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# I Heard But Didn't Hear Analyzing Women's Narrative Devices in Difficult Family Stories

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“I HEARD, BUT I DIDN’T HEAR”: ANALYZING WOMEN’S  
NARRATIVE

DEVICES IN DIFFICULT FAMILY STORIES

by

Deanna Allred

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2017

## ABSTRACT

### “I HEARD, BUT I DIDN’T HEAR”: ANALYZING WOMEN’S NARRATIVE DEVICES IN DIFFICULT FAMILY STORIES

by

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Utah State University, 2017

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Program: American Studies/Folklore

This thesis analyzed the narrative devices women use when telling difficult or sad stories in familial settings. I documented a story told by my mother, Myrle Hoagland, about the death of her twin brother at age 17. I provided a textual analysis concentrating on the storyteller’s use of silence, additional information, and non-linear structure, to provide meaning and instruction to her family. I also contextually analyzed the story, illuminating the unique way informal learning affected the storyteller’s performance. My analysis demonstrated how I, as an emic ethnographer, documented a familiar story about a death in my family. Upon deeper study, the storyteller attempted to instruct both consciously and subconsciously on topics about sexuality, economics, motherhood, and identity. This thesis is a case study of how women in my family use narrative devices such as silence, overlays, and performative variations to both project and withhold meaning.

(46 pages)

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I give special thanks to my family, for their patience and understanding as I took on grad school at mid-life. I could not have done it without all of you. I give thanks to my colleagues and friends for their encouragement and moral support, especially, my L and L writing group which provided so much inspiration from the start. Finally, I wish to thank my mother, Myrle Hoagland, for her lifelong guidance, kindness, and inspiration on how to be a good person, daughter, and mom. I love you.

Deanna Allred

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When I was a child, my mom's life seemed romantic. I grew up listening to her stories of living on a farm. Her parents, May (Polly) Hill Davis, and Cecil Glenn Davis, farmed forty acres in Hammett, Idaho, a small railroad town in the center of the state. They relied heavily on their three children, oldest Glenn, and the twins, Myrle (my mom) and Merrill, to help daily—on the farm, in the family's large garden, and in running the home.



Figure 1. Glenn, Myrle, and Merrill Davis, in the early 1940s

My mother's stories about her life were a regular part of my childhood, and impacted me in various ways. Many of her stories were instructive. For instance, I loved hearing about how she lived in a home built from railroad ties and how she accessed her bedroom by going outside, climbing the stairs to her room above the garage. She would tell about how exciting it was, when in the early 1950's, her family built another home and (finally) had indoor plumbing. I was much older before I realized it may have been embarrassing for

her to have had to use an outhouse clear into her high school years. Many of her stories also taught me other, less obvious things, through the unique way she told stories about hardships and the cultural expectations of women.

I am not the first academic to be interested in the family stories women tell. Folklorists Gillian Bennett, Elaine Lawless, and Jeannie Thomas have all addressed this topic in various ways. In her book, *Featherless Chickens, Laughing Women and Serious Stories*, Folklorist Jeannie Thomas emphasizes the importance of the study of oral narratives.

Some points John Fiske makes in a discussion of puns are applicable to...oral narratives... 'They pack a multiplicity of meanings into a small space, these meanings overflow, and escape control...it is not just that oral language does not need to spell [correctly]...it is that oral language is context and function oriented rather than rule oriented. If it works, that's enough' (1997:12).

Thus, learning to unpack meaning in my mother's stories included learning to let go of certain literary expectations and instead, value the nature of oral narratives.

I did not always understand what my mother was trying to teach me with her stories when I was young, though it is clear she intended to instruct me in some way. As sociologist and narrative scholar Gary Alan Fine maintains, "All intentional communication is motivated. Discourse is always purposeful" (1992:23). It wasn't until I had lived a more adult life that I began to understand some of the important messages in the stories she told me. For instance, my mother may have anticipated my youthful concerns about our family's humble origins, and through her stories, she alleviated many

of my questions about her upbringing, often by idealizing her poverty. She would tell stories about how poor her own mother had been, and describe how most of her neighbors and friends in Hammett were also very poor. I felt better knowing my mother was not alone in her circumstances. Her railroad tie home seemed to me like a log cabin, where she had to tote water from outside for cooking and washing. Mom's childhood seemed like something straight out of the Laura Ingalls Wilder *Little House* books. These books were my best friends; I read the *Little House* books in bed every night. At school, I pretended to be Laura at recess. Back then, I thought how exciting it would be to carry my lunch in an old honey bucket, like my mother, and like Laura, instead of in a plain brown bag. My mother would use the phrase, "things were different back then" to explain the genius of things I took for granted, like indoor plumbing. She could communicate directly on the specifics of her upbringing—things easily quantified—such as the comparisons of her daily life then and now. Just as Polly told family stories to my mother, and my mother to me, I now tell stories to my four daughters because I want to tether us together, connecting forward to my progeny and back to my progenitors. While it is obvious that families can value the stories passed from generation to generation, Jeannie Thomas explores why the study of family oral narratives is also important on a more academic level. "One way to learn more about the family and the everyday is through listening to and documenting people's oral narratives about their lives and their families. These narratives reveal the ways people construct and see the family and their own experiences" (1997:13). As my family stories demonstrate, mothers in my family continue to pass on traditional values through narrative.

However, when speaking of the more abstract conditions of her life, my mother often taught subtly, or unconsciously, and her style of narrative downplayed certain things. Folklorist Gillian Bennett describes the many purposes of family narratives, which help connect “belief, tradition, and experience” (1989:167). Like many mothers, mine told stories to instruct, warn, and connect the generations, as Bennett suggests. Yet in teaching concepts that required discussing certain ideas, such as complex feelings, my mother became less direct. For instance, when I was afraid to go to bed at night, she would tell about having to go outside in the dark to get to her bedroom. My mother would then be silent, thus creating a safe space for me to ask questions about being afraid of the dark without any unnecessary homiletics.

One of the reasons I was not always able to understand my mother’s storytelling was because I did not yet understand the nuances of way women tell stories. When my mother told stories, she would add additional information that I thought only tangentially related to what she was saying. Or, I would notice that Mom’s stories were not linear; she would go forward in time, then back, within the same story. Gillian Bennett uses the term “overlays” to define this narrative device of going back and forth in time and adding additional information. “Overlays thus give storytellers much more control over the conversational initiative, storyline, and audience reaction than a neat chronological structure would do. They allow speakers to hold the floor indefinitely and to refocus, reiterate, redefine, and amplify story-elements as often as they like or in any manner they choose” (1989:425). Being young was not the only reason I didn’t always understand the messages in my mother’s stories. She would embed deeper meaning into her stories,

meanings I could only apprehend once I was ready. Bennett acknowledges the unique ways women tell stories by saying,

I would argue that, once one forsakes preconceived ideas about what ‘good’ storytelling ‘must’ be, these behaviours, too, make sense. Far from being incompetent communicators, women (and others who adopt these strategies) are skilled manipulators of well-understood and clearly-defined communicative and linguistic rules (1989:168).

In other words, I have had to learn to spot narrative techniques and devices in order to understand more fully why my mother tells stories the way she does, and what she potentially means. Understanding these techniques is important on a personal level as I talk to my own daughters about my life (and my mother’s), but also on a larger scale as we understand the role personal narrative plays in people’s lives. The stories my mother told me when I was a child were a subconscious way to transfer knowledge. In his book, *Stories of Our Lives*, Folklorist Frank de Caro maintains,

Because we use stories—though not always consciously—to communicate essential ideas and observations about our society, our lives, our personal and communal pasts, and because stories ‘synthesize events in meaningful...whole’ (as Anthony Paul Kerby puts it), stories offer quite a personal but intensely focused way of explaining ourselves and our social and historical contexts (2013:179).

