ABSTRACT

RHAME, MARY ELIZABETH. One Hundred Years of Stuff: A Biographical Sketch of Louise S. Hartin. (Under the direction of Dr. Elaine Orr.)

While a student in the Master’s of English program at North Carolina State University, I have developed a particular fondness for the telling of one’s American experience through memoir. Books such as Eudora Welty’s One Writer’s Beginnings, Richard Wright’s Black Boy, and Virginia Holman’s Saving Patty Hearst, coupled with my own fascination with recent American history, oral history, the struggle for civil rights for various groups, and primary research, inspired me to begin my own creative nonfiction essays with my great-grandmother, the late Louise S. Hartin, as my central character. Oral history has always been important in my family. We tell and retell stories, some of them rather extraordinary, some about family members who have passed on and some about those of us who are still around. I’ve always been a writer, and in the past decade a journalist. For those of us who describe ourselves this way, I think it is our responsibility to listen to the stories of others and preserve them. I consider it my personal responsibility to make official records of family stories involving my great-grandmother. I will use my thesis as a vehicle to combine a conglomeration of materials found through research, family stories, and personal interviews into one narrative with Louise Hartin at its center.

Chapter Outline

Below is a list of chapters with a brief explanation of each.
Chapter One

This chapter will serve to introduce the reader to Louise, my central character. I will introduce her by describing her experience waiting out Hurricane Hugo alone in her home, and the attention she commanded the morning after the storm. I also begin establishing my own credibility as the author and as Louise’s great-granddaughter.

Chapter Two

Here I describe in detail the house in which Louise lived over sixty years, and all the changes that occurred in the neighborhood surrounding the house. I begin to give the reader a sense of the town, Sumter. I talk about our relationship and what we did when we were together. I further introduce Louise as a character, and include her setting: Sumter, South Carolina, and more specifically, the house she occupied for more than half her life.

Chapter Three

The focus of this chapter is Louise’s church, Trinity United Methodist Church. I detail its importance in her life and describe the scene where she went to it as firefighters were extinguishing the blaze that gutted the sanctuary. I use her to tell the story of the church’s rebuilding.

Chapter Four

I give historical context to Sumter in the 1960s by describing pertinent historical events in the region. I discuss South Carolina politics and Senator Strom Thurmond. I discuss the segregated social system that went through major changes during the Civil Rights Movement.
Chapter Five

Here I show how Sumter integrated the town. First, the hospital. Second, the military base. And, third, the public schools.

Chapter Six

Here are profiles of Dorothy and Alice, Louise’s maids for about forty years. I ponder the life of a black domestic worker.

Chapter Seven

This chapter profiles Efred, Louise’s yard man.

Chapter Eight

This chapter details two specific civil rights strides in Sumter, lunch counter and church sit-ins.

Chapter Nine

Finally, I discuss Louise’s death, the circumstances leading up to it, and my place in it all.

Epilogue

A wrap-up of all that has appeared before, and I use it as a place to record my final thoughts about Louise’s life and the project.
ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF STUFF: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF LOUISE S. HARTIN

by Mary Elizabeth Rhame

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

ENGLISH

Raleigh, North Carolina

2006

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Biography

Betsy Rhame received a Bachelor of Arts in English and minor in professional communication at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C. in 2001. Her undergraduate thesis explored *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s critical response. She entered the Master of Arts in English program at North Carolina State University in 2003. Her scholarly interests include American novels and nonfiction, American history, and the memoir.

Professionally, Betsy has been a marketing writer in the Office of Marketing and Communications at Meredith College since 2005. Prior to her current job, she worked at Ferris & Associates Law Firm, *The Cary News*, and *The Holly Springs Sun*.

She is a native North Carolinian and resides in Raleigh.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all the people who assisted me with the completion of this project, both in big ways and in small.

First, I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Lucinda MacKethan, Dr. Carmine Prioli, and Dr. Elaine Orr, for their advice, encouragement, and support. This project originated in Dr. MacKethan’s memoir class, where reading memoirs of others inspired me to begin creating within the genre as well. The project really took flight during Dr. Orr’s creative memoir writing class, where approximately one-third of this thesis was written under her guidance, with help and feedback from my classmates.

My grandmother, Dot Rhame, and I traveled together to Italy in March 2004. In Rome we struck up a conversation about my great-grandmother, and I knew then I had to capture her essence somehow. Elizabeth Jackson and Lora Tillman also deserve credit for fostering the thoughts that sparked this project. It is while visiting them in Memphis, Tennessee, in May 2005, we visited the National Civil Rights Museum where I noticed Sumter’s small part in history. I began investigating the sit-ins in Sumter very soon after returning home to Raleigh before I decided what to do with my answers. As I learned more and more information, I also learned how much more was out there that I still needed to learn.

I thank all of those people who so gladly answered the many questions I had about themselves, my family, life in years past, and other general questions once my project began to take shape. Most of these interviewees are my family members, and may have felt somewhat of an obligation to assist me with my last requirement before
finishing graduate school, including Junior, Laurelle, Donna, Honey, Betty, Jack, Dot, Daddy, Honey, Uncle Joe, and Mildred. For those interviewees who are not my relatives and who may not have felt the same obligation, I am especially grateful. They include Mayor Bubba, Dorothy Willis, and Glen and May Sharp. It is to the great stories and memories of all of these people that I owe all of the good things that appear in this paper.

I owe special thanks to Mayor Bubba. Besides providing me with helpful information and many important primary sources, he also became my friend. I was looking forward to taking him a copy of my thesis after its completion, and showing him my finished project that could have never happened without his help. Much to my surprise and sadness, Mayor Bubba underwent heart bypass surgery four days after our last email correspondence in early November, and passed away the following day from complications. He died on November 9, 2006, which would have been Louise’s 102nd birthday, had she lived two more years. Sumter lost a great citizen that day. In place of his regular weekly newspaper column in *The Item*, a coworker wrote shortly after his death, “It’s been said you never die until there’s no one living who remembers you. Mayor Bubba’s personality was so big, I believe he could be an exception to that. He’ll always be a part of Sumter and now a big part of its history.” Anyone who reads my thesis will be assisting me in keeping Mayor Bubba’s memory alive.

I’d like also to thank Rev. Stephen Taylor and Rev. Phil Jones, who in their eulogies at my great-grandmother’s funeral, helped me begin to remember what she’d been like during my childhood and adolescence, and not to focus much on how she’d been the last few months of her life.
My thanks to the staff of the Probate Office and the Register of Deeds in the Sumter County Courthouse for showing me around, answering my questions, and making copies for me.

Many thanks to my great-aunt Laurelle, who housed and fed me, made phone calls, set up interviews, and came up with ideas for me during two trips to Sumter to work on this project. Her hospitality is greatly appreciated. I’ll come back to Sumter for a visit when I don’t have to do school work, and we can just have fun.

Special thanks go to my father, Ned Rhame, and my grandmother, Dot Rhame. Without them, this project could not have happened. Between the two, I have asked them hundreds of questions, and asked each of them track down books, photos, and articles that assisted me with my project. They were always happy and eager to do anything they could to help. Several times they remembered important things and came up with ideas without prompting from me. My project has been on their minds, too, and they have taken helping me very seriously.

I would like to thank Teresa Amentt Jennings, my friend since childhood, who accompanied me on a weekend trip to the beach in November 2005. I worked furiously on this project, while she worked on her Christmas cards. She checked in on me often to update me with football scores and keep my glass full of cold diet cherry coke to sustain me while I was writing. One of my bridesmaids, who has already had her own wedding, she has offered me many ideas and shortcuts that has made working full time, planning a wedding, and writing a thesis at the same time less overwhelming than it could be.

I would like to thank my readers of draft one of my thesis, Kelley Davidson, Leslie Holmes, Natalie Murray, and Elizabeth Jackson. I am certain that when they
agreed to be my bridesmaids and offered to help in any way they could, they did not envision proofreading my thesis before wedding planning began.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, I am grateful to my fiancé, Jared Minor. While he could provide little information to add to my actual thesis except some thoughts on how an air force base impacts everything about life in a town like Sumter. He is a United States Air Force veteran. He provided me with more love, support, understanding, and encouragement than anyone else, and a quiet place at his house to add length to my thesis every time I have visited for the past year or more. I love you, and soon our life together will really begin.

My gratitude to all I have mentioned here. I have enjoyed the process of this project, especially when it meant sharing fun and interesting stories about my great-grandmother, and learning things about her I never knew. My deepest thanks to everyone involved for their willingness to help.
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Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known at the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Proverbs 31: 10, 20, 22-23, 25-31
King James Version
PART I

Chapter One: A Lady, a House, and a Hurricane

My great-grandmother, Louise Sharp Hartin, and her home on Broad Street in Sumter, South Carolina, had a lot in common. They were both solid; the house was made of brick, and Louise, though slight in stature, could be sharp-tongued, firm, stubborn, and abrupt. Louise and her house were both part of a dying breed. The home was one of a kind to me, a child who grew up in the late seventies and eighties. No one I knew had a home that had been built before the Depression. No house I had ever been in looked quite like hers. Both Louise and her house were of a certain time, and they both remained so, even as the town grew and all that surrounded them began to change. These two belonged together, this lady and her house. They were important to each other. Even now I have the hardest time thinking about one without conjuring up an image of the other.

In one particular instance when the solidarity of the house was compromised, this lady knew she had to speak up. In September 1989 Louise had an oven on the blink. Before she could get a repairman out to fix it, Hurricane Hugo pummeled Charleston, South Carolina, and headed toward Charlotte, North Carolina, moving northwest in a diagonal direction. Sumter was in its path. Hugo greeted Sumter with one hundred mile per hour winds.

According to the Washington Post, “Hugo’s eye was described as very large, at forty miles wide, and hurricane-force winds extended as far as one hundred and forty
miles from it. Tropical storm winds of about fifty to sixty miles per hour reached two hundred fifty miles from the eye.’

The power went out early, and because Louise didn’t regularly replace the battery backup, she knew that if the oven caught fire her smoke detector wouldn’t alert her. She spent the night awake in a straight chair in the kitchen while the storm blew through. She listened to WIBZ-FM 99.3, a Sumter radio station. With the help of a generator, the station abandoned its regular Thursday night programming during the storm, took calls, and provided valuable information to its listeners. Deejay J.R. Berry was finally knocked off the air at about 6:30 a.m. when the generator died, but by then the storm was over. According to the Sumter Item, WIBZ was “the only area station to stay on the air during the hurricane’s wrath,” though the studio lost part of its roof, was filled with two inches of water, and the radio staff members stood on plastic crates to broadcast and avoid getting electrocuted. In an email to me years later, a Sumterite recalled, “If it were not for J.R. broadcasting during Hugo, none of us would have known what was happening or what to do.” Louise remained through it all, holding candlelight vigil in the darkness for the stove in her kitchen, and the kitchen in her home.

At morning’s first light she could sit in the straight chair no longer. It was time to take action. Though the town around her was in complete disarray – no one had electricity, and trees were down across roadways at every turn – Louise never considered that emergency workers could have their hands full the morning after this hurricane. She dressed in polyester pants, a brightly colored blouse, knee-high stockings and shoes with heels an inch high. Her left clip-on earring was slightly off-center on her earlobe, but then
one of them usually was. She drove to the nearest fire station and blew the horn until a firefighter came out of the building.

“I need someone to come to my house and check my oven,” she yawped. The firefighter looked as though he had had a restless night.

“Mrs. Hartin, I have to stay at the fire house to respond to emergency calls,” he explained, sounding somewhat apologetic, somewhat matter-of-fact.

“I’m not leaving until someone comes to my house and checks my oven,” she snapped at him. “My house could burn down.”

The firefighter sighed, put his priorities on hold, and agreed to follow her home. He checked the oven and promised her that it was not a fire hazard. From that point forward a firefighter would come by periodically to change the batteries in her smoke alarms. He already knew about Mrs. E.W. Hartin. She may have called on him before to assist her. He realized that it would be wise just to humor her. She demanded a lot of certain people like this fireman because as a tax-paying citizen and a resident of the town for eighty years, she believed herself entitled to immediate help. Though only an eighty pound woman, she carried a lot of weight. Convincing a firefighter to change her smoke alarm batteries periodically was what she wanted, and she, the Southern lady that she was, knew how to get what she wanted.

As it turned out, my great-grandmother waited out quite a powerful storm all alone in her house on Broad Street. Even more than fifteen years later, if you drive through Sumter County, you can still see evidence of Hugo’s destruction. Sumterites still talk about the hurricane, much in the way that Miami residents talk about Hurricane Andrew and eastern North Carolinians remember Fran and Floyd.
And rightly so. During the height of the storm, nearby Shaw Air Force Base clocked sustained wind speeds of one hundred nine miles per hour. In Sumter County alone seven were declared dead and seven hundred injured. One thousand nine hundred thirty-three homes were destroyed and three thousand four hundred seventeen were declared too damaged to live in. In only a few hours, Hugo caused six hundred fifty-eight million dollars in damage to the county. It took the city a week to restore water and up to three weeks to regain power.

Though Louise waited out the storm in her kitchen, it wasn’t this massive storm that forced her to stay awake all night keeping watch. She was generally a pretty sound sleeper. She faced Hugo in an unintimidated manner, as she did a lot of things. She had her home to look after.

This was the great-grandmother I remember, though she was never this pushy with me. She was a tough lady, but only when she had to overcome a tough situation, or when someone had made her angry. Luckily I never did. To me, she was a sweetheart, and she was to others, too.

Phil Jones, the pastor she requested to do her funeral service, said in the eulogy, “It was so easy to love her…because she was so lovable.”

I’m sure that firefighter didn’t think her lovable the morning after Hurricane Hugo, but to her family and friends she was a treasure.

She sent me twenty-five dollars for each birthday and fifty dollars for Christmas. Until she was in her mid-nineties, she came to our house every year for Christmas with cookie tins full of her homemade cheese straws and bourbon balls, and sometimes my sister and I would go back home with her for the week between Christmas and New
Year’s. I’d spend a week with her in the summer, and two or three times a year my family and I would drive down to see her for the weekend or for a day. We wrote each other letters all the time. In mine, I told her about school, whatever part time job I had, what I’d been up to for fun lately, and when I was planning to see her again. Hers would begin by talking about the weather in Sumter; then she would respond to what I’d said in my previous letter. Most of them read about like this one written June 27, 2000, when she was ninety-five:

Dear Betsy,

Thank you for your nice letter and the clippings from the newspaper. I wish I could get up to see all of you. I do not have enough energy to get away from here but I am so happy here at Covenant Place. They really take good care of me.

