I pulled myself out of bed, Grammee would "fix a little something" for me, and as we sat and ate and talked, she would start thinking about and planning lunch. What the hell? It's 7 in the morning. Who is thinking about lunch?

SHE was.

She'd make her list and ask me to "run her to the Albertson's." We'd shop for lunch and dinner, and by around 10 AM, we'd have a mid morning snack, and then she'd start working on lunch. Papa (retired from years of activism and his dentistry practice) would sit at the counter and read the newspaper or his Bible, and he and I would have the best arguments as Grammee toiled away in the kitchen. This was their/our life until...

THE FIRST WIVES CLUB movie came out.

Grammee and her "cronies," as she would call them, went out on a lunch/movie date while Papa and I went to grad school and dawdled around the house. Papa would drop me off and pick me up (Yes, I was grown. Don't judge). This particular day, Papa and I got home; Grammee wasn't there. There were no snacks! So, we did what we always did. We waited for Grammee to come home.

She FINALLY got home. (Great! Snacks! AND dinner!) But... Instead of making the dinner, she stood there-- purse still in hand--and announced, "I just saw the First Wives Club, and I've decided I'm not making dinner tonight. You two are on your own." And she walked to her room and left us sitting there, gobsmacked. (I mean, okay, HERE's a moment where you didn't know whether to shit or to go blind!)

Papa recovered just enough to say, "Well, Shnooks. Looks like it's Piccadilly. Get your stuff." And that was that.

Grammee. The feminist. Fighting the man.

I loved that lady!!! LOL!

The Grammee Chronicles: Playing by your own rules (installment 4)

I don't want you to get the wrong impression. Grammee was not JUST a housewife. She had to work at it. Let my mom, [Freya Rivers](#), tell it, Grammee was THEE. WORST. COOK. and had zero control over my rambunctious uncles. Let Grammee tell it, housewifing was NOT a part of her plan N-T-WAY. But she grew up in an ugly time of racism, segregation, Jim Crow, a time when Black folx had to play respectability politics, code switch, "act a certain way" to gain a modicum of respect, abide by rules in the strictest sense or risk getting....wait, this sounds familiar. Anyway. She was EXPECTED to marry and have a family, and she said, "Back then, Black folx, Black families HAD to stick together. We had nothing and nobody else." So, she got married. Papa was a charmer. She played coy at first, but. Yeah.

He wanted four children. She agreed to four children, but there was a deal to be made. Rewind: You see, the reason Grammee was not the best housewife at first is because she didn't learn all the ins and outs of housewifing. When she was a girl, while all of her sisters were learning from their mother (Mamoo) how to cook, clean, sew, keep house, etc., GRAMMEE was playing by her own rules, hiding somewhere reading books. She loved them. She devoured them. She had no time for that domestic stuff. Fast forward. She married Papa, had children, and EVENTUALLY learned how to cook after years of torturing the family with hard biscuits, lumpy grits, and uncooked macaroni in the macaroni and cheese! (Fortunately, by the time I came around, she had it all figured out.)

So, here was the deal. Her rules: She would give Papa the four children he wanted, but when the youngest was off to nursery school, SHE would be off to school, too. Time passed. The youngest went to nursery school. When the grad school conversation came up again, though, it looked like Papa would renege on his part of the bargain. Little did he know that Grammee had already gone through with her contingency plan. She enrolled in graduate school without telling Papa and just let the tuition bill speak for itself. Papa was a proud man. There was NO WAY he was going to let anyone say he didn't pay the bills for his family, so...he had to pay the tuition, and Grammee went on to get her master's degree. Her rules. She became a guidance counselor and worked in education until her retirement.

She gave me permission to play by my own rules even though I didn't always make the best decisions. When I decided to drop out of college with only NINE credits to go, my mother was understandably furious. I followed THAT brilliant decision with a string of other well thought out decisions until I ended up, within a matter of two months, applying to be a flight attendant, interviewing, accepting the position and shipping off to training. At the plane, my mom, still furious, kinda hugged me and stepped back. My Grammee hugged me hugged me and then whispered in my ear, "This is not what we want for you, but we have to let you figure it out. You can ALWAYS come home, baby." I was a flight attendant for 9 years, but I also managed to go back and complete those nine credits and then go for my graduate degree as well.