She may not have intended to teach certain values, but my mother’s stories implicitly ingrained in me specific familial mores that I intend to discuss throughout this thesis.

When I was a teenager, I began to notice more keenly the differences in the way my mother told stories at home and the way she told stories for her profession. We lived in Jackson, Wyoming, where my mother managed a Native American arts and crafts store. I often visited her at work on my way home from school, and I enjoyed watching and learning from her while she was in the workplace. I listened to my mother tell stories about Southwest American Native cultures and artists. I watched as her demeanor changed as she explained traditional Native American arts to her customers. My mother's posture straightened and her tone of voice became deeper and more professional. At work, she went from being "Mom" to being an intriguing, interesting person I wanted to know better. My mother was the conduit between Native artists and curious customers through her stories. The years she spent working have influenced how she retells stories today.

For my mother, a model for storytelling had been put in place by family traditions and by the informal learning she acquired during the years she worked. Informal learning gave her the tools she needed to be a good storyteller and to project explicit and implicit meaning to her family. Sandra Stahl, who first argued for the personal experience narrative as a form of folklore, asserts, "Personal stories mean more to the emic listener because of intimacy. Experiencing folklore as it lives may be personally inspiring but it must somehow be translated to be useful in the external world" (1985:63). That is to say, while personal narrative stories certainly mean more to the emic listener, the etic observer also not only takes away a greater understanding of a more general concept, like family, but can also extrapolate the specific narrative patterns to a broader culture. In this thesis, I

will concentrate on an example of private folklore that has applications to communal understanding.

Among the many stories in my mother's repertoire, the death of her twin brother Merrill, stands out. This story is an excellent case study to understand how she uses various techniques such as overlays, silence, and performative variations, when telling stories intended to guide me and other listeners. When examining my mother's story of her brother's death more closely, I was finally able to hear and understand more fully what she was trying to say in a story that I've been listening to for a long time. I am inclined to believe the story was too close for too long, too much a part of me, for me to see the benefit of deep analysis. This thesis, then, is a case study of how my mother, Myrle Davis Hoagland, uses narrative devices, such as silence, overlays, and performative variations, to either project or withhold meaning in the story of her brother's death.

### Merrill's Death: The Difficult Story<sup>1</sup>

When I was a child of about 9 years old, my mother first told the story of when her twin brother, Merrill, was killed at age 17. Merrill went hunting with two friends and was accidentally shot. Mom has told this difficult story many times over the course of my life. Sandra Stahl asserts that "[p]ersonal narrative is the prime way to express traditional attitudes or shared assumptions" (1977:20), and it's obvious that my mother's story impacted me in both subconscious and conscious ways. Telling stories, often in family settings, instructs listeners about what is valuable or standard behavior in the shared culture. Thomas adds,

The same oral narrative has different powers in different discursive situations: for instance, it is fairly common for the same family story to be used in numerous settings, working differently and being interpreted differently each time it is told...sometimes someone telling a story is not entirely certain of its meaning (1997:15).

As a child, I listened to the facts of what happened, but I also heard the emotion of the story, and how the tragedy affected my mother's family of origin.<sup>2</sup> The version I collected for this thesis describes the scene, setting, and what happened, in much the same way as I remember. What has changed, however, is Mom's performance of the story, and the fact that the audience for the telling is broader than usual. The first time she told this story to me as a child, we were alone together in a car. The more recent telling included my 18-year-old daughter, Abbey Allred, and my father, Verlyn Hoagland. My mother tells the story with a more formal tone and language than I remember her using when I was a child. Also, she has changed how her mother, Polly, is portrayed. Thomas speaks to why altering an identity can occur in storytelling.

We do not settle on a stable view of identity; identities are called into question and set in motion by the narratives. The stories cause us to question how we maintain our identities in relation to each other...Looking at such narratives, reminds us that identities can be shed and renegotiated by both teller and listener and can be in constant flux from narrative interaction to narrative interaction (1997:25).

Storytellers Loren Niemi and Elizabeth Ellis add to the conversation by saying,

Some of us, (often in name of Truth) want to avoid the shadow side of our experience and think that by focusing only on the positive, we can set a good example.

Admitting that we are capable of great folly and evil, as well as the good and the heroic, is a healthy and often a humorous experience. Human beings are not immune to change, contradiction, or mistake. In recognizing this within ourselves, we come to understand that these are also keys to our survival and growth as a species. Through story, we can learn from our experience (2001:34).

As I have indicated, my mother shared this sad family story with me several times throughout my life. In the past versions, she admitted people are capable of folly. In this version, shared on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, I prompted Mom to expound on something inappropriate Polly said after Merrill's death. Verlyn interjected brief comments that I have removed for clarity purposes. However, the complete interview, including contributions from all participants is in the Appendix. I have edited parts of the story for concision. I have also numbered the lines for reference in the analysis sections.

*Myrle: I can remember Mother [Polly Davis] always sent a 20-dollar bill at the end of the month. It would come in a little letter. Cause she knew by the end of the month we didn't have much money.*

*Deanna: She really was a sweetheart.*

*Myrle: And she would make quilts. Beautiful quilts and send to us in the mail. And new pajamas for each one of the children. [Lines 1-6]*

*Deanna: What happened though, Mom, do you think? There for a while, she was mean. And I think it's good to be honest about the whole of what a person is.*

*Myrle: She was cranky with me because she, I was a girl, and she didn't want anything to happen to me. You know. I think the way she was raised, not with much love. She came from a family of one boy and 5 girls, and she was not the favorite. When they moved to Hammett, they came from Rigby, Idaho, in a covered wagon. And it was Grandma Hill [who] got bit by a mosquito, and had whatever the fever's called. Scarlet?*

*Whatever it was called. Mother said she can remember taking a pan with water, going to the crick, [sic] and getting water and bathing her head in the... [Lines 7-15]*

*Deanna: Her mother's head?*

*Myrle: Uh, huh, [yes] so that, cause she had a high fever. It's a wonder she didn't die, but she survived it and they were in a covered wagon from Rigby, Idaho, to Hammett, Idaho, which is a heck of a long ways.<sup>3</sup> And when they got to Hammett, they thought it would be a great place to live.*

*Deanna: So, Grandma didn't have a lot of love? [Lines 16-21]*

*Myrle: No, she was very...she loved her dad and she would go with him and help him. They would take railroad ties and sell them for almost nothing. And uh, that's kind of what they lived on.*

*Deanna: But what was the dynamic do you think, because all five of those girls, they never spoke to each other for years. I mean, what do you think happened?*

*Myrle: I don't know. Grandma, [Polly's mother] was very partial to Loretta which was the baby, and Audrey. And, um. I don't know what happened. But she [Polly] and Cora were pretty close. But they even got mad over...<sup>4</sup>*

*Deanna: I know, just that dynamic is weird. One time you said you wondered if there had been sexual abuse.*

*Myrle: I don't know. I would imagine there might have been. But I don't know. Mother never talked about it.*

*Deanna: Of course. [Lines 22-34]*

*Myrle: You didn't say the word pregnant or anything. You just took what came. We were born in Hammett, we lived in Hammett until we were grown up and then we all, except for Merrill, and we, uh, when we were 17, the first time that Merrill had ever gone hunting with friends, he always went with Dad and Uncle George. He went hunting with three dear friends, or two dear friends, and they were back on the mountain and they shot a deer, and as they were running down the hill there was gravel. And, one of the boys didn't put his gun on safety and he slipped and the gun discharged and it hit Merrill and killed him. And one of the boys had to run, I think three miles, and they ran into Uncle George hunting and he came and they, they were able to bring Merrill out. I was working at the, at the little restaurant that night and I remember going home and having them*