The summer will be over soon and back to school again. Our schools are going early in August – earlier than they ever have. It will be so hot. I don’t know the reason but they must have one.

Keep up the good work. I am so glad you are doing so well and enjoying all of it. Pardon the writing – I’m having a lot of difficulty with my new glasses.

So good to hear from you. Take care and know that I love you very much.

Love always, Greatmama
Chapter Two: How Firm a Foundation, Part One

The house was Louise’s domain. She moved into it in 1933 and by 1960 she was its only resident following the back-to-back deaths of her husband and mother. According to my father, she wore black from her husband’s death in February 1960 to the one year anniversary of her mother’s death in November 1961. It was then that the house became even more important to her.

From the outside her house looked like many brick houses built during the early part of the century. It was a bungalow style. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the housing market boomed in the United States, and the bungalow house was built more than any other architectural style. This simple structure was affordable to many middle and working class Americans. By 1910 contractors were lining urban streets with this style. Common characteristics of the bungalow included an open floor plan, a sleeping porch, large front porches with stocky columns, and conspicuous chimneys. The house at 255 Broad had all of these. Americans continued to build bungalows in mass quantities until the onset of the Great Depression. After World War II home building began again, but new homes were mostly mass-produced in suburbs.

The house at 255 Broad, like many other houses in town, was constructed of what the locals call “Sumter brick,” because it was manufactured in town. The brick is a deep reddish-brown color. The front porch stretched the length of the house, and the left portion of it had been enclosed by a screened porch. On the right, it extended to the corner of the house and down its side about fifteen feet. This is where the porch swing
was, a favorite spot of mine as a child. Just beyond the porch was the carport, where one
radioless Buick after another rested for as long as the house was inhabited by my great-
grandparents. (When she purchased each of these Buicks, my great-grandmother had the
radio removed before driving the car off the lot. She refused to own a car that had a radio.
She even refused to ride in someone else’s car while the radio was turned on. I don’t have
an explanation for this; it was just one of her many quirks.) The sleeping porch was
attached to the back of the house. In the days before air conditioning the house’s
inhabitants vacated the two bedrooms and everyone slept on the porch during the summer
months, hoping to catch a breeze. The porch was later removed and another bathroom
and two bedrooms were built in its place while my grandmother and her brother were
growing up, increasing the home’s square footage by approximately one-third. With the
addition the house measured 2,543.14 square feet.

Inside the house were a living room, dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, two
bedrooms, and a bathroom. The one telephone sat on a small marble top table next to a
black wooden Windsor armchair, where the bent top rail and the seat were connected
with a skinny spindle back. It looked like a chair you might see at Colonial Williamsburg.
This central location for the telephone made it easily accessible from all the original
rooms in the house, but it was a little far from the newer rooms at the back of the house.
A 1937 City Directory lists the phone number of 255 Broad as 960.

There was no peephole in the front door. On the outside of the wooden front door
was a storm door, also wooden, with downward facing slats on the outside and a screen
on the inside. When I was in the house looking through the front storm door, I had to peer
down through the screen and wooden slats when someone rang the doorbell. As a child I tried to recognize the visitor by his or her shoes because that was all I could see.

Almost all of the rooms Louise decorated in pink. The couch in the living room was a rosy color, and was the kind that you would sit on when company stopped by. (It is now in my own living room, and it is still covered in the same fabric.) When a nearby air conditioning window unit was running, the fancy cloth was cool to the touch. The back bedroom had pink painted walls and dark wooden furniture. A chaise lounge was covered in pink flowered fabric. Even the heavy draperies in the dining room had pink in them (and it was behind these drapes that Louise would hide her silver service when she went out of town, because no burglar would ever think to look there). In the instructions she left us for her funeral, she asked for an arrangement of pink flowers to adorn the casket. It was really the most beautiful flower arrangement I have ever seen (due in large part to the fact that my cousin, Donna, works for one of the florists in Sumter), and I will forever associate pink roses with her because of it.

Besides hiding the silver service, my great-grandmother kept hard candy inside every jar or container throughout the house. I inherited my sweet tooth from her. Candy and silver were not the only things she hid. My father found a one hundred dollar bill under a bathmat once. While he was washing his hands, he saw the edge of a bill peeking out from between the black and white checkered tile floor and the pink shag bathmat. This was his discovery of the place where she kept her money after cashing her monthly social security check, because, as she said, no burglar would ever think to look there.

By the end of the month, sometimes she would have spent it all; sometimes she would have a couple hundred dollars left which she’d take to her bank, National Bank of
South Carolina or NBSC, for deposit once she’d received the next month’s check in the mail.

This really wasn’t unusual, though. Keeping a lot of money in the house was something folks of her generation were used to doing. Banks closed Friday afternoons at five and were closed for lunch during the day, and people didn’t have the convenience of automated teller machines. According to my father, people carried cash because no one really used credit cards back then.

“Even poor people had money in the house,” he said.

Some of my family members found eight one hundred dollar bills under that same bathmat when Louise was moving out of her house at 255 Broad and into Covenant Place, a brand-new retirement community, in 1995.

All of the floors in the house were hardwood covered with carpet except the bathrooms (tile) and the kitchen (linoleum). The floorboards groaned when one walked down the hall or across a room. Metallic speckled linoleum made up floors in the kitchen and breakfast room.

In the home’s early days there was no air conditioning. Most of the rooms had fireplaces or a coal-fired stove. Central heating was installed in the 1940s. At this point all of the fireplaces in the house except the one in the living room, which was by far the biggest in the house, were covered over inside with sheetrock, giving more wall space to each room. The chimneys were sealed up from the outside but remained on the roof of the house. During many visits as a child I would count these chimneys from the yard at least once, as though I thought the number of them could have changed while I was away.
I think I always came up with eleven. Sometime later, window units were installed in most rooms to counteract South Carolina’s sticky summers.

This home was central to five generations of the Hartin family. In 1933 it housed my great-grandparents, Ed and Louise, their two children, Dot and Ed Junior, and Louise’s mother, Ella (called Nanny by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren). As the years went by, it hosted many gatherings of families and friends, holiday celebrations, garden club meetings, my grandparents’ wedding reception for an estimated five hundred people, visitations for funerals, and my father’s baptism as an infant during my great-grandfather’s recovery from his second heart attack. He, in fact, recovered from two heart attacks inside this house, but not the third. Ella suffered a stroke and was nursed there in her bedroom by Louise and Alice, their black maid at the time. People watched Carolina (or the University of South Carolina to us North Carolinians) and Clemson football games and *Days of Our Lives* on the only television, a color set, but not a very good one. Children threw tea parties and ran from room to room exploring every square foot of the house and all that was within it. Everyone had their picture taken on the front steps. The house contained all the joys and tragedies that span many lifetimes.

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In Sumter, as in other towns, many changes have taken place since the early twentieth century. My great-grandmother witnessed it all. When she and her family purchased their home at 255 Broad in 1933, family homes both large and small sat on both sides of the street, and in both directions, though the area was considered the very edge of town. It was *the* place in Sumter to live at the time.
At the time it was purchased, other brick homes surrounded it. A church stood down the block. The downtown shopping district was a few minutes away by car. The home, built in 1928, was purchased by my great-grandparents in 1933 for thirty-three hundred dollars with money borrowed from a family member they repaid over time. The country was knee-deep in the Great Depression and the people who sold the house could no longer afford to pay the mortgage.

During the Depression the house was on the edge of town.

“A mile or two north of 255 Broad was country,” my great-uncle, Jack Rhame, explained to me.

The house Louise occupied for sixty-two years was located at 255 Broad Street in an area of Sumter, South Carolina, where cars have always whizzed by, often in excess of the thirty-five mile-per-hour speed limit. In those years there was no bypass around the town, and since Broad Street was one of its main thoroughfares, my dad remembers, “All the traffic came right through the middle of town. Broad Street was a busy place.”

Black and white children of the generation before mine had much less to worry about. They could play outside without making their parents worry. They could ride their bicycles all over town.

“The world was a lot more secure than it is today,” my uncle, Little Joe, told me not long ago. “In a town like Sumter you wouldn’t have to worry about anything.”

He remembers riding his bike with my father, Ned, from Broad Street to an area near Morris College, a historically black institution near downtown, where there was a large park with baseball fields. The distance they’d ride was around twenty blocks.
Children could do that then. The town seemed a safe place for everyone. On almost every night in the summer, there would be games going on that the boys would watch.

“Never once did we worry that we were riding through a black neighborhood to get to the baseball fields,” Little Joe said. “Things were so simple in Sumter. Simple and secure.”

Today white children aren’t as likely to been seen in black neighborhoods, and vice versa. As further evidence of how things are different now, during those years my great-grandmother wouldn’t always lock up the house when she went out.

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The town population has more than doubled in size in three generations.

“So many people have moved in here it’s changed the whole nature of the town,” Ed Junior told me.

Mildred Shaw, a friend of Louise’s, fellow member of Trinity United Methodist, and first cousin of Louise’s son-in-law and my grandfather, has seen many of these changes, having lived in Sumter most of her eighty-eight years. At their church, when a member passes away, the ladies of the church provide a meal to the family. The town has grown so much in population and complexity during the time Mildred has been the coordinator of these meals.

“I didn’t used to have to ask people where they live,” she said. “Now I have to ask for directions and look at a map. Sumter is a town that’s become a city but is still a town. Sumter is huge as far as I’m concerned, but we’re still small town.”

Mildred told me about one area of town in particular that has seen dramatic change over the years.
“Broad Street has turned into total business,” she told me.

After World War II, the business district shifted away from Main Street to Broad as the town grew west toward Columbia and closer to Shaw Air Force Base. The state capital, Columbia, is about forty miles away. By the time my father was ten and riding his bike all over town, the neighborhood was becoming more commercialized. By the time I was a child in the 1980s, the house was surrounded much like it is today by businesses: Easy Way Laundromat, Checks Cashed Payday Advance, Kenny’s Window Tinting, Dairy Cream, and Elmore-Hill-McCreight funeral home. Many years had passed since my great-grandmother, Louise, had real neighbors.

Now, old businesses still remain on Broad, but the new ones open up on the western end of town, and many citizens realize the good that comes from growth and new businesses. Even so, Sumter natives and old timers remember all that was good in the town when it was much smaller.

“We’ve improved as we’ve gone along, but it’s just different,” Mildred explained.

My great-grandmother had a lot of trouble selling her house once her apartment at Covenant Place was ready. No one wanted it as a home. When she sold the house in 1995, a couple bought it for $59,000, less than it was really worth. It housed an accounting firm before the couple sold it five years later for $128,000. Today the sign in front of the house reads “Santee Lynches Affordable Housing & Community Development Corporation,” which I find to be ironic. Every time I’m in Sumter during a work week I drive by with the hope that an employee won’t mind if I come in and look around, and every time the business has been deserted. The company has no web site, and if it has a phone number listed somewhere, I haven’t been able to find it. It’s a shame that
no one is really enjoying this house as my family did, but actually this house is no different than all the other houses on the block. Those houses suffered the same fate, just earlier.

As the neighborhood around her began to change and Louise no longer had residential neighbors, she remained in her brick bungalow, seemingly unaffected by the neighborhood’s change for the worse. While family and friends began to worry more and more as she grew older and lived alone, Louise carried on, content to remain right where she was. And for the most part, those who were concerned didn’t expend their energy trying to convince her to move. They knew better.

“You did not tell her what to do,” said Mildred. “The only way you would have gotten her out of that house was if you knocked her in the head and dragged her out. She was tough and very independent. It worried us.”

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By the time I was visiting her, my great-grandmother had been in that house a long time. Forty-five years to be exact.

I remember the house that she was so desperate to protect during Hugo quite well. I spent the first fifteen years of my life going to see her there. As a child, I found that getting to go visit my great-grandmother in South Carolina was exciting. Her house was different from what I was used to. I didn’t know many people who had ever had known their great-grandparents, so that made her seem ancient to me. Ancient, though she was limber enough to sit on the floor and play Go Fish and Cabbage Patch Kids with me all afternoon.
I’ve already mentioned how unlike my great-grandmother’s house was from what I was used to. The suburban middle class neighborhood I lived in was built when the Research Triangle Park and IBM came to the piedmont region of North Carolina, causing Cary to boom in the sixties and seventies. Even as a child I much preferred the quaintness of my great-grandmother’s house to houses in my own neighborhood.

Her house provided me with all sorts of interesting things to see and do. I had to be careful around the “breakables,” like figurines of two high-heeled shoes, a couple dancing, and bunches of ceramic flowers, mostly confined to the living room. Other than that I could run around the house and do what I wanted. If I wasn’t playing with my great-grandmother I’d spend my days playing jacks on the kitchen floor with my second cousin, Christy, two years my senior. We had a game we’d play from the front porch swing. We’d each choose one lane of Broad Street, and whoever had one hundred cars pass the house on her side of the street first won.

I was fascinated with the backyard. It had sandy soil that was much different than the muddy clay in my backyard at home in Apex, North Carolina. After an afternoon of playing outside in Sumter my tennis shoes would be dusty but not muddy like they’d probably be at home. A brick freestanding garage stood in the backyard but I had never seen my great-grandmother put her car in it. I had also never seen the garage door closed. It was filled with a variety of interesting things: an old box spring, a green push manual reel mower (it had blades rather than an engine), fertilizer, and some of my cousin’s husband’s equipment from his photography shop.

I’d look through the couple hundred or so books she had on shelves in the back hall. They had interesting titles, sometimes mysterious ones like *Steamboat Gothic* and
Carolina Ghost Tales. Some of the titles were ones I’d already heard of like Phantom of the Opera. She had a copy from the second printing of Gone with the Wind. She had children’s chapter books like Cheaper by the Dozen and Jumping Jupiter.