Fast forward to about 10 years ago when another decision I made upset the apple cart and I started acting. It was cute, people thought, that I decided so "late in life" to want to be an actor, but whatever. My rules. Grammee came to see the premiere of a film I was in--For the Cause--where I played an ex-Black Panther. I

used a good bit of profanity. "Rat bastard" was one of my faves. After the film, Grammee was beaming. She hugged me hugged me and declared she didn't know I used such language. I assured her it was just acting. (!) Then, she wrapped her arm around my waist and walked off with me for a second and shared, "You know I always wanted to be an actor, but in those days, men were running the business, and they wanted you to do all kinds of things, and they would especially take advantage of Black women, so my mother wouldn't hear of it. YOU are fulfilling MY dream."

Permission granted. MY rules. Here's to us, Grammee!

The Grammee Chronicles: MY Grammee (installment 5)

This one, I'm sure you can gather, is more about ME than about Grammee. I am the first grandchild. Grammee was mine for three years...until my brother came around and messed it up for everybody. Thankfully, he was more of a Papa's boy, so I could keep Grammee to myself. For awhile.

Then the other grands started coming. The ones in Baton Rouge knew the lay of the land pretty well. Grammee was Grammee to them, and we didn't have too many problems, until...

The grand from California started visiting.

Now, there's an age difference here. She was five. I was...20? Or somewhere thereabouts. Suffice it to say, I had been around the longest, so the Grammee rules are the rules that I set. Everybody was on board except the California girl. She would come to visit in the summer. That, in itself, was a problem. She was taking my Grammee time, but I guess I could share. I mean, she had to go back to California eventually, so.

One day, we're in the pool. Grammee had asked me to go out with, let's call the California grand, Angela. I'm a good granddaughter. I know I'm the oldest. I take my responsibility seriously. So. I go hang out with Angela in the pool. We're talking. I mean, you know, the kind of talking you CAN do with a five year old. And then, she said, "GRANNY." Now, there was some other sentence that happened after that because I think she was telling me about whatever GRAMMEE had lined up for her to do, but I blacked out for a second.

"Ummmmmmmmmm....Her name is GRAMMEE," I politely corrected her.

"No it's not. It's GRANNY," she replied with not a little bit of snark.

"Ummmmm. Noooo. It's. GRAMMEE," I coolly responded.

"She lets me call her Granny," she insisted.

"It's NOT Granny with an N. It's GRAMMEE with an M!" I shouted.

"Well, I call her Granny!"

"It's GRAMMEE GRAMMEE GRAMMEE!!!"

"GRANNY!"

"NO! I'M the oldest. I'm the first grandchild. I named her. You can't change the name. Her name is GRAMMEEEEEEE! That's MY GRAMMEE!!!"

By this time, GramMee has come to the door because this has turned in to a full blown shouting match.

"Sharee!"

"Yes, Grammee?" I innocently respond.

"What in the WORLD?"

"She keeps calling you Granny! And your name is GRAMMEE!!"

"Oh, I swanee, Sharee. You are fighting with a five year old!"

"I. Well. I....I'M the first grandchild. She needs to get it right." I stormed out of the pool and sulked in my room. I vowed to never like the grand from California if she insisted on calling MY Grammee "Granny."

EPILOGUE

I'm happy to report she finally came around. We can call her Angela Thomas now. She's not a bratty five year old trying to usurp my status as the greatest grand. She's a beautiful, loving human with an equally beautiful and loving family. Her husband made a comment on one of my other posts that reminded me to tell the MY GRAMMEE story. Thanks, Bryan!

The Grammee Chronicles: Unchaperoned (installment 6)

This story is actually a short one, but you need to know a couple of things first, so.

1) Grammee had a ridiculously active social life. She belonged to all kinds of clubs (Matrons, Girlfriends, Catholic Daughters, etc.); she played golf; she played bridge. She was always on the go, so I don't know which of these groups she was with in this story.

2) Grammee did not drink OFTEN, but she DID drink. I know a lot of people think Grammee's a saint. Nope. She was an adventurer. She played by her own rules. Up until a couple of years ago, she would still sit with me and have a glass of MURL-oh (Merlot) with *GAH!* an ice cube in it. "What? That's how I like to drink it."

3) Grammee and I have begun MANY of our conversations MID-conversation since I was a child. I'm a talker. SURPRISE!!! My Grammee was a talker. My mom? Not so much. Also, in my mom's defense, she was a teacher and had to listen to children talk all day, so I was a LOT at the end of the day. When we would get out of the car to go in the house, I would still be chattering away, and mom would say, "Ooh shit, Sharee, call your Grammee," and I'd call Grammee and continue the conversation I was already having. She would happily indulge me. We spoke that same language all my life. It wasn't uncommon for our conversations to START with "Yeah because..." or "And then she..." as if the other had been a part of the previous conversation that those phrases belonged to.