*coming and telling me that Merrill had been killed and Mom and Dad were in the mountains and they were, the, the... [Lines 35-46]*

*Deanna: So you were home alone?*

*Myrle: Mmmhmm.[yes] Uh. Earl Harmon. and George [George Davis, Myrle's uncle] came to tell me. And then the people that worked in the Forest Service I guess found Mom and Dad. How they did, I don't know, because nobody knew where they were. But they found them and they came home and it was a pretty sad homecoming. (Myrle then switches the story here to how her brother Glenn came home from the army for the funeral). They all, he [Mom's brother Glenn] didn't have any money to come home, and the Red Cross wouldn't give him money to come home, and all of his friends gave him money so that he could get a bus ticket and come home for the funeral. And I don't know why the Red Cross wouldn't but they... [Lines 47-56]*

*Deanna: Um. I think Ronnie (my dad's brother) talked a little bit about this, one time when I was interviewing Grandma. And she said the man that accidentally shot Merrill, just never had a happy life.*

*Myrle: No.*

*Deanna: It really was bad.*

*Myrle: They owned the Oasis [motel] up on the viaduct. And they, Mother walked up to there before they owned it. Some other people owned it. And Mother would walk from Hammett up to there to serve chicken dinners for 25 cents a day. And, uh, that was a pretty good, you know wage. 25 cents a day. But she would walk up and back and there was little cabins. And that was my first job, was cleaning those cabins, and it scared me to death to go into those rooms that somebody been in and I'd always look in the closet and under the bed. Check that there was nothing to gonna get me. [Laughter.] That was my very first job. The cabins are still there, depleted [sic] as they are, and the place is still there, but it has gone through different people. But the people worked there, I remember they gave Mother a birthday cake on a plate and I am pretty sure I gave the plate to Sydney. [Lines 57-72]*

*Deanna: So, this, the kid that accidentally shot Merrill. Didn't have a happy life?*

*Myrle: Oh, it was... He had to stay with Merrill while they ran to find help. But he died. The bullet had gone through here [Myrle points to her chest] and killed him quite*

*soon, I mean he didn't... They said he just gasped, and it must have been horrible thing. Steve<sup>5</sup>*

*says the worst thing that ever happened to him, was when he came up on those children, those high school kids, and he tried to bring the boy back, you know he gave him... it was one of his ball players and they put him in the ambulance, and he [Steve] had to drive the ambulance and they got to where the helicopter came, and he couldn't figure out why the helicopter didn't leave because, he, [Steve] had him [the hurt boy] breathing. But he was...<sup>6</sup> [73-82]*

*Deanna: Gone.*

*Myrle: He was gone. He [Steve] said that's the worst day of his life. And there's a big... right now, I passed it. And there's rocks all around, and flowers and everything's his number, 23. I think it was, or 32, in rocks and they are all painted, and it was... and every year they go, the school kids go remember him.*

*Deanna: We talked about roadside memorials in my folklore class a couple of weeks ago. That um, you know they're something people do all over.*

*Myrle: And I mean there's some between Hammett and Mountain Home that people have been killed, and there's always some flowers. The, you know, the plastic flowers. They're not buried there, but... [Lines 83-92]*

*Deanna: No, it's just where they were killed.*

*Myrle: I remember when Merrill was killed. His best friend Rodney, not Rodney but, what was his name? Killed on the tractor? Wesson, the little Wesson boy, was driving the tractor and they got too close to the edge, and the tractor rolled over and killed him.*

*Deanna: So, he died after or before?*

*Myrle: He died before. But there was the two boys and then, and then the other boy. How did he die? Well, you went with his sister? [Mom is speaking to my dad here]. What was their name? Helen. Helen's little brother died some way tragically. There were three boys that died.*

*Deanna: Who came up with the poem on Merrill's gravestone?<sup>7</sup> [Lines 93-102]*

*Myrle: When they [Mom's parents] went to buy the headstone, the, wherever they bought the stone from, had different things. And they saw that. It kind of, they wanted to*

*put it on the headstone. So, I'm sure they're in a in a horrible frame of mind and they wanted something special. And I'm sure that's... And I can remember, I wasn't... I should have gone to the cemetery. Or to the, to the, mortuary more. Mom and Dad had to go, and I*

*wouldn't go several times. I don't know why I wouldn't go, but I...*

*Deanna: It was probably hard, Mom.*

*Myrle: But I should have gone with them, and supported them, and I remember not going.*

*Deanna: It was probably hard.*

*Myrle: It was hard.*

*Deanna: I think sometimes you gotta remember to be kind to yourself about this stuff. You did a lot of good things, and you know, sometimes I think we beat ourselves up about the things we didn't do. [Lines 103-116]*

*Myrle: Yeah. Mother really had a hard time. She would walk through the field every day and we'd have to go get her. She was going to go kill herself. And uh... she... it was... and the lady from the restaurant came and got [asked] her, "Polly, we need you really bad. Could you come and wash dishes for us? We are way behind, and we just need you." And that really saved mother. She'd finally cooked and waited tables. And, and then she started to bowl. And that was her whole life, was bowling.*

*Deanna: She didn't bowl till after Merrill died.*

*Myrle: Uh huh. [Yes]*

*Deanna: That probably helped her too.*

*Myrle: It did. That was... I was... Remember mother was not herself and she told me she wished it'd been me instead of Merrill, and I knew that she didn't mean it, and I never, I never ever...*

*Deanna: But it was a terrible thing to hear.*

*Myrle: Well, I heard it, but I didn't hear it. But she was, was a terrible thing for her to go through. Or any parent. [Lines 117-131]*

In the following sections, I will consider Myrle's narrative with regard to text, texture, and context<sup>8</sup> I will analyze how Myrle<sup>9</sup> codes this story for her audience, and will

attend to the tone and texture of Myrle's performance—the way Myrle tells the story, and the rhetorical devices that women often use to convey meaning. I will also discuss the unspoken, or hidden meanings Myrle includes in her story, especially when she says Polly was “cranky.” Thomas asserts, “the personal experience narrative can depict moments of dramatic discomfort within the family, and this dis-ease is perpetuated in the sharing of these stories as narrators and listeners try to sort out how they feel about them, about each other's interpretation of them, and about each other” (1997:25). While difficult family stories can at times make an audience feel uncomfortable or vulnerable, the darker moments of our lives are also valuable to understand on personal and communal levels.

### Textual Analysis

Even before I began studying Myrle's narratives for this thesis, the way she birthed the story of Merrill's death intrigued me. Why did Myrle jump around in the story, going back and forth in time?<sup>10</sup> Why did she interject material that seemed unnecessary?<sup>11</sup> Why does Myrle use periods of silence in the story, evidenced by ellipses in the text?<sup>12</sup> For example, in lines 61-67, Myrle starts to answer a question I posed about the boy who accidentally shot Merrill. She begins to tell me about the boy, then immediately describes another family who owned the motel before the family of the boy who shot Merrill. She makes a connection between the families by describing how both Myrle and Polly worked at the motel. This additional information is purposeful. Gillian Bennett explains how overlays in the texts, which often appear in women's storytelling, make sense from a narratological perspective. She explains that women storytellers often “[load] their story with a mass of circumstantial detail so dense sometimes that it

obscures the storyline altogether” (1989:168). She then clarifies and validates women storytellers by saying, “If you make the assumption that women are wordy and incompetent narrators, there is, of course, nothing to explain about these constructions... however, you [could] assume that they know what they are doing and they are in control of their stories” (1989:170). Myrle’s stories are an example of Bennett’s assertions. The overlays are not unnecessary fluff in the story, but rather, a way to slow the story down, to emphasize certain points, and to build toward the conclusion.

