

During a visit with Jane in 2018, as we rummaged through old files, I recorded our conversation. I transcribed that tape and this is an edited version.

The Riverboat

Conchita: Can you tell me the story of about our grandfather and the riverboat?

Jane: Oh, Uncle Ernest told me that story. I don't know if it's true or not. I don't think Uncle Ernest really liked Grandfather Will. Uncle Ernest was a precious man beyond words, but he wasn't very smart. Case in point, Uncle Seth, I believe it was, and one of the uncles left Granny that farm. And she didn't think a woman ought to run it, so she gave it to brother. And brother lost it in the Depression. I asked Uncle Ernest one time, what kind of man was my grandfather? He said, well, Will was a wonderful guy until he started running with those angel boys. That's become a saying in our family, Jean McGee loves that. She used it all the time. I'm running with angel boys. But anyway, Uncle Ernest said, one time Will bought a riverboat. And he went over there and had a dance on it one night, never did go get it and sell it or anything. I don't know if it's true or not.

Conchita: Where would he have bought a riverboat?

Jane: Here in Clarksville. Clarksville. Riverboats were big deals back then, you know.

Conchita: Where would he have gotten enough money to buy a riverboat?

Jane: Don't ask me. It may not be a word of truth in it, but I don't know why he would have told me that. On the other side of the family, I've heard a lot of things that I didn't believe.

Will Townsend's First Family

Conchita: Am I correct that after his first wife died, before he married Granny, that he was just kind of like a rake and a rambling man.

Jane: Yeah. I'm so mad at him because of his daughter. I've got the letters here that she wrote to him when he took her and left her in Bowling Green. And she said, Papa, please come and get me. I don't like it at all up here. You know, write to me, come and get me, just begging.

Conchita: And why do you think he left them? He just didn't think he could take care of them by himself.

Jane: He kept the boys, didn't he?

Conchita: I don't know.

Jane: I think he kept the boys. He just thought he couldn't raise a girl.

Conchita: What was their relationship with Granny, his sons? One of them died, right? One of them either shot himself or had an accident.

Jane: I don't know. I remember one of them was a doctor. Wasn't he? I think he's the one that mother stuck a bean up her ear, a dried bean, or in her nose, and Granny couldn't get it out, so she took mother to him. That's highly unlikely that she would take him to her husband's children by his first marriage. That was unusual.

But anyway, she, Granny told me this story. I believe anything Granny said. Anything she said, I would believe it. If it wasn't for her, I don't know what I would have done as a teenager because when I needed some advice or something, mother was too busy. But if Granny was there for her, August clothes making deal, which she used to come and bring the fabric and make us all a bunch of dresses.

But she said that, mother said, how much do I owe you? He said, nothing for getting it out, but \$5 for letting her get it in there. That's funny.

Will Townsend

Conchita: What did Granny ever say about Will Townsend? You know, I never talked to her about that.

Jane: I asked her one time the same question I asked Uncle Ernest. I said, Granny, what kind of man was my grandfather? She said, I could have lived with him a million years. He thought only of the children and me. That's what she said. And then when she was old, she had forgotten him and she saw this picture that I've gotten in here and said, who is that?

The Accident

Conchita: Did she ever talk to you about the day of the accident?

Jane: All I know is what Mother has told me, and of course, Mother was a little kid. she was 11. Aunt Teddy didn't even remember it, but Mother said when she and Jean and Aunt Teddy went out there to find his grave, that every time they would see a house, Aunt Teddy would say, wonder if my papa built that. And then when they found his grave, she said, well, I did have a papa.

Conchita: What did your mother say about the accident that day? What did your mother remember?

Jane: I don't know if she remembers it or not. She may have just heard it from Granny. I don't know if Granny told Mother or what, but the story was that they went out to cut that tree down because Grandfather wanted to build them a cottage out there so when he went hunting, they could stay out there. They didn't take the children with them. I'm glad they didn't. And he cut the tree and it fell on him. And Granny didn't know if he was living or dead. And she started out to get help and she was worried about wild hogs

because they had a lot of wild hogs in Arkansas then. Well, she went out the wrong end of the little forest they were in. And when she came out, she couldn't tell where she was. She had a terrible time finding her way back to anybody who could help her. One of the neighbors was keeping Aunt Teddy and Mother and Presley.

Granny's brother Uncle Ernest went out and got on a train, helped Granny get back to Louisville. They moved to South 4th Street. Mother said the main thing she remember about it was the steps were so high. She was a little tiny and had lived in a cabin.

She didn't stay in Louisville long. She wasn't happy being dependent on her brother. This is a story that I've heard, and I don't know who I've heard it from, but you know how things are just in your head? The story was that she wrote somebody in Russellville and said, please come and get me. I'm not happy.

In Russellville she did various things. She made hats and she sewed. And she ran that hotel, it was around the block. But she used to run that hotel. when she did everything to make a living. I don't know how she did it. Aunt Teddy was always beautifully dressed. But she told me one time, Aunt Teddy said, well, I had Barbara Perry for a friend. She was a rich man's child.

Granny's Garden – feeding that neighbor and making communion

Jane: And grandmother had a garden every year, and she would fix her lunch and fix enough for Robbie* and take it over there. Robbie lived next door, in a big house. We have some of the Christmas cards from Miss Robbie. I remember when Mother got it. The first one said, the wolf is at the door. And then the second one, the wolf had already gotten in, Miss Robbie had a good sense of humor. I don't know how she and grandmother could have been so friendly, because granny didn't have any sense of humor. She didn't really know what was funny. (*Robbie is Roberta Fisk McClean (1882–1975), an artist who lived in Russellville.)

Conchita: I have the communion plate and little pitcher from the Russellville church. What do you know about it? I was always told Granny made the wine for communion. The tray was in Moma's corner cupboard.

Jane: Your grandmother fixed the communion at the Russellville church all her life when she was single. Well, you know, Granny had that rose arbor she used as a grape arbor. There's still some grapes up there in the backyard of that old house, you know, where she lived. But Edward Coffman kind of put a different slant on it for me, and I was so glad he did. He said, you know it was hard times, and Alma didn't have money to give to the church, so she raised the grapes and made the communion grape juice, and she also made the unleavened bread. And he said, Teddy would come to Sunday school real early before anybody else came and get all that in the church. And they would bring the communion set back wash it.

Jane: We started at the Baptist church in Gracie when we moved down there. And we thought we'd go there all our lives. But about the third week, they had a business

meeting. They had a big argument between two brothers. And Dot, who was already driving a car, said, girls, we don't have to put up with this. So we became teenage Methodists.