So. The story.

Also, first, or actually fourth...a bit of advice. If you hear the old(er) women in your life talking about chartering a bus, understand that if there are no CHAPERONES for them???? Life is going to be REAL INTERESTING.

Now, the story.

I'm living in Atlanta by this time. Grammee calls.

"Yeah, Sharee. What's the name of the wine?"

"What wine?"

"I thought you would know."

"Grammee. Wait. Where ARE you?"

"You know we got this bus"

"Mmmhmm"

"and we're at the casino now, but somebody brought the wine on the bus and I thought you would know what it was."

"Ummm. No. What's the label look like?"

"I don't know. All I know is everybody was just a-giggling and talking and acting like school girls."

"Grammee. What th-/"

"Yeah, chile. We had some fun. The bus is nice, and we're all checked in to the hotel now."

"Oh, good. Sounds like y'all need a nap."

SHE is now giggling like a school girl. "Yeah, chile. That monkey is on my...OH! OH! Monkey. That's it!"

"That'ssssss...WHAT???"

"It's something with a monkey."

"BR-, BRASS????? BRASS MONKEY?????"

"YEAH! That's it. I knew you would know. It's something the young folk drink."

"N-, NO. It's NOT what the young folk drink! What are you? Wh- WHO. HAD. BRASS. MONKEY. ON. THE. BUS?????????"

"Oh, shoo. I don't know. They started pouring the wine an-/"

"It's NOT WINE. It's poison. NOBODY drinks Brass Monkey, Grammee."

"Well, I didn't think it was that bad. Shoo, but chile, that monk-/"

"Is. Is on your back. Yeah, Grammee. I get it. You should prolly go get some rest now. You're gonna feel that in the morning."

"Okay, baby," giggling, "yeah, 'cause that mon-/"

"Goodnight Grammee!"

"Okay, baby."

Y'all. My Grammee was wildin'.

SMDH

The Grammee Chronicles: I swanee (installment 7)

My mama, [Freya Rivers](#), stole my thunder on this one when she commented about my Grammee's "association technique," but I still gotta say a little something about it.

Grammee had some of THEE BEST sayings and some of THEE WORST ways to remember things. She said she had an "association technique" that she used to remember things, but it almost NEVER WORKED. EXCEPT for the calculus problem (as my mom so accurately called it) she used to remember my great-grandmother's phone number.

THEE BEST SAYINGS accompanied by a sample sentence for "clarification" (?)

--Skoshie bit: Use just a skoshie bit of sugar to take the bitterness away.

--Shit or go blind: Chile, that lady didn't know whether to shit or go blind after I told her you were mine!

--Druthers: If you had your druthers, which grade would you teach?

--I swanee: I swanee, Sharee, sometimes you are impossible.

--Mariney (pronounced: muh RINE ee, NOT muh REEN ee): You know the boy I'm talking about? He was kinda mariney-colored.

--Cover her feet up: Your Papa keeps joking that he has another woman. All I can say is "cover her feet up" because she has got something in store for her trying to take care of his cantankerous butt.

--^^^^^Cantankerous butt!^^^^^

THEE WORST ASSOCIATION TECHNIQUE

Three examples: Candy/Sweetie/Cookie, Mudfoot, Tsunami. These were the names she called Sugar, Stepteau, and Sundiata, respectively.

She THOUGHT she used her association techniques to remember these folx names. Clearly, they did not work. Sugar: "Well, Sharee. I associated her name with something sweet." Suffice it to say, Sugar could very well be called right about anything using that technique: M&M's, Honey, German chocolate cake... [Stepteau](#) (pronounced: step toe) became Mudfoot because "I remembered that his name had something to do with your foot [toe] and you step in the mud with your foot." (Wait. What? Is that...is that the only thing you do with your foot? I mean, why THAT action??) Finally, [Sundiata](#) had to tell Grammee his name about five times in a row until she simply fixed it in her mind that it sounded like Tsunami to her, so that was that.

Here's the ONE THING she got right, and oddly enough, EVERYBODY who heard this explanation ALSO remembered the phone number. (I bet YOU will, too!) My great-grandmother's phone number was 766-7549. Grammee told me that the way she remembered it was thus: Grandmother had the same "exchange" as Grammee and Papa (766) and then she "took the number 100 and said to [herself], 'okay, 3/4 of 100 is 75 and HALF of 100 is 50 minus 1 is 49. So, 766-7549.'"