I discovered that if you dialed her telephone number and hung up, all the phones in the house would ring, and you could talk to whoever picked up, usually my sister or my great-grandmother.

All the doors on the inside of the house displayed crystal knobs, with locks that needed an old fashioned key to open them. Those keys were located in various places around the house, or were often left in the locks. I became fascinated with locking and unlocking the doors, and with the fact that the keys could lock or unlock a door from either side of it. I think that as the owner of all these keys, my great-grandmother carried one around in her pocket when I was staying with her in case I locked a door to a room she needed to enter, or somehow locked myself in a room and couldn’t get out.

The house smelled of paprika, sage, and Season All. It smelled of antique furniture, old books, and starch. It smelled clean. I have never smelled all of that in one place anywhere else.

Her best friend, Evelyn Kirkland, often stopped by to see me and would bring me some of her homemade fudge with pecans on top. She was always dressed in brightly colored suits. She had tinted bifocals, which I really noticed for some reason as a child. That, and she was always smiling.

My favorite activity, however, was having a tea party in the dining room. Against a wall between a window and a door to the living room was a child-sized table. The plastic top had a dark plaid pattern on it, but it was usually covered with a child-sized
dark green tablecloth that matched the drapes in the room. The table legs were aluminum. There were two matching chairs with aluminum legs and orange seats that when not in use, were pushed under the table at each end. An extra child-sized straight chair with a woven seat could go on the long end if three people were invited for tea. I spent hours playing with the sets of little dishes that were kept in a buffet made of dark wood in front of the windows in the dining room. The dishes were white plastic with pink flowers and were matched with white plastic silverware. The most interesting dishes, however, were the serving pieces, which didn’t match the rest of the set. There was a sugar bowl with a lid and a cream pitcher both made to look like oranges. They had probably been brought to Louise by someone who had been to Florida on vacation, or she brought them herself one of the years she took her daughter-in-law, Laurelle, and her granddaughters, Donna and Honey, there for spring break. The sugar and creamer were each two or three inches tall. A larger pitcher, shiny midnight blue, was usually filled with milk that would wash down the crackers or other small snack we might be having on our little plates. We’d use small paper napkins. Usually my sister or a cousin would join me. If asked, even my great-grandmother would fold into one of the chairs and play along. She was pretty spry. If she was busy, my Cabbage Patch doll, Colette, would accompany me. We’d all say things like, “Please pass the sugar.” I would ask, “How is your tea?” and my great-grandmother would reply as she sipped imaginary tea from a tiny teacup, “It’s delicious, thank you.”

When I wasn’t playing with my sister, with my cousin, or alone at the house, I just did whatever my great-grandmother did. I’d go with her to the beauty shop, the bank, the Bi-Lo, or to walk the mall (“She walked faster than many twenty year-olds,”
remembered my great-aunt, Betty Rhame), or to Trinity United Methodist Church. Once we went to Ward’s Barbeque, which stands at the intersection of Wise Street and Alice Drive (one of the most well-traveled roads in town), to pick up a mysterious looking mixture called “hash” by South Carolinians, and served cold with white rice and eaten alongside barbeque. It is a concoction not included on a menu in a North Carolina barbeque restaurant.

I did all these things with my mother back home in North Carolina (except for buying hash), but somehow they seemed much more exciting in Sumter, maybe just because the errands were in a different place. Perhaps the reason was that it seemed like everywhere I went with my great-grandmother, she often ran into someone she knew. She’d introduce me as her great-granddaughter from Cary, North Carolina, Ned’s daughter. Usually, upon the mention of my father’s name, the person would squat to my level, comment on how much I looked like so-and-so, and ask “what grade was I in?” before recalling a story from my father’s childhood. When I ran errands with my mother at home, we only ran into people we knew every once in awhile. At home we lived in a subdivision out from town and it seemed like a long ride all the way into Cary to go to the grocery store or the bank. I was fascinated by being no more than a five minute car ride away, seemingly around the corner, from anywhere in town as we were in Sumter.

At home we were often in a hurry, trying to squeeze in a trip to the grocery store, the dry cleaners, Roses, the bank, and to pick up a birthday present for someone all in a short time. In Sumter we’d go to the hairdresser one day and to the bank the next, and then to church on the following. These errands didn’t have the same urgency. There was always time for fun, too. Often when I was visiting my great-grandmother, she’d drive us
out to Swan Lake-Iris Gardens on West Liberty Street. There we fed bread to the ducks and swans. Swan Lake boasts the Japanese iris and is, according to its web site, “the only public park in the United States to feature all eight swan species.” In 1927, thirty acres of swampland had been donated to create the park, followed by ninety more acres on the other side of the street, given in 1938 by A.T. Heath, Sr., the owner of Sumter’s Coca-Cola bottling plant and a close friend of my great-grandparents.

In short, doing things with my great-grandmother as a child, even if they were much like the things I often did at home, seemed more fun. When I visited her in Sumter, the company was always good, and there were always interesting things to see and do. I never grew tired of exploring all that there was inside her home and out.

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Sumterites can no longer say they know everyone in town. According to Betty Rhame and Ed Junior, it used to be that when you went to the grocery store or walked down Main Street there was always someone there you knew, and you’d speak to everyone, whether you knew them or not. Today this isn’t always the case.

Its residents considered Sumter a small town in the first half of the twentieth century and still do, though the population today is just under 40,000. There are quite a few newcomers to the town, but still many old-timers. For example, while working on this project, I interviewed numerous family members and family friends. One evening I was on the phone with Betty Rhame. I had just asked her if she would tell me what Sumter was like years ago.

“Be glad to,” she answered quickly, pausing before she protested, “But you know I’ve only lived in Sumter sixty years.”
I chuckled hearing her discount her own credibility because she wasn’t a Sumter native, though she’d lived in the town more than two of my lifetimes.

If you live in Sumter, it is likely that your parents and grandparents did too. You would have classmates whose parents were your parents’ classmates. Everyone not only knows everyone but knows everything about them. It’s the kind of place where you know you can count on your next-door neighbor, an attorney, to take care of a speeding ticket for you because you bought twenty rolls of Christmas wrapping paper from his third grader for the school fundraiser and cared for his dogs when he had a family emergency. It’s the kind of place where the preacher will check on you if he looked out on his congregation from the pulpit the Sunday before and didn’t see you sitting in the same pew your family has occupied for the past thirty years. It’s the kind of place where your plumber knows you well enough to honk at you and wave as he passes you traveling down South Guignard (pronounced “gen-yard”) Street.

The desire to maintain a friendly reputation is demonstrated in the city’s web site, where it says, “Nestled in the heart of South Carolina, Sumter offers the best traditions of both the Old South and New. It’s a community where neighbors still greet each other from shaded front porches, high-tech industries rise alongside the cotton fields and the iced tea is served sweet.” The town’s motto, which can be read on signs posted in the downtown area, is, “The friendly place to be!” By my judgment, this is a true statement, even now.

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Through all of this, the house at 255 Broad Street remained. In fact, it still does, even though it is no longer a home but a government housing office. The front screened
porch has been enclosed and is now someone’s office. The backyard that gave all the children hours of fun and adventure is now paved in asphalt. Those who work in that house park their cars where I used to play. The fate of this house is no different, though, from any of the houses around it. All of them now are businesses of some sort. Louise was the last woman standing as a Broad Street resident in the house that she occupied for over sixty years, and more than half of those living alone. The house and all of the activity that occurred within it remains alive in the memories of many of us who are still around.
Chapter Three: How Firm a Foundation, Part Two

My great-grandmother placed importance upon several specific things. First would probably have been her family. Next would have been her home, and after that it would have been undoubtedly her church. She went to church all the time. She was involved in a United Methodist Women circle, the Constance Herbert Sunday school class, and every committee at one time or another, as was her husband, Ed. Church-going and Christianity were important parts of her life. Some of Louise’s best friendships were formed with fellow church members, and she always got to know her pastor well. Everyone in the congregation knew that Louise had her spot in the sanctuary – the seventh pew on the left - and they all knew not to sit there. Her church family’s importance spiked when Ed died in 1960. People from all over Sumter, but especially from the church, visited her, brought her meals and flowers, and contributed memorials during her bereavement. Her family took care to spend extra time with her as well.

On June 9, 1960, Louise’s grandsons, Ned and Joe Junior (known as “Little Joe” to the family – his father, the older Joe was known as “Big Joe”), were visiting from Greenville, South Carolina, newly released from school for the summer. For the past four days they had played with their cousins, Donna and Honey, built a fort in the backyard, ridden their bikes around the neighborhood, and squirmed next to their grandmother in church on Sunday.

That day they likely had big plans of exciting things like hopping on a city bus and riding around town all afternoon. Later that morning they’d probably be asked by their grandmother to ride with her down Broad Street to Epperson’s Grocery to pick up a
few things for dinner that night. If they had time, they wanted to visit the pigeon squab farm that was within walking distance of their grandmother’s house headed west toward Columbia.

But this morning before another day of fun, as she was collecting his oatmeal bowl, Louise informed Ned that she had a job for him. Today she was going to the cemetery to place a flower arrangement on her late husband’s grave. She was going to need Ned’s help. As my father, Ned, remembers, they day would have gone like this.

“Alma will be over in a few minutes,” Louise said. “She’s going to help me arrange some flowers for Granddaddy and then we’ll need you to help us get them to the cemetery.”

Alma Martin, a florist, was one of Louise’s best friends. She lived in an apartment around the corner with her husband, Sam, who worked for the railroad. The Martins and the Hartins attended church together. (Today, Alma and Sam’s graves are right next to those of my great-grandparents, so I know it was a special friendship.) Alma and her business partner, Paul McCracken, owned a flower shop downtown. It was in a converted gas station not big enough inside to turn around twice.

The doorbell rang.

“Jump up and let Miss Alma in, please,” my great-grandmother said to my father.

His chair screeched across the linoleum and he jumped up, almost knocking his glass of unfinished milk on to the Formica table. Dashing out of the breakfast room, through the dining room and into the living room, he came to a halt before the big front door where he reached up to unlock the deadbolt and swung open the heavy door. Ned correctly identified Alma’s black patent leather heels through the downward slats of the
storm door, turned the knob, and opened it, just as I did as a child when I was in Sumter and someone stopped by the house.

“Good morning, young man,” Alma said, smiling down at him. “Are you going to help your grandmother and me this morning?”

“Yes, ma’am,” responded the eight year-old.

Before either of them could say more, Louise called out, “Alma, I’m in the kitchen,” and Ned stepped aside to let Alma in the house, still holding the storm door open with one hand. Alma had her hands full, carefully carrying both a huge bunch of white gladiolas and other assorted flowers, along with her purse which matched her shoes perfectly.

Alma went to the kitchen at the back of the house, where Louise was just setting the last of the now-clean breakfast dishes in the dish rack on the counter to dry.

“Good morning, Alma,” Ned’s grandmother said as she dried her hands on a dishtowel and bent at the waist to kiss Alma on the cheek.

“Good morning, Louise,” she said. “I hope these gladiolas will do. I had ordered them for Mabel Purdy’s granddaughter’s wedding and then she decided to go with hydrangeas instead.”

“Oh, they’re beautiful. Thank you for bringing them over,” Louise said.

The women chattered away while filling a three feet tall wire basket left from the funeral four months earlier with water and the cut flowers and Ned looked on from the doorway. Shortly after the funeral, Louise had purchased two nail spikes at the hardware store and had them bend the heads for her. Later at her husband’s grave she had driven the spikes into the ground and used the bent heads to hold the wire basket in place.
A few minutes later Louise told Ella and Little Joe, who were watching television in another room that they’d be back in a little while. Alma held the huge arrangement of flowers, Louise grabbed her purse and car keys, and Ned followed them out the front door. Under the carport, Louise unlocked and opened the deep trunk of her white Buick Le Sabre.

“Hop in,” she instructed Ned.

Once he was inside the trunk squatting, Alma handed down to him the flower arrangement.

“You hold on to the flowers ‘til we get to the cemetery,” she said. “Careful not to spill the water.”

Ned performed quite a balancing act. While he squatted back on his heels he had to hold the trunk open with one hand and keep the flowers upright with the other. When Louise started the engine and backed out of the driveway, Ned still managed not to spill the water or allow the bouncing trunk lid to crush the flowers as the car moved down the driveway. The open trunk obviously impaired Louise’s rear-view sight. A horn honked and a pickup swerved into the left lane, narrowly missing the Le Sabre’s trunk, the grandson, and the gladiolas.

Louise, oblivious to the catastrophe she had almost caused, put the Buick in drive as the three headed off down Broad Street to the cemetery. She thanked her grandson later.

“She was so appreciative of my being there and doing that,” Ned said.
“Louise, are you going to Sunday School this week?” Alma asked. “Dixie, Dr. Mason’s wife is giving her testimony.”

“Ooh, I shouldn’t think we would want to miss that,” Louise said. “It would be a shame if no one showed up after all her family has been through.”

“Wouldn’t it?” Alma said, clucking her tongue.

Dixie Mason did give her testimony that Sunday, and Alma and Louise were there to hear it. But they, like everyone who attended Trinity United Methodist Church on Sunday, June 11, 1960, couldn’t keep their minds on Mrs. Mason’s testimony, the sermon, or most anything except the terrible event that had happened the day before.

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Early that Saturday morning Ned and Little Joe were awake and in their play clothes preparing for a day of riding their bikes in the area, and maybe if their grandmother gave them money for bus fare, an afternoon of riding the city bus around town again until it was time to head home for supper. The day’s plans were quickly interrupted when Louise’s next door neighbor knocked insistently on the back door.

Louise, who was applying makeup in her housecoat in her bathroom, coughed through a cloud of loose facial powder and exited the bathroom to answer the door. Something was wrong. Louise could tell by Mrs. Folger’s facial expression before she opened the screen door.

When she did, Mrs. Folger blurted out, “Louise, your church is on fire!”

“What?” Louise was alarmed. She clutched the collar of her bathrobe between the fingers of her left hand.

“Trinity is on fire! I heard it on the radio.”
The screen door slammed shut and Louise ran back into the house toward her bedroom. She grabbed a pair of brown polyester pants, a blue top, and black shoes. It was the fastest she had ever gotten dressed. She picked up her purse out of the blue chair in the corner.