Myrle’s first overlay is right after what Labov and Waletzky would describe as Polly’s “resume”<sup>13</sup> (1967:20). Myrle values Polly’s generous nature and wants Polly to be remembered this way. Thus, she describes the way Polly would send her \$20 and make quilts and pajamas for the family. Myrle also points out that Polly was not the favorite in the family. I then ask specifically about the time Polly was “mean” to Myrle. Myrle responds by talking about how Polly was “cranky” because my mother was a girl.<sup>14</sup> Intuitively, Myrle both projects and withholds meaning. Myrle gives background for Polly, setting up the context of Polly’s life. Myrle describes how the family traveled to Hammett from Rigby, and how Polly cared for her sick mother. She also withholds meaning in this passage of why perhaps Polly was “cranky” at times, especially with Myrle. Myrle alludes to why being born a girl made Polly feel she needed to protect Myrle “from anything happening to her.” This need to protect Myrle suggests Polly felt it necessary to keep Myrle safe from unwanted sexuality, or from becoming pregnant through consensual sex. During the interview, I did not immediately pick up on what Myrle was saying. As a new ethnographer but also as member of the family, I heard the story but did not attend consciously to what Myrle was saying. I had grown up listening

to this narrative, and I also knew the part of the story about which I wanted more information. Bennett's work helped me realize the need for both emic and etic ethnographers to trust the storyteller, especially female storytellers. Instead of trusting Myrle's storytelling abilities, I redirected Myrle back to what I was looking for: the difficult story. Elaine Lawless discusses the importance of trusting the narrator in her book, "Women Escaping Violence." She reflects on an interview with a domestic abuse survivor. "I have concluded, actually, that I should not have asked her to go back and fill in what she had originally left out. She was not ready; she had already made a narrative decision. I am convinced, now that we must hear and "read" these stories as they come to us, even interrupted and broken by the gaps" (2012:59). When analyzing the transcription, I saw I had overlooked parts of the story Myrle was trying to tell me—the part of the story Myrle downplayed, but that was explicitly there for me, as her audience. Myrle was telling me that Polly was "cranky" because Polly understood the cultural role given to women, which is to ensure their children have moral values. When I redirected Myrle, I lost the opportunity to hear more about Polly's parenting, and perhaps I lost the opportunity for Myrle to tell me more explicitly about the moral values Polly tried to instill in her. I then asked Myrle about why Polly and her sisters remained estranged as adults. Myrle begins to answer my question, then stops, and instead, she tries again to discuss sexual moral values. She doesn't say why the women were estranged, or why she once told me there might have been sexual abuse in the family.

The language Myrle uses to code the sex discussion, while sparse, is quite informative. Thomas states,

Behavior that threatens family stability or continuity—sexuality that gets out of hand or illegitimacy that brings an unknown bloodline into the family—has to be censured (Elizabeth Stone 50)...Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia...There is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others...(Holquist 426-427) (1997: 29).

In line 35, Myrle describes how the word “pregnant” was not a word that was spoken in her home, or perhaps even in her community, evidenced by the phrase, “*You didn’t say the word pregnant or anything.*” While unclear, the pronoun “you” could refer to the family, or more broadly, to members of the community. She then goes back in time and talks about being born in Hammett, which is curious to me. This part of the story is juxtaposed after the supposed sexual abuse in Polly’s family leading into Myrle’s comment on the word “pregnant.” Sexuality was not something discussed in Myrle’s home, (or in my home when I was growing up.)<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note the closeness of the two words, “pregnant” and “born” in the text. This could indicate how deeply rooted sexual morality may have been for Polly to instill in Myrle, and which Myrle was then trying to convey to her progeny. It was Polly’s job as a woman, as a mother, to instruct her daughter about the necessity of staying sexually pure before marriage. Historian Laura Woodworth-Ney claims, “Women’s activities at home supported male efforts in the larger civic and economic sphere [...] This made [women] the bearer of morality for the family—hers was the more pure experience” (1985:105). While this quote pertains to the late nineteenth century, it still holds true for women in my family in the early and mid-twentieth century. However, the actual language required to have this important conversation was not available in Myrle’s home. I experienced a similar situation when

Myrle attempted to explain sexual reproduction to me. Neither Polly nor Myrle had the actual language required to describe concepts such as sexual reproduction, sexual abuse, and sexuality in general. In line 35, Myrle's language immediately moves into resignation— "You just took what came"—addressing the economic situation of the family, and yet also speaking to something more subconscious.

Both Polly and Myrle bravely bucked the sexual conventions of their community of Hammett, and were pregnant before marriage. Sociologist Jonathan Hearn has stated, "When we assign moral responsibility, we are also, by implication...asserting that those 'responsible' had the power to do otherwise" (2012:168). If there was no language for talking about sexuality, then the reality of being pregnant outside of marriage must have been confusing, and perhaps frightening, for both women. In their respective generations, both women were poor, pregnant, and brave, having to navigate childbirth, marriage, and motherhood, in a short period of time. In a different conversation, I asked Myrle if she felt judged by her small, mostly LDS<sup>16</sup> community of Hammett, Idaho. She said she did not feel any judgment about being pregnant when she got married, because no one spoke openly about the pregnancy. It was, perhaps, spoken about privately between community members. After her brief comment about the word "pregnant," Myrle immediately returns to Merrill's death story, and yet there was so much unspoken about sexuality in that brief moment. It appears that sexuality is still a difficult topic for Myrle to discuss, so she loads a lot of information in only a few words.

Just as Myrle can fit a lot of meaning in a small space, she also uses silence<sup>17</sup> in meaningful ways during her narration. Occasionally, she is simply searching for a word,<sup>18</sup> but at other times, silence indicates places where Myrle slows the narrative for her

audience, perhaps to allow listeners to digest the information given.<sup>19</sup> Bennett describes how

[women storytellers] have to make sure that the listener gets the point, and that important moments do not go by before the listeners have grasped their significance. Women's stories are often 'little' stories, or single incidents, yet their significance may be very great. The trick therefore is to slow down the story at intervals in order to let the hearer catch up with the speaker, reflect on the events, and get the point of the story. (1989:176)

In lines 43, 51, 80, and 104, the silence, or the slowing of the narrative, happens at particularly critical and emotional parts of the story, places where the story has the most impact and where Myrle prepares listeners for the story to come.

I notice, in places where Myrle uses silence, she may also insert additional information. Again, Bennett helps clarify:

It is a characteristic of...women in general, to prefer story-structure which, instead of moving the plot inexorably forward, allows them to back track their time-reference and create a many-layered, multi-textured structure... each of these overlaid planes contributes a little extra to the plot-line, and adds subtlety, emphasis and texture to an otherwise bare account. (1989:174-75)

For example, when Myrle inserts the information about my brother Steve's experience with the death of his high school basketball player (see lines 75-83), she had just described Merrill's gunshot wound. After describing the wound, Myrle pulls back from the story and tells a story where another boy dies. By inserting Steve's story in this place, Myrle compares the two emotional stories. She describes how hard this event was

for Steve, which in turn lets her audience know how difficult Merrill's loss was for Myrle without becoming too emotional.