WTAH? CALCULUS IS EASIER, GRAMMEE.

Gotta love her.

The Grammee Chronicles: Lagniappe (penultimate installment or 8, if you're counting)

Some odds and ends things about my Grammee before the final installment.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM...Grammee could go with the flow if she needed to. During the Black Power movement, everybody was sporting big afros. The family looked up one day, and Grammee was sporting a big blonde afro, too!

SIGN OF THE TIMES: Grammee changed as times changed. I think this is one of the things I admired about her most. People say that folx get stuck in their ways and in their way of thinking. Grammee didn't. Quick (hopefully) example: Grammee believed in the sanctity of marriage. She believed that children should be brought up in a loving household with two parents. That is how she was taught. That is what SHE did. I knew that, and yet, somehow I hoped she'd understand.

My first marriage is not something I will go into the details about, but I WILL say that it was not a healthy relationship. EARLY in my pregnancy, which was also EARLY in the marriage, it was not a healthy relationship. We managed to stay together, though, for two years until everything simply unraveled. I called Grammee. I asked her advice. Maybe I was asking for her permission. She started, "You know that I think a child should be brought up in a house with two parents."

My heart sank. I had a sick feeling in my stomach. "Yes, Grammee." I knew better. I knew she was going to say that. She was going to try to convince me to tough it out. I was drumming up the nerve to tell her there was absolutely no way, and then...

"But. If the two of you can't be healthy, loving parents TOGETHER, then you need to be healthy, loving parents APART. Your generation of women can do things on your own. You've got a good job. You make your own money. You don't NEED him. Our generation, we depended on each other. We HAD to stick together. There are blessings and curses in both situations, but that child deserves to grow up in a house where there is love present." And that was that. She gave me permission to, again, play by my own rules.

There are other examples of her understanding the times and changing with them, like going from balking at the idea of being called an "African American" to fully embracing it, especially after she saw the research on our lineage. She was a perfect example of Khepera (look it up).

CLAIRVOYANCE: Grammee "saw" things in her dreams. She knew the details of events (tragic and joyous, alike) before anyone else knew them. I won't bring up specifics because they might trigger some bad memories for folx. Just know that every time she said, "Sharee, I had this dream last night," I RAN.

CODE SWITCHING: The funniest thing you could ever watch is Grammee answering the phone at home. She was extremely "proper" as we used to say. Softly, demurely, she'd answer, "Hellooo. Yes, this is Missus Anderson. Who's calling, please?" And then she would recognize the voice of one of her "cronies," and her tone/accent/demeanor would flip in the blink of an eye. Hand on her hip, loud and country into the receiver, "Juss?? Yeah! Giiiiiiiiiiiiiiii, yeah." Belly laughs and straight up gossip.

BETTER THAN: Grammee would be offended by someone thinking that SHE thought she was "better than" other people. Admittedly, she had some "advantages." Her husband had a successful dentistry practice. She was well educated and had a long career in education. Their family was well known in the community as one of the major activist families in Baton Rouge. She belonged to organizations across the state. She had traveled the world. So, people say she lived a charmed life and some mistakenly assumed she thought she was better than everybody else. She explained to me one day: "You know? I DO think I'm better than other people, but not in the way they say. I don't care how much money you have or education or whatever all that is, but I DO care about how you TREAT people, and I DO. I DO think that I am better than people who choose to hurt people because that's not right."

She was magic with a heart full of sunlight and butterflies and giggling babies and puppies. I don't know. I just wish there were more of her.

*****FINAL INSTALLMENT*****

The Grammee Chronicles:
UNAPOLOGETICALLY
BLACK

Some context: Growing up as the dark skinned child in the family in Baton Rouge was not always fun. Although my friends and family will say that I was vain, it was a persona I developed to deal with my discomfort of being the "black sheep." (That is, until my vanity REALLY kicked in after I cut my hair!) My immediate family was not the issue, but some of the off-handed things that have been said to (and about) me by distant relatives, friends, friends' relatives, etc. are wild. Here are a few:

--"You're dark skinned, but at least you have European features like your family." Where the--Who the--What the?!?

--Addressing my boyfriend at the time, while looking at ME: "You know, **insert boyfriend's name here**, when considering your spouse, you must also consider the outcome of your offspring."

--"You should TRY to marry white or at least creole so your children will be pretty."