“Boys!” she hollered out as she headed into the hall. “Where are you?”

“In here,” they yelled back in unison from the living room where they were watching television at nearly full volume while their great-grandmother, Ella, sat in the same room in a chair with her head under a helmet hairdryer. She wasn’t quite ready for the day yet either, though she had already dressed. She had on polyester pants and a blue top as well but was wearing slippers and no makeup.

“What’s wrong?” Ella said, looking at Louise’s flushed cheeks.

“The church is on fire. Let’s get in the car,” Louise said with panic in her voice.

Ella was worried. She frowned and punched the “off” button of the hairdryer, stood up and followed Louise and the boys outside, even with her wet hair and slippers.

Though the church was only a mile from the house, Louise must have felt like it took forever to get all the way down Church Street and then to the corner of Council and East Liberty. Surely she wasn’t prepared to lose her church, she probably thought. After all, she had just lost her husband. She was depending on her church and her family to keep her busy and help her pull through her grief. Though a little voice in her head gently reminded her of the children’s song that said, “The church is not a building. The church is not a steeple. The church is not a resting place. The church is the people,” she couldn’t imagine not having church in that building, in that place.
Finally the church came into view up ahead of them. Louise couldn’t see the stained glass window that at eight o’clock in the morning should have been shining in the sun.

“Oh, thank goodness they put tarps over that window,” Ella said from the passenger seat. “We don’t want it to burn.”

Louise didn’t respond right away. The boys in the backseat were leaning over the front quietly taking in the scene before them. At closer examination, Louise really couldn’t respond to her mother’s comment, as she was rendered speechless. Across the street from the church she threw the car into park and the four of them climbed out of the car, stunned and staring at the burned church in front of them, smoldering now that the fire was out. The stained glass window hadn’t been covered with a tarp at all, but blackened by the smoke that filled the sanctuary. It was ruined. Four fire trucks were parked on the street, in the yard of the church, and in its parking lot.

“I think every fire department in Sumter County was there,” my father, Ned, later recalled.

About twelve firefighters were surveying the scene. Two of them were spraying water on what had been the choir loft at the front of the church, but was now covered in a strange looking metallic substance, the melted pipe organ. One firefighter emerged from the smoldering building holding a brass cross that had been on the altar. It had not burned and remained one of the only items from the sanctuary to survive the fire. The preacher, Reverend John Shingler, was sifting through the area where his office had been, looking for anything salvageable. There wasn’t much left. Several dozen church members and
other Sumter residents stood out of the way of the firefighters shocked by the sight of the destruction before them.

“It was a total loss,” Ned remembered. “The building was just gutted. The roof had fallen in.”

Betty Rhame remembered, “It was burned to the ground. The Sunday school buildings were saved.”

The magnitude of the damage to Trinity Church was fully realized to everyone present.

“We were just stunned,” Ned said. “But Louise was more devastated than the rest of us.”

A newspaper boy had spotted the fire around four in the morning while delivering papers in the adjacent neighborhood. He alerted the fire department by banging on the door of the nearest house until its occupants woke up and reported the incident. Some areas inside the church were in the process of being painted, and investigators ruled that the cause of the fire was spontaneous combustion from some paint cans left lying around over the weekend. During the painting, the congregation had been meeting for church in the fellowship hall, but planned to return to the sanctuary soon.

“Everyone was looking forward to it,” Ned said.

For the next three years church services were held in the fellowship hall and a building committee was soon selected to handle the new sanctuary’s construction. During a time when women’s leadership in the Methodist church was scarcer than it is today unless it involved children or music, Louise and two other women were elected to the committee, and Louise kept adding more and more to her plate.
During the construction, Louise was part of the building, executive, memorial, stained glass window symbols, and grounds and landscaping committees, and was vice-chairman of the planning and the furnishings and lighting committees. She had been on every other board and committee at the church, so the congregation knew she’d be a good fit.

“She didn’t have a lot of other demands on her time,” my father recently told me. “She was so headstrong they knew she’d be good.”

Betty Rhame told me, “Everyone in that church was quite aware of your great-grandmother.”

Probably intense church work was really what Louise needed to keep her mind off all the bad things that happened to her in 1960 (the deaths of her husband in February and her mother in November).

“When all of a sudden you’re a widow, you can be a wimp or you can take charge of things,” my father told me.

My great-grandmother, of course, chose the latter. Rebuilding her church gave her something to really focus on.

“1960 was really tough on her,” her son, Ed Junior, recalled. “It was one thing right after another that year but she was so strong. Once she realized she had to handle everything, she was all right.”

She was. The committee began considering revamping the church’s architectural style from the way it had been, a square sanctuary and circular pews that made the congregation, no matter where they sat, close to the altar. According to my father, the tragedy really became an opportunity to make some needed improvements.
“It was her influence I believe that made the church be built as a new gothic cathedral,” Betty Rhame told me. “It ended up being a good thing.”

Louise gave the money to replace the focal point of the sanctuary - the stained glass window - for the sanctuary, and dedicated it to her husband’s memory.

“It was just something she wanted to do,” Ned said. “It wasn’t for show. She wanted to contribute something significant.”

It had been installed the week before Ned and Little Joe were back in Sumter for a weekend visit early in 1963. The church wasn’t quite ready yet to hold services. The pews weren’t installed but the marble floor had recently been put down. The brass cross had been refinished, and was again on the front altar. No longer showing the damage from the fire, it was polished and shiny. That weekend Louise took the boys by the church to see their grandfather’s window. When the three of them entered the sanctuary the morning sun shone through the windows and on to the empty gray and white floor. The blues, magentas, greens, and golds reflected down on the cool marble.

It was a striking scene to my dad, who still remembers years later, “It was pretty on the empty floor.”

It’s just as beautiful today, and those who see it do so the same way my dad did as a child that first time, by looking at the window displayed prominently above the altar at the front of the sanctuary. The window depicts the Trinity, especially appropriate because of the name of the church. Jesus is in the center panel with an open palm to represent God’s blessings upon the congregation. The lamb below Jesus is said to represent the resurrection. Jesus and the lamb are between two other panels. The one on the left depicts Paul, and the one on the right is John the Baptist. It’s poignant how the window
represents those messages of Christian rebirth. It nicely parallels Trinity Church’s own
rebirth and resurrection after the fire of 1960.

One of the last pieces in the rebuilding of the sanctuary happened the week of
Vacation Bible School in 1963, the addition of the church’s steeple. May Sharp, a friend
of both my grandmother and my great-grandmother, and a lifelong Sumter resident,
remembers being there to watch.

“A huge crane lifted it up,” she said. “It was exciting.”

Recently, I attended the early service at Trinity Church and couldn’t help but
focus on the gigantic window that loomed in front of me. I had planned to go that
morning with my great-uncle Ed Junior, and great-aunt Laurelle, and my second cousin,
Stacie. We met Cousin Mildred there, who always sits in the pew in front of the Hartins. I
had secretly been hoping all weekend that the sun would hit that window just right and
I’d be able to see what my great-grandmother showed my dad and uncle about forty-three
years before. Maybe it wasn’t the right time of year or the right time of day. Though the
window was beautiful, its colors weren’t reflected down onto the stone floor. I keep
hoping that one of these days when I’m there it will be. Louise’s church is one of the
places I enjoy going back to when I’m in town. Now that the most important place of
hers, her home, today isn’t what it was, and I can’t go visit it, I like to go to her church. It
was probably the second most important place to her. It’s nice to visit a place that she
frequented because it was such a big part of her life.
PART II

Chapter Four: Civil Unrest

During some of my great-grandmother’s adult years there was a definitive, yet invisible line dividing blacks from whites. The division seemed especially apparent during the 1960s when black Americans were fighting so hard for equal opportunities. There was at that time, and both before and after it, tension between blacks and whites in Sumter and in the areas around it. It was, after all, South Carolina, where race relations have had a troubled history. Some specific events happened right under my great-grandmother’s nose.

Sumter is just north of Clarendon County, where in 1948 some of its African American residents organized to petition the state to provide bus transportation for black children to their schools, which had been a privilege afforded only to white children. It led to the court case Briggs v. Elliott, which helped pave the way for other monumental civil rights court cases, such as the more well-known Brown v. Board of Education. Sumter County’s residents, both black and white, though they had no battle in court to prove it, would have likely had similar struggles regarding segregation in schools and in other parts of their society.

On February 8, 1968, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, less than sixty miles southwest of Sumter, the Orangeburg Massacre occurred. On this day white police officers fired into a crowd of black students near the campus of South Carolina State College, a historically black institution. Three students were killed and thirty injured. In
Charleston in March 1969, black hospital and nursing home workers went on strike to demand higher pay and better working conditions. More than five hundred of these protesters were arrested.

The heightened tensions and discontent both leading up to and following these events and others in the Southeast and some Northern cities were certainly felt in Sumter, though the protests of Sumter’s black citizens might have been ignored as much as possible by some white citizens. All three of these events happened an hour or less from where my great-grandmother lived, but I’ve never heard her mention them at all. There were likely other incidents that never made the history books. Who knows how much of all this Louise actually paid attention to. Did she concern herself with any of it? I’m not sure she did.

“She didn’t act like all of that made a big difference to her right then,” Dot, my grandmother, said of Louise’s thoughts during this tumultuous time. “Her age and way of life kept her out of contact with a lot of the social change. A lot of people in Sumter didn’t think things were going to change much at all.”

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In addition to the civil unrest that surrounded my great-grandmother in the middle of the twentieth century, there were also outspoken public figures who probably would have influenced the opinions of their constituents, including Louise. A person whose public life required him to consider race issues was Louise’s political hero and fellow South Carolinian, Strom Thurmond. He played a large role in this complicated and racially separated society. As a state senator, he supported the poll tax which prevented many blacks in his home state from voting, saying that having to pay a fee to vote did not
hinder one’s ability to do so. Though he was against murder, he thought a federal anti-lynching bill was unnecessary. Thurmond believed segregation was necessary to maintain order in society. He once said, “We know that [laws of segregation] are essential to the protection of the racial integrity and purity of the white and Negro races alike.”

In the fifties he made weekly radio addresses in which he constantly referred to his African American constituents as “nigras,” a socially acceptable term, he thought. He advocated state’s rights, though he said it had nothing to do with his feelings about race. Thurmond holds the record for the longest filibuster in United States Senate history when in 1957 he spoke against the civil rights bill for twenty-four hours and eighteen minutes. Thurmond fathered a child with his family’s black maid in 1925, a daughter who was his oldest child, but their relationship was publicly nonexistent, though he had private visits with her and likely paid her tuition at South Carolina State College. According to Dot (Louise’s daughter and my grandmother), however, Louise had no knowledge of this daughter. In 2003, Essie May Washington-Williams made public the connection with her biological father, but Louise didn’t catch it. If she had, I’m sure she would have been shocked. I know she would have been disappointed in the Senator for violating her value system, though she could have just carried on, pretending that she didn’t know about his black daughter.

“I don’t think she ever knew about it,” Dot said. “By the time we knew about it, he was dead.”

My family believes my great-grandmother voted for Thurmond in the 1946 gubernatorial election and in his 1948 presidential race on the Dixiecrat ticket. I know for certain that she voted for him in all eight of his successful races for the Senate position.
that he held for forty-eight years. My great-grandmother usually told her daughter, a staunch Democrat, each time she voted for Thurmond. Louise and Thurmond were almost the same age – he was born in 1902 and she in 1904 – and they most certainly held similar mindsets.

“She was quite an admirer,” Dot once said.

He preceded Louise in death by less than a year and a half. They both died at age one hundred.

It means something to me that my great-grandmother thought so highly of Senator Thurmond. I’m not surprised that she did, since they shared the same opinion on many subjects. But they both were representative of the white South that used to be, and they resisted adapting to the ways of the New South. Both of them now represent to me the white Southern ideals that aren’t as present anymore: destructive things like segregation and nurturing things like hospitality and fried chicken dinners. It’s as though not working on Sunday, always dressing your best, and the deep concern with the way outsiders might see your family, among other things both good and bad, died with folks of my great-grandmother’s generation. I think my great-grandmother’s admiration of Thurmond resonates with me so much because knowing his political stance gives me insight on hers. Since she often kept her business to herself, I think I know more about her by learning about him. They were both children of their time.

Politicians weren’t the only public figures adamant in their support of segregation.

The Sumter Daily Item quoted Dr. Bob Jones, theologian and founder of Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, on April 21, 1960, as saying, “There has never been a time when the white population of the South has been more eager to help
the colored people than right now, and all this agitation going on right now is not headed up by Christian people but by religious liberals, by preachers who do not believe the Bible and by Communists….if you’re against racial separation, you’re against God – because God is the author of separation.”

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Just as much as Thurmond, Jones, and other prominent white South Carolinians tried to believe that the state’s black citizens were economically unimportant and held only a small role in the workings of the state and the country, they must have realized deep down how much white society depended upon the cheap black labor force. I wonder now if this ever scared them at least a bit.

It was a system that most whites believed worked well, because everyone stayed quietly in his or her proper place, and appeared content with that place in society. Another relative of mine, my great-great uncle Murr Hall, a Sumterite, was in another business dependent upon its black workers – furniture.

“He wouldn’t have had any ill will toward blacks, because they were so important in his industry,” my father, Ned, explained.

If my great-grandfather hadn’t been able to employ black men at his wholesale business, Thomas & Howard, a supplier of local grocery chains and convenience stores, he probably wouldn’t have been as successful as he was. Ed Hartin would have had more overhead had he been forced to hire the more expensive laborers, white men. If my great-grandmother hadn’t had the help of Efred, Dorothy, Alice, and others in the yard and in the house, she wouldn’t have been able to donate her time and energy to the philanthropic causes that she supported, such as Epworth Children’s Home in Columbia and the local
YWCA. She couldn’t have been a member of her United Methodist Women circle, or her
garden, book, or art clubs. She couldn’t have been a volunteer at Tuomey Hospital.
Perhaps she would have also had to do without the material things like a car, a beautiful
home, and as many clothes. From where I see things now, there is irony in that the white
economy needed blacks to remain submissive, but to do this, some blacks had to be
reminded to keep quiet and pretend to be happy. This struggle happened throughout the
South until the Civil Rights Movement put some changes in motion.