In other words, a teller who becomes too emotional in a story loses the trust of her audience by not creating enough preparation for both teller and audience for such emotions. Myrle softens the impact of the death for both herself and her audience by introducing a parallel story, preparing her audience for the tragedy that is closer to home. As Myrle continues to talk, the silences become more frequent, especially at the end of the story. Myrle pauses, letting the information thrum in our minds. Myrle's artful, performative silences allow for reflection on Polly's mental health, and how Myrle must have been affected by the tragic comment from Polly which she hears, but doesn't really hear.

In several places, Myrle gives information which may seem out of place, and somewhat hard to follow when reading the text. After telling Steve's story, she returns to Merrill. However, she immediately inserts additional information about how her brother Glenn did not have the money to come home for the funeral.<sup>20</sup> She then tells about the deaths of other boys in the community, both before and after Merrill's death. Being in the same room as Myrle during her performance made her narrative much easier to follow because I could watch her movements, and hear the way she changed between topics. However, even then, there was a lot of material layered in the text. For me, an emic audience member, those layers add a lot of meaning. I know the motel by the viaduct where Polly worked. I know intimately the field where Polly walked on her way to the river to attempt suicide. I remember Polly bowling, and I have one of her bowling balls. For an etic audience member, the story, while still very sad, is presented in a way that

gives some of the emotion to the story but not too much, thus allowing for a glimpse into what can happen to a family during crisis or tragedy.

### Contextual Analysis

Others who have read my earlier writing about Myrle's narratives have commented on the interesting variations in Myrle's performance style. This change in narration also drew me in. Lines 5 and 6 provide an example of how Myrle's language shifts to a more professional tone when she tells stories. She received a lot of positive feedback from her job, mostly due to her friendly demeanor, her knowledge of Native American cultures, and the way she described the artwork to her customers. I do not recall her ever talking about my siblings and me as "one of the children"; she just called us "the kids." Audience then, has changed the performance, and thus, the language of Myrle's delivery. Jeannie Thomas discusses how variation is foundational to folklore studies when she asserts, "Awareness of the text's ability to change, its instability, is important in deconstructive approaches, and, interestingly, attention to this 'slippage'—what folklorists call variation—has always been a central concern in folklore scholarship" (1994:115). In other words, change in a text is expected. Scholars document such changes to inform themselves and others on meanings and purposes of the texts. When Myrle told this story to me when I was a child, she would tell me when we were alone driving in the car, separate from the rest of my family. I remember the first time I heard the part of the story where Polly makes her hurtful comment. I knew beforehand that Merrill was Myrle's twin brother. I knew he was killed in a hunting accident. I did not know about Polly's comment. Conversations in a car can become very intimate. The

enclosed space becomes a setting where people can share very private information. I felt like Myrle's confidant but I also could not escape the story as I was her captive audience.

The emotion of the story affected me, as difficult family stories do. Roger Abrahams has described the value of emotional stories told in intimate settings, when he says, "when [experiences] can be shown to be extra personal, the narrative achieves psychological importance for the group as well as the individual. Thus, we can relate the implicit values of the story to the lives of those in the groups" (1963:107). In other words, in an intimate setting, information given through a personal narrative, which can reflect the dark parts of our lives, becomes valuable for both the teller and the audience. The story becomes more deeply embedded within the intimate group, in this case, my family. I agree with Gary Alan Fine when he says, "Although institutions are defined and labeled in terms of the content of their goals, they have power because they operate through organizations, translating socially held values and norms in behaviors through techniques of socialization and social control" (1992:11). Myrle and I became intimates through her story when I was a child. Myrle shared her pain with me.

I submit that what is in a personal narrative, especially a difficult story, can deeply affect both personality and memory. Thomas works through these ideas when she states, "The omissions, the uncertainties, what cannot be known, and what we do not want to know, are things that necessarily face all of us who tell and hear stories, record them, and talk about them" (1997: 36). As a mother, I have thought of this story many times. Remembering Polly's comment helped prevent me from saying things I might regret in moments of stress. I wasn't perfect in this, but it did inform my behavior. Women often carry the burden of teaching the family. What was Myrle teaching me as a

child when she included that harsh comment from her mother? What does she now convey in the new version she tells me as an adult? Perhaps, when she told the story before, she wanted to create a bond between us. Perhaps she was asking for understanding about hurtful things all mothers say. When Myrle tells the story now that I am an adult with grown children, perhaps she wants Polly to have redemption from her hurtful words. Myrle does not believe Polly was capable of intentionally doing something so hurtful, because Myrle “heard, but didn’t hear” the comment. Mothers just don’t say hurtful things like this. But sometimes they do. And when they do, maybe daughters have to not hear them. Lawless helps interpret the narrative breakdown even further. “But in exploring the places in women’s stories where language seemingly breaks down, where they are not able to speak the unspeakable, we must also acknowledge that there are other places and other stories where the ‘unspeakable’ *is* spoken” (2012:59). In Myrle’s narration, she simply did not have the words, so she went silent, and then compensated for the lack by idealizing Polly. The need for women to be ideal is a holdover that still persists in certain cultures where women need to be perceived as ideal, in order to have a voice within the culture. Myrle may not have felt judged by her LDS community when she was pregnant. However, in a different conversation, I asked Myrle if she felt constrained to behave certain ways by living in a small, LDS-influenced community. She said she did not, but on reflection, she did say she felt constrained, not by the church, *per se*, because she was not an active churchgoer, but more through informal social control by other community members and their comments.<sup>21</sup> Her intent to portray Polly more ideally could be an attempt not only to redeem the comment, but also to put the family in

the best light for Myrle's progeny. With my daughter Abbey present as a listener, the purpose of the story changed to an idealized version.

Women benefit from trusted relationships when telling their stories, especially stories where they or their families are not ideal. Niemi and Ellis argue, "...Creating safe spaces in which [women] can speak their experience can also foster a community of compassion in which differences and hurts can be understood and brought to light" (2001:13). If Myrle can convey many important life lessons in this one difficult story, perhaps her progeny will better understand family values and learn to be more resilient during hard times. When Myrle began telling her story, her demeanor changed. She tried to sit more upright<sup>22</sup>, she folded her hands onto her lap, and, as I mentioned above, the tone of her voice became much more formal. When Myrle ended the story, she softened Polly's comment, and by telling us that she "heard but didn't hear," she protects Polly from being seen as harsh. Perhaps Myrle also protects herself from reliving the hurtful comment. Myrle provides more context to the story; she says "*it was a terrible thing for her to go through. Or any parent.*" It is probable the words still pained Myrle, but this time when she tells the story, much has changed. Myrle is not a young mother but rather an aging grandmother. I see the purpose of the story changing for Myrle in this context. She is more understanding of Polly's situation, and perhaps, her hope is that her audience would also be more understanding of Myrle's situation. Maybe as her progeny, we will be more forgiving of her maternal mistakes.