--"You're cute for a dark skinned girl." I mean, this should go down in the dark-skinned girls' lamest compliments hall of fame.

--"You cut all that pretty hair off your head. You gone catch a hard time getting a man."

--"Oh, you must be Freya's STEP-daughter."

--Door opens. "Baby, you are at the wrong party."

--"How YOU get HIM? He only likes light skinned girls."

Oh, the list is so much longer. I was not happy about this whole "black thing." But, Grammee, though?

This little lady, who many mistook for white, would never ever ever let you make that mistake without you getting a full dressing down. There's a term, "passe blanc," which basically means "passing for white." Down south, we just say "passing." Grammee could very easily pass. She didn't. Four stories.

1) Back in the day, way back in the day, Grammee's hair texture dictated the need for a white stylist. She found one, and she would go to the beauty salon at night after it closed to get her hair done. One night, while styling her hair, the stylist said, "Mrs. Anderson, you know you could come to the salon during regular business hours. No one would know." She replied, "I would." The stylist came back, "Why don't you just pass for white? Wouldn't that be easier for you?" Grammee's response, "No. Because I'm NOT white. I don't FEEL white. I don't ACT white. I don't LIVE white. I'm colored."

2) Driving through Mississippi one night, Papa and Grammee were stopped by the police. It was illegal for a white woman to ride in the front seat of a car with a Black man. Grammee told the officers that she was colored.

They asked for her driver's license. To her surprise (and dangerously so), her driver's license actually had a W for white. Papa's life was threatened. Calls had to be made to all kinds of important people, and the police eventually backed off. When Grammee returned to Louisiana, she immediately went to the court to have the designation on her driver's license changed. Again, the question: "Are you SURE? Wouldn't it be easier for this to say that you're white?" Grammee's unwavering reply, "No."

3) We DO have members of our family who pass. They won't be named (or invited to the barbecue), but one summer, Grammee was invited to their home. Grammee accepted the invitation. Then, she found out that there was a stipulation attached: She couldn't bring Papa. My Papa was a brown skinned man. Grammee immediately declined. "I am not going anywhere my husband is not welcome."

4) Did I say, the WORST thing you could do was say that she was white? We warned people ahead of time. Like, seriously warned them. "Listen, when you see her, understand that she is BLACK. Don't even hint that you think there is a possibility that she's anything else." I tried to warn my son, [Fonah Fonts](#), when he was three: "Son, whatever you do, don't say anything to Grammee about being white." He said he understood. He clearly did not. He almost got us both disowned. "Grammee? You're not weally a pahwt of this family."

Taken aback by this revelation, "Why, baby?" Grammee inquired.

"Because you're not bwown like the west of us." Noooooooooooooooooo! I couldn't stop him. I tried. I pinched his thigh while he was in the car seat. Shutupshutupshutupshutup. Nononononononono. But it was too late.

She turned all the way around to address him. It was the longest history lesson of his entire life. We went all the way back to Marie Therese Coincoin and the Melrose Plantation, baby. Get you some history. Check yourself before you wreck yourself. I couldn't save him, y'all. He never made THAT mistake again. He may have turned four by the time she was done.

The thing that strikes me about all of this is something that I've been seeing lately on people's posts as this unrest around the country continues to percolate: "I still love being black." Indeed. Grammee, in spite of mailbox bombs and crosses being burned and death threats during the Civil Rights Movement; in spite of looking white and having the "permission" to pass; in spite of having the opportunity to "live above it all" decided she "still loved being Black." It made this dark-skinned girl take another look at things. I grew into my blackness. Not that it wasn't there before. My mom surrounded me with examples of Black excellence. I had a Black doll collection. I had bookcases full of books by Black authors. But being the ONE black girl in my family when the standard of beauty was everything I was NOT and at a time when beauty to a little girl was EVERYTHING, I still could not love being Black. It took a LOT for me to get there. It took a lot of hugs around my waist as people stared at me. It took a lot of research and deconstructing. It took sitting at my Grammee's feet and understanding the struggle and the sacrifice it took for her to get my mom and her brothers to the other side of the Civil Rights Movement and to get ME to the other side of the parking lot or the other side of my marriage or the other side of my blackness. Her hand is no longer around my waist, but I don't need it there any more. She started living inside me and walking with me and speaking through me a long time ago. One

day, my brother and I were walking, and he said, "Do you know that people just STARE at you?"

"Yep," I replied.

"Doesn't that bother the shit out of you?"

"Nope," I insisted, in all my blackness.

Thank you, Grammee.