Some whites might have argued that though black workers in the South were
underpaid, their conditions would have been considerably more meager had they been
unable to work for white citizens. They were stuck in their role as the underpaid black
workers. White citizens knew that often the success of their businesses depended upon
the help of black workers.

Today in Sumter, neighborhoods, churches, and areas of town stay fairly
segregated, in a seemingly voluntary way, just as in many other American towns and
cities. Whites still, for the most part, live in neighborhoods where whites have lived for
decades, and the same goes for black residents. They attend the churches they always
have. When I drive through Sumter today, I wonder what has really changed. Some
things have; others not at all.
Chapter Five: A Segregated Sumter

My great-grandmother was the matriarch of her house.

“She was in charge all the time,” her daughter, my grandmother once said.

Though the house was Louise’s domain, she ran it with help from others. Ed, hard at work as a partner in a wholesale grocery business, interfered very little with the day to day happenings inside his home.

“He didn’t do anything around the house,” my grandmother said. “He was totally wrapped up in the business.”

But he provided his wife with money to keep the household running smoothly and paid repairmen to fix broken things while he was working. He was almost always working. He’d leave for his office job in the warehouse of Thomas & Howard next to the railroad tracks near downtown around six-thirty in the morning. He would first be seen by his family when he returned to the house for breakfast about eight. He always wore a suit and covered up his bald head with a hat when he was outdoors. When he did come home in the evenings, he relaxed in his recliner in the corner of the living room.

Louise’s mother, Ella, did the majority of the cooking.

“No recipes. Everything from scratch,” remembered Ed Junior, Ella’s grandson and my great-uncle. “Lord, I miss some of the things she would cook.”

Over the years Louise employed several black men and women to assist with the cooking, take care of the children, nurse her mother after her stroke, clean the house, and work in the yard. She had the laundry sent out to a washerwoman, and the woman’s children brought it back in a red wagon. There was a difference between the lives of the
Hartins at 255 Broad Street and the lives of those who helped the household run.

Interestingly, the black world and the white one, though they were forced to be separate in most places, overlapped within the homes of most middle and upper class families. For those who were used to a segregated way of life, in a town where blacks and whites worked together and were in and out of each other’s neighborhoods, the written rules of society often got little attention.

“You didn’t really think about it,” said my uncle, Little Joe, a look-alike of his grandfather, Ed, who vaguely remembers the segregated South of his childhood.

In department stores, he remembers that you would see two water fountains, one labeled “white” and one “colored.”

“That was the only thing you really noticed,” he said.

My father remembers as a child being taken to one of the two movie theaters in town by his grandfather, Ed Hartin. Blacks were allowed in this particular theater, though they had their own entrance separate from the whites’, and the blacks sat in the balcony.

“You wouldn’t even know they were there,” my father told me.

In one of society’s unwritten rules, the point was always to keep black people hidden from sight (as well as children). In the first half of the twentieth century, most houses in Sumter had an alley in the back and a back door that was used frequently.

“The back door was what it was all about,” explained W. A. McElveen, Jr., better known as “Mayor Bubba.” “Children weren’t allowed to enter the house through the living room. Black people couldn’t come to the front door. Children and servants went through the back door.”
The movie theater and the rules of the back door really illustrate to me the importance of one’s place. Good children and black folks followed the rules and remained in their place as instructed by society. As long as the rules were followed, life was harmonious. When one decided to get out of line, however, that’s when the trouble started.

A segregated Sumter was more noticeable to Mildred Shaw, who was the head nurse of Tuomey Hospital for twenty years. In the 1980s after she’d retired, she was the first woman elected to the hospital’s Board of Trustees.

“My whole life has been attached to Tuomey,” she told me.

Mildred saw many changes in the hospital during her tenure. In her early days in nursing, Tuomey was a training site for nurses.

“We had one of the best schools in the state,” she bragged.

Later the nursing school closed and today Tuomey has expanded to two hundred and fifty beds from the fifty it had early in Mildred’s career. In her early days there the hospital, like most other public places, was segregated. There was one wing for blacks and one for whites. During this time, Mildred was on duty in the emergency room when several black people arrived at the hospital after surviving a car accident. Some members of the group were uninjured but some who had sustained injury were admitted for treatment and observation. Unfortunately, there was nowhere in town their friends could stay the night to wait for them to be discharged from the hospital. All of the hotels in town were white only.

“The blacks we knew didn’t travel much,” Mildred said. “The ones who weren’t hurt wanted to stay but didn’t have anywhere to stay. That was bad.”
So Mildred did the only thing she could think of so those folks would have a place
to spend the night. She called her friend, a prominent black lawyer in town who came to
the hospital to pick them up and arranged a place for them to stay overnight.

In the 1940s Tuomey integrated, but continued to keep blacks and whites loosely
separated by floor. All in all, Mildred said, the transition was smooth.

“Sometimes we’d have people who’d rather die at home than be with the blacks,”
she remembered. “But most people didn’t mind.”

I’m wondering if “most people” really meant “white people.”

Integrating Tuomey Hospital was one of the two things that happened in the
1940s that Mildred believes helped pave the way for a smoother conversion to integration
than some Southern towns experienced. The other plus was that Shaw Air Force Base,
located fifteen miles west of town and referred to as “Shaw Field” by the locals, was
integrated.

“Shaw has a big influence,” said Betty Rhame, my great-aunt.

The base always has had this influence in Sumter, and the two have benefitted
each other greatly since Shaw’s arrival in 1941.

“If they ever move Shaw Field, this place will dry up and blow away,” Mildred
said.

(She noted that although she shares her last name with the base’s namesake, they
are only distant relatives.

“There are as many Shaws as Joneses in Sumter,” was her disclaimer.)

In the base’s early days, according to Mildred, children of airmen accounted for
one-fourth of the school children in Sumter County, and today it is nearly the same.
Integration was already part of life for these families. The United States Air Force, which grew out of the Army into its own branch in 1947, began integrating its airmen in 1948.

By the time schools integrated in Sumter County it also went more smoothly than in some places. My cousin and Louise’s granddaughter, Honey Truesdale, was a child in the Sumter County school system when integration was going on.

“I began first grade at Crosswell Drive Elementary in 1965,” she said. “That was the first year we had a black child in the school. He was in another first grade class and his name was Anthony Jefferson. I didn’t have a black child in my room until I moved to Alice Drive Elementary in the fifth grade in 1969. I only had one then and at the time we had all subjects with one teacher except social studies and I had my first black teacher for that subject. Sixth grade on, I had more black children in my classes and black teachers.”

The one high school in the county, Sumter High School, was built in the 1970s when Edmunds High, the white school, and Lincoln High, the black school, merged.

“We had to do something to accommodate the integration,” Mildred said.

This integration set into motion the private school movement, where some affluent white parents paid to send their children to school. Often tuition was too expensive for lower income students, many of whom were black. I wonder if the education system would have really flourished with the combination of black and white students and teachers together at every school. Wouldn’t that have been the best for everyone?

Mayor Bubba and his family were part of the original push for private schools. At one point, a relative of his was a white second grader assigned to attend a black school in a black neighborhood.
“We were very concerned about the safety of that child, and not only that but the education,” he told me. “We’ve been a part of the private school movement with children and grandchildren.”

The schools in Sumter County are broken down into two systems, District Two and District Seventeen. The latter is where Honey is a first grade teacher, and it is the larger of the two districts, encompassing most of the school children who live inside the city limits. In this district, currently sixty-six percent are black and thirty-two percent are white, with the remaining children mostly of Hispanic and Asian Pacific ethnicity. The number of black students is particularly high when you consider that the 2000 United States census found whites to make up fifty-one percent of Sumter County and blacks forty-seven percent. A large number of Sumter’s white school children still attend private school.

“People are still doing without food to send children to private school,” Mildred remarked. “Public schools in Sumter with a few exceptions are struggling because of private schools.”

Some folks who were proponents of private schools a few decades ago have abandoned them in favor of the Sumter public schools of today.

“Private schools built to keep out integration have outlasted their times,” Mayor Bubba claimed.

I can’t help but wonder why so many white parents felt they had to rescue their children from an integrated educational system. Maybe I’m only wondering this because it conflicts with my own upbringing and experience in a world more open to diversity. I mentioned earlier that my great-grandmother was simply a product of her own era.
Perhaps I am too. Because of that, it’s hard to picture myself as anyone other than who I am. It’s hard to say how differently I might feel if I wasn’t. If I was born a generation or two earlier. If I was from a small town. If I wasn’t white. I realize that more perspectives exist than what I have represented here, but I have presented what is most familiar to me.

Overall, Sumter integrated successfully, and in a more orderly manner than some other places.

“As a whole, our integration problems were not bad and it was due in large part to the blacks we had,” Mildred said. “They were good people.”

Maybe they just didn’t stir up too much trouble.
Chapter Six: The Importance of Knowing Your Place

There was a certain place in which Louise’s black employees, and those of other Sumterites, remained, and this place was both a physical and an intangible one. Some rules were strictly enforced, few were written down. Many were simply expected. Fortunately, these rules didn’t negate who one’s friends could be when you were inside your own home.

A maid came over to Louise’s twice a week to clean the house. She would get paid at the end of each day she worked via an envelope with cash in it and her name on it, waiting for her on the table in the center of the kitchen. Sometimes Ella, Louise’s mother, would forget what they were for and throw them away without looking inside the envelopes. Upon discovering this, Louise would huffily dig through the trash can to find the discarded money. All three of the maids over the years were well-liked by Louise and the family. They were very much a part of the family goings-on, but at the same time removed. For instance, though one of them, Dorothy, spent a good part of Christmas day each year cooking and cleaning the kitchen while Louise’s extended family enjoyed their holiday together, Dorothy didn’t sit down with them during dinner. She’d fix herself a plate and eat it in the kitchen and would take some leftovers home to her own family. Surely it would have been difficult to spend almost the whole day with someone else’s family working.

I had the privilege of meeting Dorothy, age ninety-two, on a visit to Sumter a year and a half after my great-grandmother’s death. She was a tiny thing. She had beautiful brown skin, surprisingly smooth considering her age, and starkly contrasting white hair,
parted down the middle and in two braids by each ear, with the ends tucked under. She greeted my great-aunt, Laurelle, and me warmly and chatted away with us for a half hour or so. I’ll never forget the matter-of-fact way she explained to me how she, using a home remedy, successfully removed a cataract from her own eye by making an herbal tea and dropping it in her eye every so often. Her doctor had confirmed the cataract’s disappearance. My family hasn’t traditionally relied upon home remedies. It’s too bad my great-grandmother didn’t learn the process. She got cataracts in the days before a surgeon would just remove the cloudy mass. Instead, she had to wear glasses with thick, murky lenses to correct her vision. It’s interesting to me that Dorothy didn’t need resources and doctors because she had knowledge and faith. When I asked her to tell me about Louise, she sang her former employee’s praises.

“She was always helping somebody,” Dorothy told me. “She was loving to everybody. She was a Christian lady.”

After my visit with her, I mailed her a thank you note, and she sent me back a note. In it, she said, “I am so glad I can help. I love your grandmother. I’ll always think of her.”

Dorothy said that when Louise lived alone, she often went out to dinner with friends. If she did that on a day when Dorothy worked, Louise made sure Dorothy got to eat there before she went home.

“She treat me nice,” Dorothy explained to me.

Sometimes helping Louise meant doing some babysitting. When Louise’s husband died, Dorothy stayed at the house during the funeral with Donna and Honey, Louise’s two granddaughters (my cousins), ages three and eleven months respectively.
This was only after Dorothy had dropped everything she was doing to get new curtains up in the house between Ed’s death and when Louise began receiving friends at the house.

Dorothy kept great-grandchildren from time to time, too, including my second cousin, Christy, and even me while my family attended my great-grandmother’s seventy-fifth birthday party at Sunset Country Club. I had turned a year old just three days before. Dorothy recounted that evening to me during our visit. She remembered that my mother was nervous about leaving me, but Dorothy assured her I would be fine.

“She fret just a little bit,” Dorothy told my mother upon her return.

Then, Dorothy said, I went right to sleep.

Dorothy worked for Louise more than thirty years until she moved from her house on Broad Street to Covenant Place, a retirement home where she rented an apartment. After her move, Louise would ride out to Dorothy’s tidy white house at 16 Milton Street and give her money every so often. After she stopped driving, Louise would have someone else drive her out there.

Years later when Dorothy’s husband died, Louise’s children and grandchildren didn’t let the passing go unnoticed. They sent flowers and were genuine in their sympathies. Louise’s daughter-in-law, Laurelle, drove her out to Dorothy’s house to visit with her after her husband’s death. Louise gave her a check. The two women were similar in stature, both being no more than five feet, two inches tall, and skinny. When Louise died, Dorothy had the pick of any of her clothes, and took several things. Louise also left Dorothy money in her will.
They were friends, and Dorothy also became friends with Louise’s family. Laurelle goes by to see Dorothy every so often these days. Sometimes she’ll call her, too. When she does, Laurelle doesn’t even need to identify herself; she and Dorothy can just begin talking right off the bat.

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Alice, the maid who preceded Dorothy, never talked about the progress black Americans were trying to make socially during the 1960s when she worked for my great-grandmother. I’m sure she knew all about school integration in Little Rock, Arkansas, the freedom marches in Alabama, and Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. I imagine that she noticed the upheaval the South was in during those days. Who wouldn’t have? Alice wouldn’t have wanted to rock the boat, though, especially at her age.

“A lot of the blacks didn’t feel like they were mistreated,” my father explained to me when I was trying hard to understand what this society had been like, and I am still wondering if that is completely true. “But that’s not to say they didn’t welcome change.”

Alice and her contemporaries seemed content to leave the picket lines and sit-ins to the younger African Americans. Often it was the black college students who led in these movements. It’s a good thing they did. Alice and other working class black folks often didn’t have that luxury because they were hard at work all day, as opposed to black college students who, with their varying class schedules, may have had more time on their hands. Alice needed her job and she never would have wanted Louise to think she held any resentment against her. Alice’s livelihood depended upon her white employers. Even though race relations were shaky across the South, things didn’t seem to change
much at first with regard to black domestic workers and their relationships with their white employers.