Myrle repeats herself several times in this section of her story. "*That was...I was*" and "*I never, I never, ever*" are not performative or memory mistakes. Instead, Myrle uses this phrasing to slow down the narrative so that her point is driven home. There is

also some narrative breakdown, as though this is an idea, or an emotion that really can't be coherently explained. This is the powerful point of the story, the heart of the story at the conclusion. Everything in the story is building up to this end. She heard, but didn't hear. I cannot describe the understanding that must have passed between Polly and Myrle at that moment very well, either. I have had my own mothering moments I am not proud of, moments that may be repeated in story to my grandchildren. By using more formal language and posture, Myrle creates distance in the story in order for the listeners to digest this moment without overpowering them. Then, the narrative breakdown shows the emotional reality of the story, giving the listeners time to more fully understand. Niemi and Ellis maintain, "It is so much easier to fudge, to hedge our bets, to gloss off the rough edges. But to what purpose? Does it make difficulty any easier to understand or resolve?" (2001. Pg. 32). Yes, I believe it does make it easier, especially within intimate groups such as family storytelling settings. While Niemi and Ellis are arguing for more honesty in telling difficult stories, I propose there are times and situations when the difficult story requires some gloss in order to not overpower the audience with the negative emotions of the moment. I agree with Thomas when she states, "Women are aware of all the voices and the proscriptions they imply, but often they cannot answer them all or even say what they want to say in the face of all that the voices expect and demand of them—so they retreat into silence" (1997: 30). The emotions are clear, but drowning in them may not serve the best narrative purposes. Myrle certainly wanted to protect Polly, Abbey, and me. And in some way, perhaps she still wants to protect herself.

## Conclusion

While the story of Merrill's death has been a part of my life, Frank de Caro states, "Stories are ephemeral. That is an inevitable but regrettable thing because stories communicate ideas and experiences and perspectives and now lost worlds in ways that touch our imaginations; they have the potential to give us important knowledge and understanding" (2013:194). When Myrle says in line 127, "*I heard, but I didn't hear,*" I can relate because I have "heard" the story of Merrill's death throughout my life but didn't always "hear" the values and ideas she was trying to tell me. I agree with Niemi and Ellis when they write,

To fully tell the truth we must say that we have experienced so and so, that we felt such and such. It is not always clear how it happened. It is not always clear what it means. There are times when we are not sure how we feel about what happened. The decision to tell the difficult story is not always about surety, but often about choice. We decide. We act. We tell. We shape the telling. In the process, what we are not clear about may come into focus" (2001:131).

While I wanted Myrle to discuss the death of her brother, she was more interested in shaping a definition of her mother, Polly. Certainly, losing her twin brother has affected Myrle's life in ways I cannot understand, on top of the strife between her and her mother. Whether she intended to bring in concepts such as sexuality, economics, or resilience to life's inevitable difficulties, those concepts were illuminated during the telling through the informal narrative techniques Myrle learned from her upbringing and from her work. Gillian Bennett states,

As storytellers, [women] have only personal experiences—their own or that of members of their family and community—as material to work with, and only the basic resources of the language as their tools. Nevertheless, their narratives are not without structure and the power to move. Their structure derives from a cultural consensus about the proper way to tell a story and for the exploitation of basic rules of grammar and discourse. Their power to move an audience to wonder or pity derives from their ability to manipulate those structures with confidence and tact (1989:180).

Myrle's storytelling, for all her silence and diversions, definitely exhibits this kind of confidence and tact. By texturing her narrative and going back in time, using formal and sometimes stilted language, Myrle felt more in control of the narratives at home and at work. Bennett maintains, "Personal narrative is not like a traditional story, but its formation into a story plot depends upon a model for plot contained in traditional narratives *for that culture* [my emphasis]" (1977:15). Myrle used narrative techniques she learned from both formal and informal settings, and her narratives were shaped by our family's culture. Myrle effectively used additional information, performative variations, and silence to add meaning. Both emic and etic listeners recognize these patterns and devices subconsciously to hear what was not explicitly said. However, much of the texture of the story is available more keenly to the emic listener. Gary Alan Fine maintains,

Organizations [like families] can influence [stories]...by affecting individual's situations and narrative content. These institutions help to determine the values of individuals, alter their personality, shape their interests, and teach them to communicate by establishing the "proper" and expected way of doing things. This socialization process

inevitably influences the types of narratives people select, present, and treasure (1992:11).

For example, much of Myrle's self-confidence and love of life came from her work, similar to how Polly found healing when she took up bowling. The idea that a woman needs a purpose outside the home, or to heal, seems implicitly embedded in the story.

When I began graduate school at mid-life, I looked to the past, to my mother and my grandmother, for help in reinventing myself. I also looked to the future. I wanted to document stories for my daughters to help them navigate the difficult parts of their lives, an often critical component of women's storytelling. Niemi and Ellis assert, "If we do not tell our story, who will? Not as therapy or self-congratulation, but as direct testimony and transformation. Not out of guilt or titillation, but as part of the human experience from which we may draw lessons and model behaviors" (2001:20). Jeannie Thomas incorporates the importance of studying family narratives through the lens of folkloristics. "Folklore's study of personal experience narratives and family lore has implicitly recognized the importance of analyzing the private, of including our lives in our knowledge" (1997:13). When Myrle says, "I heard, but didn't hear," subsequently the profound implications for me and my daughters require us to listen and try to understand more fully what it means to successfully come through a difficult time.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the entire interview

<sup>2</sup> See Stanley Brandes “Family Misfortune Stories” 1975, for more information about traditional form in difficult family stories. Brandes uses socio-economic loss in his research.

<sup>3</sup> The distance between Hammett, Idaho, and Rigby, Idaho, is 235 miles per Google Maps.

<sup>4</sup> This section of text needs some emic explanation. Polly and three of her sisters, Doris, Audrey, and Cora, lived in the small town of Hammett, Idaho, most of their adult lives. Polly and Doris were married to brothers, Cecil and George Davis. However, there was a strange dynamic between the sisters. They did not speak to each other for many decades. I was at a family reunion when Doris and Polly finally spoke to each other after the long estrangement. I can only speculate as to why the sisters did not speak to each other.

<sup>5</sup> Steve is my brother, Myrle’s third child. He is a teacher and a basketball coach in a small southern Utah town.

<sup>6</sup> Myrle talks about a time when her son, Steve, had to resuscitate one of his basketball players after a car accident following a basketball game. There is a roadside memorial outside the town of Circleville, Utah, commemorating the boy’s life.

<sup>7</sup> The poem on Merrill’s headstone reads, “Dear Friend, As you are passing by, As you are now, so once was I. As I am now, you soon will be, so prepare yourself to follow me.”

<sup>8</sup> Alan Dundes (1964) recommends analyzing items of folklore in terms of these three qualities.

<sup>9</sup> For analysis, I will refer to my mother by her given name, Myrle. Polly is Myrle’s mother.

<sup>10</sup> See lines 10-15; 35-37; 62-72; 74-82; 94-102 as examples.

<sup>11</sup> See lines 63-72; 76-82; 94-96; 98-101 as examples.

<sup>12</sup> See lines, 15; 29; 46; 56; 74; 76; 78; 82; 92; 106; 108; 118; 126 as examples.

<sup>13</sup> See lines 1-3; 5-6; 10-15.

<sup>14</sup> See lines 9-15.

<sup>15</sup> At age 9, my mom handed me a book about sexual reproduction and menstruation, and said, “Here. Read this. It’s interesting.” And it was! However, sex was not discussed again until right before my wedding day when I was 21 years old.

<sup>16</sup> Myrle is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

<sup>17</sup> Indicated by ellipses in the text.

<sup>18</sup> Examples, lines 15, 82, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Examples lines 46, 56, 82, 106-108.

<sup>20</sup> See lines 51-56.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, our bishop one time made the comment to Myrle that she probably wouldn't sell jewelry in heaven, meaning, Myrle's non-attendance at church because she worked would be problematic for her in the afterlife.

<sup>22</sup> Myrle has had many surgeries due to extensive arthritis throughout her body, including five hip replacements and an extensive back repair surgery. She is currently scheduled for another hip replacement. For her, sitting up straight is very difficult.

<sup>23</sup> The use of the word "Indian" is problematic for me and refers to Native Americans.