“They certainly didn’t want to lose their jobs,” my dad said. “They had friends who didn’t have jobs. They hoped that change would be good for them.”

But according to Dot, most African American domestic workers didn’t have to worry about job security.

“When someone began working for you, they just stayed on,” she explained. “They had the job as long as they wanted.”

I wonder if Dorothy realized how much my great-grandmother depended on her. Was that as obvious?

According to my father, who knew Alice well from visiting his grandmother often, Louise needed Alice very much.

“People like Grandmama depended on their black employees, especially as single women,” he explained to me once. “It meant they could stay in their homes and be self-sufficient. It satisfied a mutual need.”

When Ella suffered a stroke, Alice moved into the house and sat up all night every night with her for months until she died. Another woman was hired to be at the house tending to Ella all day.

I’m sure, though, that Alice welcomed the progress made. I can’t imagine the satisfaction she must have felt when it became apparent that her grandchildren would never again be prohibited from playing in Sumter’s “White Only” Memorial Park, or have to come in a separate entrance and sit in the balcony in one of Sumter’s two movie theaters, or attend different schools than white children, though some blacks didn’t want
to give up their schools either. These were all changes she would have been happy to see take place. But all these changes weren’t something she would talk about while working for my great-grandmother, or any of her other employers.

Alice walked a fine and interesting line, one that I have a hard time understanding from where and how I see the world in 2006. It is a line I would have never known existed had I only studied history books rather than supplementing that scholarly material with oral history. No history book ever suggested to me that Alice and Louise would have been or even could have been friends. But they were friends in an interesting, incredible way that makes me think that maybe the South wasn’t always the way you see depicted in film or in books, both history and fiction.

Alice spent two days a week at Louise’s helping her keep house. On her workdays Louise would drive to Alice’s house off Broad Street in a neighborhood of unpainted clapboard houses on a dirt road to pick her up around ten in the morning. Then Louise would take her back home when the day was over around four.

At Louise’s often they worked alongside each other. Housework was more involved then when no one had washing machines, dryers, dishwashers, or other appliances in their homes that now we take for granted. Everything took more time. Alice earned a salary of a few dollars per day. Often at the end of a workday, Louise would send her home with food Louise had cooked too much of (my suspicions are that this happened often, and on purpose), so Alice and her family didn’t have to cook dinner. It was the way Louise showed Alice appreciation for the work she did.

Around 1965 Alice got the opportunity to move to New York to become a nanny, making what she called “big money.” At the time many of Sumter’s African American
labor force were migrating to cities in the North like Detroit to work in factories. A maid was getting harder to come by. Alice worked for a family in New York for about eight years. While she was gone, she and Louise kept in touch. When Alice would return to Sumter to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas, or come for a visit in the summer and my dad was also down for a visit, he could hear Louise’s and Alice’s incessant chatter and laughter coming from the den while they were visiting. They were friends, and they counted on each other.

Many times Alice promised to leave her job in New York and come back to Sumter if Louise needed her.

“Now, Miz Hartin,” she’d say. “When you need me to come stay with you I will.”

My dad always remembered that.

“Alice gave her word that she would be there when Grandmama needed her,” he said.

Alice died around 1980, nearly twenty-five years before Louise did. As it turned out, Louise never needed Alice to nurse her as she had Louise’s mother, Ella. But a standing offer was there, and Louise knew that if she needed help, she could count on Alice. The way my grandmother explained it, “She was kind of like family.”

According to Mildred Shaw, many white families thought of their black maids as an extension of their households, but with one strong distinction.

“They were part of the family,” Mildred said before pointing out, “but servants ate in the kitchen. Whites would do anything for their black servants. But they had a place and they better stay in it.”
But I know that “anything” didn’t mean “everything.” Growing up, Mildred’s parents employed a black woman, Clara, to help around the house and keep up with their eight children, of which Mildred was the oldest.

“We loved Clara,” Mildred said. “But she ate in the kitchen.”

Years later, when Mildred was married with two children working as a nurse at Tuomey Hospital, Clara got a serious illness. Mildred didn’t think twice about tending to Clara. She took a morning shift at the hospital and left her children with her mother every morning to be Clara’s private nurse. She continued this practice until Clara passed away. That was just how things were. White families and their black maids often formed a bond, and when either needed something, the other would do anything to help, which is not something I knew to consider before undertaking this project. A good working relationship with her white employer meant more than just a regular salary for a black domestic worker. It meant food to take home to her family for dinner, hand-me-down clothing, and sometimes a ride to and from work instead of walking or paying to ride the bus.
Chapter Seven: A Disappearing Act

Louise knew the general area where Efred, her yard man, lived - near the corner of Liberty and Guignard Streets near the county fairgrounds. She never knew exactly where, however, because he walked almost two miles to her house to work in her yard rather than having her come get him or riding a city bus.

“You’d see him walking all over town,” said Ed Junior.

Ned said, “He wouldn’t spend enough money to ride the bus.”

If Louise needed him outside of his regular workday at her house, since he didn’t have a telephone at home, she’d drive to the area where she was pretty sure he lived, and start asking around. When she found someone who knew him, and I imagine nearly everyone in the area would have, she’d ask them to tell Efred to come by, that she had work for him. By seven on Friday mornings, Efred’s tall, lanky frame could be seen working quietly in Louise’s yard, pruning the Confederate Rose bushes, planting or moving plants, picking up pecans that had fallen from the pecan tree, or mowing the centipede grass (it was what grew in Sumter County’s sandy gray dirt) with a push manual reel mower. Confederate Rose bushes exist today in many of the yards of the older homes of Sumter. The thought that it was Efred and other black yard men all over town who have cared for these plants is fraught with irony.

Mowing the grass may have been the task Louise asked Efred to do most often, according to Donna and Laurelle. Once when her reel mower broke, Louise rushed right out to replace it before Efred’s next work day. Efred was said to have looked visibly
disappointed that the next morning upon meeting the replacement so quickly, and being asked to put it to use.

He worked quietly and spoke little. I wonder what he thought about all those days that he was hard at work in my great-grandmother’s yard. And he was always there on Friday mornings.

“He was faithful,” said Laurelle. “He’d show up rain or shine.”

“Efred was just a fixture,” Little Joe said. “He probably never said two words to me the whole time I knew him. My grandfather probably never did anything in the yard because Efred took care of it.”

“She’d tell him what she wanted and he’d work on it,” my dad remembered. “I’m sure things were sometimes done to her liking and sometimes not.”

When Louise had breakfast ready, she’d come down the back steps to bring Efred a plate covered with a cloth napkin. She knew exactly what he could and couldn’t eat. He was a diabetic just like her husband. If the weather was nice, he’d eat his breakfast on a stone bench under a tree in the backyard.

He was absolutely meticulous in his work in Louise’s yard, and every other yard he took care of. Once Louise asked him to pull the ivy off the brick carport, a tedious job since the ivy had adhered itself into the cracks between bricks. But before Efred left for the day the carport was completely free of ivy, just as Louise had requested. The last thing he’d do before he left her yard on Fridays was rake the dirt paths in the yard where grass wouldn’t grow.

“He raked his way to the street,” my father, Ned, said. “When he left there were very few footprints.”
According to several different family members, Efred took pride in the yard and his work in it, as if it was his very own. He worked hard to take care of it, and quietly left on Friday afternoons proud of how it looked. The morning after Hurricane Hugo plowed through South Carolina, he walked to Louise’s yard very early past downed power lines, debris, and disorder to begin cleaning it up. He also checked on her to make sure she was all right and to see if she needed anything. Once he finished there he moved on to another one of his employers, Evelyn Kirkland’s, to do the same.

Sometimes it would be raining during Efred’s normal Friday morning visit to Louise’s yard. When it was raining hard enough that he couldn’t work, he would sit on a fold-up chair with wooden slats on the edge of the stand-alone garage, watching the rain fall. This was the same place he’d eat his breakfast if the weather was bad, and the place where Louise would locate the dirty plates that never got returned to the kitchen after Efred ate. When it was cold outside, anyone looking out the window from the house might see him wearing a hat and up to three sweaters.

When Efred was too elderly to walk across town to work in Louise’s yard, and after she had moved to a retirement community and no longer had a yard, she would sometimes drive in the neighborhood she thought he lived in with cash for him if she could find him.

Once when my grandparents were in Sumter for a visit, Louise asked Dot to drive her into town to find Efred. She had some cash she wanted to give him. They each grabbed a jacket, left my grandfather watching television, and crunched through the fallen leaves in the parking lot on the way to my grandparents’ white Chevy Lumina.
I doubt my grandmother talked much during the ten minute drive. But Louise probably chattered away, briefing Dot on the intricacies of the upcoming town and county elections, what her pastor had preached on the Sunday before, and what the Sumter family members had been up to since her last visit. I imagine Dot made a left out of the parking lot of Covenant Place on to Carter Road, a left on to Wilson Hall Road, a right on to Broad Street, and a right on to North Bultman, south to where the street changes names to Guignard before continuing south to the neighborhood near the fairgrounds.

After making a left at the Sumter County Fairgrounds, Dot slowed the car to a snail’s pace while Louise scrutinized every house, trying to determine if it was Efred’s. The yards on that street didn’t have much grass.

“We rode around awhile and found the house she thought he lived in,” Dot remembered. “It was poor by our standards, but not ramshackle. Nice.”

A middle-aged woman with her hair wrapped in a turban sat on a metal folding chair on the front porch. Dot stopped the car and Louise rolled down her window.

“Ma’am?” she addressed the woman, poking her head slightly out of the car. She didn’t have to talk too loudly; not much of a yard separated the street from the front porch. The woman made eye contact. She had a pleasant look on her face.

“I’m looking for Efred White. Do you know him?” Louise asked.

“Yes’m. I know ‘m. I ain’t seen him lately.”

“If you see him, will you tell him that Mrs. Hartin is looking for him and ask him to get by to see me?”

“I’ll tell ‘m,” the woman promised.
“Thank you very much.”

I imagine Dot pulled away slowly. Maybe she turned the car around in a driveway two houses down. They went back down the street the way they came in, and Dot and Louise both waved at the woman as they drove past her.

“I sure wish I could find Efred,” Louise lamented on the ride back to Covenant Place.

“Mother, I’m sure he’s around somewhere,” Dot assured her.

Dorothy told me that my great-grandmother had called her to inquire after Efred’s whereabouts.

“Miz Hartin asked me about him,” she told me. “I said I didn’t know nothin’ about him. He might be done passed.”

My great-grandmother left him money in her will so my great-uncle tried hard to find Efred but could not, and finally assumed that he had preceded Louise in death.

“Ed Junior never could find anything about him,” my grandmother said.

Because no one else could, I was determined to know what had happened to Efred when I was in Sumter on a recent visit. Though everyone has assumed that by this point Efred had passed away, if he has there is no record of it in Sumter County. I was optimistic that with a little research I’d know and be able to tell everyone else, but I, too, kept running into dead ends. I keep hoping that one day we’ll know for sure, and we’ll be able to properly pay our respects to the man who so faithfully cared. Efred got away from us. He had disappeared quietly, and none of us have been able to find him, just as he did every Friday when he had finished the yard work at 255 Broad. When he worked, he showed up, worked, and left inaudibly. He’d erase his footprints from the sandy soil.
Then no one would see nor hear from him until a week had passed. This time it seems as though he has disappeared for good.
Chapter Eight: Sit-ins and Sumter

When I was growing up, I always enjoyed my history classes, particularly the twentieth century material. I was amazed each time I heard about North Carolina’s Civil Rights Movement’s claim to fame: the Greensboro sit-ins. On February 1, 1960, four black college students from North Carolina A&T University staged a sit-in in Woolworth’s department store lunch counter. The sit-in lasted for several days with the help of more students from A&T and Women’s College, now the University of North Carolina – Greensboro. When I was younger, I had a hard time understanding why blacks and whites couldn’t eat together in public restaurants. I was fascinated that this event took place in the very city where I was born eighteen years later, a city where my four grandparents have lived most of their adult lives. I knew that this brave act by Greensboro’s college students sparked similar acts throughout the South, but I never knew the specifics of those other places and events.

The summer I was twenty-six, I was visiting college friends who had moved to Memphis, Tennessee. While touring the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, the site of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, I paid close attention to the area of the museum pertaining to the Greensboro sit-ins. And then I saw it in writing: mention that important sit-ins were held in Sumter, South Carolina. That was all the information it gave me, so unfortunately I left the museum with many questions. How had my family reacted to the Civil Rights Movement being carried out right under their noses? Why had no one told me about the Sumter sit-ins before? Where was my great-grandmother while this was going on? Did she happen to witness any of this in person?
Since only a handful of Southern towns and cities were mentioned in that paragraph on the wall of the museum in Memphis, I figured the sit-ins in Sumter had to really mean something to Sumterites and to the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement.

Upon my return home I began digging for answers. Some of my family members shrugged off really knowing much about Sumter’s sit-ins. My grandmother didn’t particularly remember them, though she wasn’t living in Sumter at the time. Numerous Google searches and trips to North Carolina State University’s D.H. Hill Library didn’t turn up anything either. My luck began to change when visiting Sumter for my great-uncle Ed Junior and great-aunt Laurelle’s fiftieth wedding anniversary party. Laurelle arranged for me to have an appointment with Mayor Bubba. I was intrigued. I didn’t know what to expect. Besides being a former mayor of Sumter, he is also a retired car salesman turned historian and Sumter archivist. He had grown his collection of material significantly since he left his mayoral office some fifteen years before. He knows almost everything there is to know about Sumter past and Sumter present. He seemed the right person for all my unanswered questions.

I met Mayor Bubba in his office in a deserted warehouse district of downtown Sumter. Across one wall in his office were ten file cabinets containing alphabetical files. The drawers were labeled with such intriguing titles as “NAACP to Negro Politicians” and “Historic Preservation to Industries.” Mayor Bubba had on one bookshelf Sumter phone books dating back to the twenties. On another shelf across the room he had a century’s worth of local newspapers bound into volumes.
Mayor Bubba and I spent the day together. He told me all kinds of details about life in Sumter through the years. He had a detailed answer for every question I tossed at him. Every question, that is, except the one about the Sumter sit-ins.

“What do you know about the sit-ins in Sumter during the Civil Rights Movement?” I asked.

Mayor Bubba only knew that C.N. McMillan, assistant manager of S.H. Kress lunch counter had used an electric cattle prod on the demonstrators.

Then he said, “Pull the folder labeled ‘Civil Rights.’”

Though I still didn’t find a large amount of material on the sit-ins in Sumter, I did find a couple of newspaper articles that helped me get my facts straight, at least. As it turns out, the sit-ins at the three Sumter lunch counters were held on March 4, 1960, which was my father’s eighth birthday. With a date to work with, I went back to my grandmother to find out if now she could tell me what the family did that day.

“Oh, I can tell you exactly,” she said. “We would have been on our way to Sumter from Greenville to celebrate Ned’s birthday. My father had just died a month before and we were going to Sumter every weekend to help Mother.”

Still, she had no specific recollection of the sit-ins that day in Sumter. Nevertheless, March 4, 1960, was a historic day in Sumter, one where the tension between blacks and whites finally reached the boiling point. My family members have told me numerous stories since then. I recreate the following narrative to demonstrate the disconnect between black and white Sumter citizens on an average day when an historic event occurred.
A handful of students from Sumter’s Morris College, a historically black institution, filed into Cut Rate Drug Store in the downtown shopping district on Main Street, sat down at the counter, and asked to be served lunch. When they were refused service, the students remained in their seats, calmly and quietly leafing through Bibles they had brought with them. Ten or twelve students were doing the same down the street at the S.H. Kress lunch counter. A block away a few more students were trying to get a bite to eat at the counter in Lawson’s Department Store.

When Sheriff I. Byrd Parnell arrived on the scene at Kress, he was asked by assistant manager McMillan to remove the students.

“I asked them to leave,” recalled Sheriff Parnell in an article in The Sumter Daily Item.

When the students failed to comply, Parnell said he physically brought them out of the store. Once his work there was done, Parnell headed down the street to Sumter Cut Rate Drug and forced the students from the lunch counter there as quickly as possible, and arrested them. I can’t imagine the Sheriff would have treated the protesters with compassion. I imagine what he would have done is been at the very least firm in his grip as he took each protester out. Next he headed to Lawson’s where Dr. J.H. Lawson had closed his business to avoid a potential scuffle in his store.

“I told Dr. Lawson to open up because we wouldn’t allow anyone to close down a business in Sumter,” Sheriff Parnell said.

He reported that he felt sure that the sit-ins would have turned violent had he not taken preventative steps to end them almost as soon as they began. I think they probably already were rather violent.
McMillan, of Kress, said that he, too, feared violence would erupt, though he was the one reported to have brandished an electric cattle prod during the sit-ins in his store. McMillan stated that it was store policy not to serve Negroes at the lunch counter. Dr. William Van Deest of Sumter Cut Rate Drug maintained that his store had the same policy.

Lawson, the third store owner said that, “Within thirty minutes after the defendants were arrested, I had two phone calls. The callers told me to let them know if anything else like that happened and they’d get ‘em.”

Lieutenant J.L. Dollard of Sumter’s police force said that there was no written law against a black person buying a soft drink over a counter in Sumter, but they could not be seated and expect service.

The twenty-six Morris College students who staged three sit-ins in downtown Sumter on March 4, 1960, ended up much like those who participated in similar actions in other places: in jail charged with conspiracy to breach of peace.

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I imagine that while twenty-six black college students were in downtown Sumter fighting to rise from their status as second-class citizens, Alice was busy dusting and vacuuming the house at 255 Broad, which was then on the edge of town. She had heard rumors that the students from Morris might try to get things stirred up in town, but she had no idea that today was the day. She was too busy to really think about it. Wednesdays had always been her regular day at Mrs. Hartin’s, but since they had family coming into town for the weekend (again), Alice had volunteered to come on Friday this week instead. Normally Friday was her day at the Bynums’, and that never changed. Today
she’d be cleaning both houses and could stay at neither one too long. She tried not to get any dust on her outfit. She knew she wouldn’t have time to go home and change before she had to be at the Bynums’ at two.

Louise was in the kitchen. Her homemade, made-from-scratch brownies were in the oven, and she kept monitoring their progress by cracking open the yellow oven door and peering in. Though she was cooking, she was dressed up, though all in black, and wearing nice shoes and clip-on pearl earrings. She wore black all the time these days. She was still in mourning from her husband’s death.

Ella was in the living room watching a game show on television. She was an older version of Louise, both in looks and in apparel, except Ella was tall and very slender; Louise was thin, too, but several inches shorter. Today Louise wore a mid-calf black skirt and black shoes with a tiny kitten heel. She had a shiny light blue blouse on under a black wool cardigan. Though she wasn’t going to leave the house until suppertime, Ella had a fully made up face. She was even wearing a heavy brooch. This was just how she was, always dressed in case company should stop by unannounced. As the show ended, Ella got up to turn the television off just as Alice entered with a rag in hand and began dusting the wooden legs and arms of the burgundy velvet sofa in the corner.

“Alice, would you have a sandwich?” Ella asked.

“Oh, yas’m. I believe I will. I am hungry,” Alice said, pushing back a strand of straight salt and pepper hair from her face.

“Does toasted pimento cheese sound all right?”

“Yas’m. Sounds just fine.”
Ella exited the living room, leaving faint traces of perfume behind her. In the kitchen Ella made four sandwiches, placed each of them on a Desert Rose salad plate, and poured four glasses of sweet iced tea. Meanwhile, Louise was just opening the oven and the smell of warm chocolate brownies began to fill the house.

“What time are we expecting them, Louise?” Ella asked.

“Oh, I expect they’ll be here around four o’clock,” she replied. “I thought we’d all go down to Cole’s for dinner since that’s Ned’s favorite place, and come back here for birthday cake and ice cream.”

“Are the girls coming with us?” Ella asked.

The girls were Ned and Joe’s cousins, Donna and Honey.

“Yes, Ed Junior and Laurelle are going to drop them by on their way to the movies. They are going to stop in for cake and ice cream when they come back to get the girls.”

“All right. Well, I’ll take our sandwiches in the breakfast room.”

Ella pushed open the swinging door carrying two of the plates. A few seconds later she carried two glasses of tea to the table and sat down at one end of it.

“Alice?” she called out from her seat.

“Yas’m?” came a voice from one of the bedrooms.

“Your lunch is ready!”

Louise was checking the brownies again as Alice came in the kitchen for her plate.

“Alice, one of those is for Efred. Will you take it out to him?” Louise said.
Alice nodded. She took the two plates, stacking them up her left forearm. She
took four steps forward and pushed open the screen door, came down the back steps, and
hollered out, “Efred! Lunch!”

She set the two plates down on the stone bench in the yard and went back in the
house for the tea. By the time she came back, Efred was seated on the bench enjoying his
sandwich. He was, as my father, Ned, remembers, “skinny as a rail.” He had a head full
of wooly gray hair. He wore dark slacks that had been dusted with the sandy soil found in
the backyard, but his blue button down and his hands were clean. He had leaned his rake
against the side of the house next to the back door. Alice joined him, sitting next to him
on the bench. She set the two glasses down next to her.

“It’s turned out to be a right pretty day,” she commented.

The temperature was in the low sixties that day and breezy, typical March
weather. Efred grunted an affirmative sound. He had hung his jacket and felt hat on the
nail on the garage wall upon his arrival. He had gotten warm on his walk over that
morning. The two continued eating together. Alice made a comment every few minutes,
but Efred, though glad for the company, didn’t offer much talk in return. Ten minutes
later, once the two had finished their lunches, Alice collected the dishes and went back
into the house to finish changing the sheets in the two guest bedrooms before she walked
to the Bynums’ house. Efred quietly returned to his work in the yard. He would soon be
finished, too.

Dot, Big Joe, their boys, and their dog, Pee Wee, had come down to see Louise
every weekend for the past month, since Louise’s husband’s death, a result of his third
heart attack. Ed had suffered his first one while Dot was away at Converse College years
before, and spent a long time in the hospital recovering. He had then been instructed by
his doctor to live a less stressful life, take medicine, eat healthier foods, lose a little
weight, monitor his diabetes more closely, and cut back his hours at Thomas & Howard,
though the doctor knew nothing then about the risk Ed took by smoking cigarettes, one
after another all day long.

“It wasn’t long before he was back at work doing what he’d always done,” Dot
remembered.

In the twenty years since, Ed’s habits were much the same as they had been
before the first heart attack, and in the meantime he had suffered a second. The third one
had claimed his life on February 3, 1960, at age sixty-two, leaving Louise widowed at
fifty-five. So much of his waking life had been spent in his office in the Thomas &
Howard warehouse downtown.

“He worked for them until the day he died,” his son, Ed Junior said.

There had been an outpouring of love and concern shown to Louise and her
family by their friends and fellow citizens of Sumter.

“People brought food by the tons,” Dot remembered. “My husband said in his
grief he gained about six pounds.”

For all of those people who had sent memorials, flowers, or food, there were now
hundreds of thank you notes to be written. This was one of Dot’s main tasks on the
weekends she was in Sumter. Because they had lost a family member unexpectedly and
then had to settle his estate and attend to other items of business, in addition to dealing
with their own grief, the sit-ins of 1960 both in Sumter and elsewhere went largely
unnoticed by the Hartins.
“I guess that’s why we didn’t pay attention to the sit-ins,” Dot said. “We were all tied up in his death and trying to help Mother. I can’t remember them.”

On March 4, 1960, Louise wasn’t aware of what was happening a couple of miles away in the downtown shopping district. And until Alice was through getting the house ready for visitors, it is likely that she wasn’t either.

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When their trial ended on April 21, 1960, all twenty-six Morris College students were found guilty and sentenced to pay a fine of $100 each or spend thirty days in jail. Many of these students chose jail time rather than paying the fine because, according to Mayor Bubba, young blacks who were arrested during civil rights demonstrations thought of their police records as badges of honor.

The college students continued to be active in the Civil Rights Movement, though they received the most attention for their sit-ins.

“All the big trouble came from Morris College,” Mildred Shaw said.

Sumter’s Morris College students did stir things up in town, but they were only doing what North Carolina A&T students were doing in Greensboro, Shaw University and Saint Augustine’s College students were doing in Raleigh, and South Carolina State College’s students were doing in Orangeburg. The bravery of all of them did little to change the mindsets of some in these Southern towns immediately, but earned some of the participants a mention in the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis years later. For that alone, those Morris College students, and their counterparts who were arrested for demanding a basic human right should be proud.

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Six years after the sit-ins, the *Charlotte Observer* pointed its finger at Sumter for more “flagrant violations of basic constitutional rights” of its black citizens. The editorial defended the rights of Morris College students to assemble and demonstrate peacefully, after another conflict between the students and the town of Sumter.

It said, “The authorities….have made arrests for ‘breach of peace’ when no peace was breached. In doing so, they have made a mockery of the constitutional guarantees of the right to assemble peaceably and to petition for redress of grievances….The students of Morris College in Sumter have as much right to demonstrate as the American Legion has the right to parade on November 11 or the Daughters of Confederacy to parade on Lee’s birthday….The Sumter police have supplied one of the most shocking examples of recent years. Their action can only increase tensions and give the students two immediate causes instead of one.”

By 1966, the year Morris College students were again under fire, those who noticed might say sit-ins were a somewhat frequent occurrence around town, and for that matter, all over the country. In the sixties when black Americans were finally beginning to gain a more equal footing, a group of black Sumterites decided to stage more sit-ins. This time, however, they’d be on Sunday mornings in white churches. Some white congregations caught wind of the plan early and voted on what to do if the situation actually arose. Some churches voted to let blacks in and some voted against it.

Sumter’s First Presbyterian Church is a stately church downtown with beautiful steps leading up to its front doors. On the Sunday when some African Americans were scheduled to attend, white male church members positioned themselves on those steps and refused to allow entry to those black worshippers.
“I thought it was terrible that some churches wouldn’t let them in,” Mildred Shaw said.

At Trinity United Methodist, Louise and Mildred’s church, the congregation voted to let them in after the Bishop sent a letter asking Methodist churches in his district to do so.

On one particular Sunday it happened, and on that day just as any other Sunday, Louise probably would have been present. Upon the dismissal of the Constance Herbert Sunday school class, with Alma Martin, she would have collected her purse and Bible and they would have made their way over to their teacher, Louis Warmoth.

“That was a mighty good lesson, Mr. Warmoth,” Louise probably said, and squeezed his hand a little. Alma nodded in agreement.

“Why, thank you, ladies,” Mr. Warmoth was pleased to be complimented. “You ladies look lovely today.”

Alma and Louise thanked him, told him they’d see him next week, and headed out of the classroom. Mr. Warmoth was right. They did look nice that Sunday, but they always did. It would have been just like Louise to wear a suit with a Peter Pan collar in jade green. Her clip-on earrings usually matched her brooch. Alma would have worn a similar outfit, maybe a patterned dress with a matching belt, and silk scarf in a coordinating color. The two ladies made their way to the sanctuary, probably speaking to everyone they saw on the way, people they’d known forever like Sig Boykin, Judge Purdy, May Sharp, Lila Lee Spratt, and Marion Myers.

A few minutes later they likely entered the back of the sanctuary and headed for Louise’s regular spot, the seventh pew on the left. She almost stopped dead in her tracks
when she noticed two well-dressed black women sitting right in her space. The nerve! she thought at first, and prepared to do what she always did when someone unknowingly took her seat, politely ask them to move. Alma, seeing what Louise saw, said nothing but placed her hand on Louise’s arm as they made their way up the aisle. The two had heard rumors that today might be the Sunday they’d have some visitors. Louise had even (if reluctantly) voted to allow them entrance should they attend. She felt in her heart that blacks and whites just shouldn’t worship together. However, by the time she made it all the way up to the seventh row, she had changed her mind. She sat down just behind the women in the eighth row with Alma, then leaned up between them and said, “Good morning. We’re glad you’re here.” The two women turned to smile at her just as the organist began the prelude.