## Appendix 1

D. She really was a sweetheart.

M. And she would make quilts. Beautiful quilts and send to us in the mail, and new pajamas for each one of the children.

D. What happened though Mom, do you think. There for a while she was mean? And I think it's good to be honest about the whole of what a person is.

M. She was cranky with me because she, I was a girl, and she didn't want anything to happen to me. You know, I think her way she was raised, not with much love. She came from a family of one boy and five girls, and she was not the favorite. When they moved to Hammett, they came from Rigby, Idaho, in a covered wagon. And it was Grandma Hill got bit by a mosquito and had whatever the fever's called. And was very. Scarlet? Whatever it was called. Mother said she can remember taking a pan with water, going to the crick and getting water, and bathing her head in the...

D. Her mother's head,

M. Uh, huh, so that, cause she had a high fever. It's a wonder she didn't die, but she survived it and they were in a covered wagon from Rigby, Idaho, to Hammett, Idaho, which is a heck of a long ways. And when they got to Hammett, they thought it would be a great place to live. And

D. Was it Hammett then, or was it?

M. It was Hammett then.

D. Cause Glenn says it was named something before.

M. Uh.

D. It doesn't matter.

M. It was the, it was out where, what's the name of the mountain.

D. Medbury?

M. Medbury. It was Medbury. There was a little town there, and they had a bank. They had uh, a grocery store. They had, this was,

D. Up at Medbury. Sometime, I'd like to go see that.

M. And then it, and then it, I don't know what happened. Glenn could tell you, Deanna.

D. Yeah, he has, and I may even have that recorded. But he did tell me something about that.

M. The water came and covered the, I can't remember where, or how, or if it came from the river, the crick. I'm not sure. Daddy might know. But it flooded it over and people had to move then into Hammett. But I think that this was before Mom and Dad moved there.

D. So Grandma didn't have a lot of love.

M. No, she was very, she loved her dad. And she would go with him and help him. They would take railroad ties and sell them for almost nothing. And, uh, that's kind of what they lived on. Grandpa was an Indian.<sup>23</sup> Grandpa Hill was an Indian, and people didn't like the fact that Grandma was married to an Indian. And, uh, Grandma was recorded by a lady from Hammett. Her name was Clark, and she has it in Boise, and I've talked to her, but she told me, and she told me she would look for it, but she never did. Perhaps she didn't find it, but Grandma Hill talked about how hard that was to live in a town where they weren't, they didn't want to rent a house to them. They didn't want to associate with them. And uh, Mother had a real hard growing up. She grew up with near nothing. They all did. But,

D. But what was the dynamic do you think. Because all five of those girls, they never spoke to each other for years. I mean, what do you think happened?

M. I don't know. Grandma was very partial to Loretta, which was the baby, and Audrey.

D. As babies often are. Abbey and I are the babies. [Laughter]

M. And um. I don't know what happened. But she and Cora were pretty close. But they even got mad over...

D. I know. Just that dynamic is weird. One time you said you wondered if there had been sexual abuse.

M. I don't know. I would imagine there might have been. But I don't know. Mother never talked about it.

D. Of course.

M. You didn't say the word pregnant or anything. You just took what came, and, but they lived in a little teeny house. Grandma Hill had the most beautiful, it was just mother's, my grandmother, mother's mother and father, and they lived in a little house. It had two bedrooms. And she always had a canary. But she cooked on the most beautiful stove. It was a wood stove. And it was spotless. And she would cook, make bread every day or every other day.

D. I think I remember that stove.

M. And she had water, that's how they had hot water. It was in the little whatever you called it. And, uh, I can remember going, her house was always very clean. But we

were not always welcome there. And when we would go, we would have to sit and be very still and not talk.

D. And she'd hide her candy.

M. Yeah, she would put a newspaper, if they had a bowl of candy, I can remember that.

D. That's just weird mom. It's just weird that you wouldn't want your grandkids to have your candy. That's weird.

M. She only liked dollar chocolates, and they were always the mint. The dollar mint chocolates, and they called them dollar chocolates. She didn't like the cheap chocolates. She wanted the dollar chocolates. And Grandpa Hill, like I say, worked at the school and was the um,

D. Janitor.

M. Janitor. And Grandma worked at the laundry in Glens Ferry, and I remember that she would bring home all the handkerchiefs because no one, you know, people would leave hankies in their pockets. And she would bring them home, and wash, and iron them, and everybody had handkerchiefs.

D. So. That's where the Indian comes in. You say Grandma Hill's husband what was his name?

M. Earl.

D. Earl Hill. Was an Indian.

M. But Grandma can remember when she was a little girl, when they lived in Rigby, the Indians would come to the door begging for food because they were hungry. And she said she could remember hiding under the table and the Indians came and stood around the table while Grandma gave them food. And how you know they smelled like leather and she didn't know what it was, but it frightened her. And she could remember hiding under the...

D. There is a real similar story to that in the Laura Ingalls Wilder books.

M. Is there?

D. That is interesting. And how she hid under the table, I think. I'll have to go back and look. And could smell. There was a smell.

M. Well you know, they, they wore leather. They wore fur. They wore what they had, and they didn't bathe, you know like we bathed. We bathed once a week in a big cast iron, no what were they called? Aluminum tubs? Is that what they were? Everybody take a bath on Saturday night.

V. Mmmmm.

M. And uh, on Christmas, we had one package. Everybody got one package, and it would be a sweater or a skirt. And maybe a little something that smelled nice. And a hankie. And I remember Daddy had never had Christmas. Their family were really poor and never had. Grandpa Hill was, Grandpa Davis was hurt and they had very little to live on, and they didn't have Christmas. And when Mother and Dad got married, Mother felt like you needed Christmas. We would always have a Christmas tree. And Daddy didn't buy her anything one Christmas, and I remember she cried about it. And he went to the store, to the Hammett grocery store, and...

D. On Christmas day?

M. On Christmas day.

D. Was it opened?

M. No. Hiney came to the door and,

D. This is a great story.

M. And Daddy bought a handkerchief, and a box of cherry chocolates. And that was Mother's Christmas, but she said it was too late.

Giggles.

M. Anyway, that's where the cherry chocolate story comes from. Daddy would always buy us a box of cherry chocolates and he accused me of hiding mine under the bed cause I didn't want to share them with anybody. 29:52 Which I might have, I don't know. I don't remember but...

D. I used to be so jealous of Sydney, because she'd still have her barber pole candy cane. Her barber pole..

M. Yes, and she'd lick it.

D. I know, and I'd just crunch mine right down. And she'd have hers till Easter. I remember thinking how can that be? How can she still have her barber pole?

M. I still give her a barber pole at Christmas time. And they were those long peppermint...

D. Barber pole candy cane.

M. Peppermint sticks.

D. Yeah, candy canes.

M. And she would lick hers every day.

D. It wasn't in its wrapper. But no kidding, that woman would still have it at Easter. I just couldn't. I didn't understand how that worked.

M. I remember the first time we got a chocolate Santa Clause for Christmas in our sock. That was really something. We didn't know whether to eat the foot, or the hand, or what. It was pretty special. And I remember how excited we'd get when the package would come, and the post office, from Monkey Wards cause that meant there'd been a...

D. An order?

M. An order made out of the catalogue.

D. Is that what you called it? Monkey Wards?

M. Monkey Wards. Mmhmm. It would come in the mail, and we were not to look, but of course, we did. And Glenn looked once and got in trouble. Cause he didn't leave it like it was left, and someone knew that he'd peeked.

D. And that had to be Glenn cause he was the naughty one.

M. I'm sure Merrill wouldn't have done it. But um, we had what we thought. Then I can remember, Daddy would always go out and shoot a goose. And that's what we'd eat, chicken, or a goose. That would be our Christmas dinner. And, I remember the first time we had a turkey. That was exciting. That we were able to have a turkey. And, there was a family that lived in the valley. Uh, what was their names, Verlyn? That brought, every Christmas? That we'd have the Christmas play at school and everybody would...

V. Wilsons?

M. What was his name?

V. Um.

M. It was the Wilson family and they were the rich people in the...

V. They ran lots of sheep.

M. They owned most of the Indian Cove. And everyone worked for the Wilson family. And the night that we would have our Christmas play at school, Santa Wilson would come around with a bag, and leave it at everyone's door, and it would be full of nuts, and candy, and oranges, and apples.

D. While everybody was at the school?

M. While everybody was at the school.

D. That's sweet.

M. And, after Mr. Wilson passed away, his son, would bring a bag of potatoes. We always looked forward to that bag from Santa Wilson. Cause it was, we didn't have a lot of candy. Or oranges. Well, Mother would buy box of oranges every, every Fall. Oranges and apples, and we could have one a day. Because we needed the Vitamin C,

they would tell us. We could only have one a day. But we, that was kept in the cool room. All the rooms were cool because there was only one stove. And we would put our pillow on the stove and get it warm and run to bed, so we could be warm. And that cold room. And we lived in Hammett. We were born in Hammett, we lived in Hammett, until we were grown up, and then we all except for Merrill, and we, uh, when we were 17, the first time that Merrill had ever gone hunting with friends, he always went with Dad and Uncle George. He went hunting with three dear friends, or two dear friends, and they were back on the mountain, and they shot a deer, and as they were running down the hill there was gravel. And one of the boys didn't put his gun on safety, and he slipped, and the gun discharged, and it hit Merrill. And killed him. And one of the boys had to run I think three miles, and they ran into Uncle George hunting and he came and they, they were able to bring Merrill out. I was working at the, at the little restaurant that night and I remember going home and having them coming and telling me. That Merrill had been killed and Mom and Dad were in the mountains and they were, the, the

D so you were home alone?

M. Mmhhh. Uh, Earl Harmon and George came to tell me. And then the people that worked in the Forest Service, I guess found Mom and Dad. How they did, I don't know, because nobody knew where they were. But they found them, and they came home, and it was a pretty sad homecoming.

V. Glenn was in the army.

D. Was he?

V. He was in Fort,

M. Was he in Washington?

V. Yeah, he was at...

M. They, all, he didn't have any money to come home, and the Red Cross wouldn't give him money to come home, and all of his friends gave him money so that he could get a bus ticket and come home for the funeral. And I don't know why the Red Cross wouldn't, but they...

V. We always used to give Red Cross money but I don't do anything for the Red Cross anymore because of that.

D. Um. I think Ronnie talked a little bit about this, on one time when I was interviewing Grandma. And, she said the man that accidentally shot Merrill, just never had a happy life.

M. No.

D. It really was bad.

M. They owned the Oasis up on the viaduct. And they, Mother walked to up to there before they owned it. Some other people owned it. And Mother would walk from Hammett up to there to serve chicken dinners for 25 cents a day. And uh, that was a pretty good, you know wage. 25 cents a day. But, she would walk up and back and there was little cabins and that was my first job was cleaning those cabins and it scared me to death. To go into those rooms that somebody been in, and I'd always look in the closet and under the bed. Check that there was nothing to gonna get me.

Laughter.

D. That must be a thing we do.

M. That was my very first job. The cabins are still there, depleted (sic) as they are, and the place is still there, but it has gone through different people. But the people worked there, I remember they gave Mother a birthday cake on a plate and I am pretty sure I gave the plate to Sydney.

D. Oh good.

M. But she broke it.

D. Oh well. That happens.

M. That happens; things break. Either that or, her first husband didn't let her have them back, I can't remember how the story went.

D. Arun? Oh. So, this, the kid that accidentally shot Merrill. Didn't have a happy life.

M. No, he had twin brothers, and himself. There was just the three of them, wasn't there? His name was...

V. I thought he was one of the twins?

M. No. He was the older one.

D. That must have been a hard thing to do.

M. Oh, it was. He had to stay with Merrill while they ran to find help. But he died. The bullet had gone through here and killed him quite soon. I mean he didn't. They said he just gasped and it must have been horrible thing. Steve says the worse thing that ever happened to him was when he came up on those children, those high school kids and he tried to bring the boy back. You know, he gave him, it was one of his ball players, and they put him in the ambulance, and he had to drive the ambulance, and they got to where the helicopter came, and he couldn't figure out why the helicopter didn't leave because he had him breathing. But he was...

D. Gone.

M. He was gone. He said that's the worst day of his life. And there's a big, right now. I passed it. And there's rocks all around, and flowers, and everything's his number, 23 I think it was or 32.

V. 32.

M. In rocks, and they are all painted, and it was, and every year they go, the school kids go remember him.

D. We talked about roadside memorials in my folklore class a couple of weeks ago. That um, you know they're something people do all over. 40:38

M. And, I mean, there's some between Hammett and Mountain Home that people have been killed, and there's always some flowers. The, you know the plastic flowers. There're not buried there, but...

D. No, it's just where they were killed.

M. I remember when Merrill was killed, his best friend Rodney, not Rodney but, what was his name? Killed on the tractor?

V. Wesson

M. Wesson, the little Wesson boy was driving the tractor and they got too close to the edge, and the tractor rolled over and killed.

D. So he died after or before?

M. He died before. But there was the two boys and then, and then, the other boy. How did he die? Steve's getting wood (she is reading a text from my brother). Uh. Well, you went with his sister? (To my dad). What was their name? Helen. Helen's little brother died someday tragically. There were three boys that died.

D. Who came up with the poem on Merrill's gravestone?

M. When they went to buy the headstone, the wherever, at, they bought the stone from had different things. And they saw that it kind of, they wanted to put it on the headstone, so. I'm sure they're in a in a horrible frame of mind, and they wanted something special. And I'm sure that's. And I can remember, I wasn't, I should have gone to the cemetery, or to the, to the, mortuary more. Mom and Dad had to go, and I wouldn't go several times. I don't know why I wouldn't go, but I...

D. It was probably hard, Mom.

M. But I should have gone with them, and supported them, and I remember not going.

D. It was probably hard.

M. It was hard.

D. I think sometimes you gotta remember to be kind to yourself about this stuff. You did a lot of good things. And you know, sometimes I think we beat ourselves up about the things we didn't do.

M. Yeah. Mother really had a hard time. She would walk through the field every day and we'd have to go get her. She was going to go kill herself. And uh, she, it was, And the lady from the restaurant came and got her. Polly? We need you really bad. Could you come and wash dishes for us? We are way behind and we just need you. And that really saved Mother. She'd finally cooked and waited tables and, and then she started to bowl. And that was her whole life was bowling.

D. She didn't bowl till after Merrill died?

M. Uh, huh.

D. That probably helped her too.

M. It did. That was. I was remember, Mother was not herself, and she told me she wished it'd been me instead of Merrill. And I knew that she didn't mean it, and I never, I never, ever...

D. But it was a terrible thing to hear.

M. Well, I heard it but I didn't hear it. But she was, was a terrible thing for her to go through. Or any parent. Well I'm sorry I didn't have any.

D. No that's perfect it was great. I want to do that again over Thanksgiving.

M. Mother would go and scrub the headstone. And just, she just kept it really clean. Didn't she Verlyn.

V. Yeah.