Those two black women never made it back to Trinity, and neither did any other black worshippers. The actual event, which had caused quite a stir, turned out to be anticlimactic. My great-aunt and great-uncle, Jack and Betty Rhame, don’t remember any other visitors.

“We weren’t really targeted,” Jack said.

Things in Sumter have evolved, but as evidenced by many of the people I interviewed over the course of this project, things change slowly. Generally, Sumterites aren’t ones to get things all stirred up. The boat is not usually rocked. Sometimes things change slowly enough that the transition goes virtually unnoticed until the change is complete. This is just the way it is.
All of the external influences over my great-grandmother – her church, her employees, social change, and family – that I have described, bring me back around to her again. Years past an average American life expectancy, Louise remained Louise, true to herself and steadfast in her character, even after witnessing decade after decade of change. I think this is one reason why I remained constantly amazed by her. She’d tell me things, true things, that I had to take in for a moment before I really believed them. Like the time when I was much younger and she told me that when she was growing up she had no telephone. Or when she told me that as a young adult, she didn’t have a heated home, just coal burning stoves in every room. These things were hard for a young child to believe. My great-grandmother seemed so old to me, and I think all of this describes why. I think she thought herself as old sometimes too, but age wasn’t something that bothered her. Neither was death. She talked about it comfortably quite a lot.

Once right after we blessed Christmas dinner, she piped up, “I have just purchased twelve burial plots. Anyone who’s interested in being buried with me, just get with me after dinner.”

When my parents, sister, and I would visit her, during our goodbyes she said on more than one occasion, “Now when I die, the instructions for my funeral are inside my Bible. Make sure you look there.”
After hearing that a few times, my father told her, “Well, we’ll all come back here after your funeral, sit down together, open your instructions, and see how we did.”

When she turned eighty and the family threw a birthday party for her, she decided afterward that she didn’t need to have a birthday party every year anymore, just one every five years. So we went along with that and proceed to throw two big parties for her. On her eighty-fifth there was a pig picking at my cousin, Honey’s and her husband, Harold’s place at the lake. For her ninetieth birthday we had dinner for the family at Sunset Country Club in a private room. Ed Junior and Laurelle are members there.

When she was in her early nineties, she was hospitalized for a couple of months with several different ailments. She was in Tuomey Regional Medical Center in Sumter so long that most of us thought she would never make it home. Sometime during that hospital stay she decided that she had done everything on earth she needed to do. She was ready to go whenever she was called.

Her pastor, Phil Jones, who often came by to visit her, said about one of his visits, “I stood by her bedside. I didn’t think she’d get well, and she didn’t think so either. But she said to me through a smile, ‘I am ready to die. I’m not afraid to die. I am at peace, perfect peace.’”

She bounced back quite remarkably, though, after a few weeks. She resumed her daily walks and her driving, all of her normal activities. She even bought herself a new white Buick Skylark in her mid-nineties.

“Mrs. Hartin was driving after a lot of her friends were not,” Betty Rhame told me.
Said my cousin, Zoe Rhame Warmoth of her father-in-law Louis Warmoth, “He was envious of how she was driving herself around at an old age.”

For her ninety-fifth birthday the whole family and her best friend, Evelyn, came to a sit down dinner at one of the hotels in Sumter. Just in time for her ninety-eighth birthday, Laurelle decided to forgo the request for birthday parties only every five years and hosted one at her house. She did the same for her ninety-ninth.

About seven weeks before her one hundredth birthday Louise was admitted to the hospital to have a bleeding stomach ulcer treated. She stayed a few days, received several pints of blood and then returned to her independent apartment at Covenant Place, the retirement community where she’d been a resident for ten years. A few days after her return, her ulcer flared up again and she was sent back to the hospital for treatment. This pattern continued until her doctor informed my family that the hospital could not afford to give her any more blood because they had to save it for other patients, such as newborn babies and younger car accident victims.

Perhaps I should mention here that her mind had gotten confused in the last few years. A couple of years before, she had mailed me a birthday card to the wrong address with no check enclosed like she had intended. My annual twenty-five dollar birthday money did show up a couple of weeks after the fact, when my very embarrassed great-grandmother realized she’d left it out. Sometime around then my great-uncle and her power of attorney, Ed Junior, began writing her checks for her.

Once when I shipped her some chocolate-covered pretzels, my return address label on the package listed me as “Mary E. Rhame,” which is my legal name, though everyone I know calls me Betsy. She could not, for the life of her, figure out who she
knew named Mary in Raleigh. Following the rules of proper etiquette, this Southern lady still sent me a thank you card that read,

_Dear Mary,_

_Thank you for the lovely pretzels. I love them and am really enjoying them. Hope you are fine. Come when you can._

_With love, Louise_

She had no idea who I was. Around that time I believe she began to more fully realize her mortality. She knew she was mixed up. She would flat-out tell you if she couldn’t recall something, “I just can’t remember things like I used to.”

The family hired someone to check in on her every day to make sure she had on clean clothes and no runs in her stockings. But up until seven weeks before her death she was walking laps around Covenant Place daily. She’d walk outside around the building when the weather was nice, and up and down the halls inside when it was cold or raining. She moved slower than she used to, but she still got around pretty easily, and better than some people twenty or thirty years her junior. She continued to live in her two bedroom, two bath independent apartment while many folks younger than she were living in another area of Covenant Place, dependent on others for their care. And many of her contemporaries simply weren’t still living.

Because of her mental state and her failing health (she continued to experience internal bleeding), the family made the decision to move her to assisted living where she could get checked on by a nurse twenty-four hours a day and would have a roommate. The next time she came home from Tuomey, she didn’t go back to her apartment, but to her new room, now shared with a woman she’d known in Sumter all of her adult life. My
great-grandmother was none too happy about it either after living alone for forty-five years. She still had enough sense to know she wasn’t where she was supposed to be and she was most disgruntled.

While all this was going on, Laurelle, Donna, and Honey spent endless hours cleaning out her apartment, and we all began dividing up her belongings. While some were physically and emotionally exhausted from all this, Louise was quite exhausted from trying to figure out her surroundings.

“They keep moving me all around,” she told me when I went to see her in assisted living. “I don’t know where they’re going to move me next.”

I remember thinking how ironic it was that she was being moved about just as though she was a piece of furniture while we were all in the next wing doing just that.

That week in September 2004 on a Thursday, my dad drove to Sumter, rented a U-Haul and came back to Apex with my great-grandmother’s double bed for my sister, which she had promised her years before, a burgundy velvet couch with a flowered slipcover, various end tables and two rocking chairs, paintings of my dad and his brother promised to my grandmother for her fiftieth birthday (Dot was then almost eighty), and an array of books, cards, newspaper clippings, and photos. I was asked what I wanted from her things. I knew it was just a matter of time before she’d slip away from us, and I was already so upset about it I couldn’t even remember what she had that I might want. After a few phone calls back and forth with my mother and Laurelle, I was informed that the last piece of unclaimed furniture, my great-grandmother’s rose colored couch with wooden feet that curl up, was all that remained in her apartment and would be handed off to an antique dealer. My great-grandmother had probably had it in her living room for
sixty-five years. I even have a picture of my grandmother sitting on it when she was in her early twenties. So I intervened immediately. I called Laurelle and told her I’d be there that Sunday for the couch. I also knew that I needed to see my great-grandmother, and that it probably would be my last time doing so.

I borrowed my mom’s van with the back seats removed the night before and drove the three hours down to Sumter from Raleigh that Sunday morning. I rented a Toni Morrison novel on tape to listen to on the way down and back. I stopped at the Winn-Dixie about a half-mile from the retirement home to pick up flowers. She loved getting flowers. I imagined that hadn’t changed. I found Laurelle and Donna, there in her almost empty apartment, cleaning out her two bathrooms and kitchen. The couch was the only piece of furniture that remained. I remember being amazed at how quickly and easily we had all divided up her belongings. One hundred years worth of stuff.

Before moving anything, Donna took me down to see my great-grandmother and stayed with me in the room during our visit, which probably lasted about ten minutes. On the way down the hall, Donna warned me that these days she hardly knew who anybody was. Donna said she’d been in earlier to see her and she’d recognized her. She had told my great-grandmother then that I’d be coming by to see her, but Donna said that didn’t mean that she’d know me when I went in. So even though I felt prepared for this, when I walked into her room and heard her say, “Hello, Betsy”, I couldn’t help it. It choked me up. But she either didn’t notice or was too polite to act like she did. She couldn’t stop smiling. And she squealed a little when she saw that I had brought her flowers. I had taken a vase from her kitchen for them and placed it next to the thirteen-inch T.V. on the dresser.
She sat up on her bed, hugging her knees and looking at me in a most girlish way. She had stockings on under her camel-colored polyester pants. Her blouse matched the pants exactly, and it had a small diamond pattern on it. I’ll never forget that the color of her teeth matched her blouse and pants exactly. I guess I had never noticed that before. This time, she was smiling so big it was hard not to notice.

While I was there, Donna combed her hair, and we all chatted a bit. Every so often I had to turn away and pretend to be interested in what was on the television to dab away at my eyes. My great-grandmother asked me all the questions she always had. How was I? How was the weather in North Carolina? How was school? How was my job? When was I coming back for a visit? After a few minutes the nurses started coming around to walk everyone down to the dining room for lunch. Donna and I kissed her goodbye and I promised to stop back by after lunch.

But I couldn’t. I knew that in her current state sometimes she was nice and sometimes she was downright mean. Since I had just seen her at one of her few happy times, I couldn’t bear to go back in case she was upset about something later on. I wanted to, I suppose, end things on a high note. I didn’t go back, and Donna and Laurelle assured me that she wouldn’t remember that I’d said I would anyway. As soon as we ate lunch and moved the couch and a few other things into the back of the van, I got back on the highway headed north. I cried the whole way home. I never finished the Toni Morrison novel, *Jazz*. I couldn’t concentrate.

It didn’t turn out to be the last time I saw her, though. In mid-October my parents, sister, and I went down on our way to the beach for the weekend and visited her. That time she was in the hospital. We stayed a few minutes. She tried to be social but she was
confused. At one point during our visit she looked at me and asked how school was. For a second I happily thought how great it was that she remembered that I was in graduate school.

I answered that it was fine, to which she said, “I declare, you’re getting to be so grown up. One of these days you’re going to graduate from high school.”

It was on that visit and at that moment that I knew for sure I’d never see her again, and I was right. A few days before her November 9 birthday, she fell out of bed and broke her hip. Even with her age, the doctors decided to do surgery, and she did wake up from it, but lasted only a few more days.

More than ten years after she decided she was ready, it was her time to leave us. She made it to age one hundred and approximately one hour and forty minutes. She had always said she wanted to live to be a hundred. She’d had a will to live for a long time. When she died during her sleep in her hospital bed, she was surrounded by only a few of her things. A bathrobe, probably, and slippers. A few toilet items and a comb. Some birthday cards from friends and family members, and a flower arrangement or two. She had already passed on everything else of hers: her wisdom, her furniture, her clothing, and her love.
Epilogue

Here is the end of my story, and the completion of my attempt to understand my great-grandmother, and appreciate all the changes she saw in her one hundred years. Life for her in Sumter as a young adult was very different from my young adult life in Raleigh, North Carolina, but I like to think that despite all the differences, we still share some things in common.

The process of writing down all these stories and thoughts has been a long time in the making. In March 2004 my grandmother, Dot, and I traveled with a large group to Italy for ten days. We saw all the highlights, with one day each in Milan, Verona, Venice, Siena, Assisi, and Florence, and spent the last three days of the trip exploring Rome. On our last night in Rome, we ate an early dinner and were supposed to spend the evening packing and getting rest. Our suitcases were supposed to be out in front of our doors in the hall of the hotel at an ungodly hour the next day. Then we were to depart to the Leonardo da Vinci airport at seven in the morning.

Instead of packing, somehow Dot and I got into a discussion about her mother, my great-grandmother, and Dot shared some stories about her that I had never heard. I was fascinated and knew that I needed to do something with all my information. Interestingly, the story that most grabbed my attention didn’t make it into this collection of stories. So, I suppose I’m really not finished yet; I’m just at a good stopping place.

The Italy trip happened before my great-grandmother’s death, so upon my return, I should have hightailed it to Sumter and interrogated Louise for all the information I could have before it was too late. I never got the chance to do that. Fortunately, she’d
been telling me stories about her life for all of mine, so I had a lot to go on. Family members, friends, and my own research endeavors have helped me fill in all the holes.

During my most intense period of interviewing folks for information for this work, my Uncle Joe, and grandmother, Dot Rhame, had a phone conversation about my project. During it, my uncle remarked that he could tell me most anything I wanted to know about life growing up in the South in the middle of the twentieth century, but that I would never really know how it was. He’s right. I haven’t experienced segregation and integration, the plight of black domestic workers, and a small town way of life myself. But I’ve heard accounts from numerous people who did. My work is a conglomeration of all that I have heard and seen during my nearly two years of research, plus all the memories I already had, and it is a recreation of what life was like in those years before I was even a thought. Every piece of information, every scene, and every conversation included in this work is fact or based strongly upon fact.

Throughout this process, I have come to a full appreciation for oral and family histories. I didn’t want anything to be lost to the passing of time and the fading of memories. I got a verbal pat on the back for that during a visit with May and Glen Sharp, old friends of the family and longtime Sumterites.

Just before I left, Glen said to me, “Ed and Lou were motivated, healthy, dynamic people, and if no one writes it down about them, it is lost forever.”

The stories of Louise Hartin were just too good not to write down.
Recipes from Louise’s Kitchen

Louise’s mother, Ella Sharp, was known for her cooking. She both did it well and enjoyed doing it. When Louise married Ed Hartin at the age of nineteen and they established a home together, Ella, a widow, moved with them. In the house on Broad Street, several of my family members recall that Ella did the majority of the cooking for the family. Louise, with her ever-present sweet tooth, supplemented Ella’s cooking with delicious baked goods for birthdays and holidays.

“Grandmama never cooked anything until Nanny died,” my uncle, Joe, told me recently.

When Ella suffered a stroke in 1960, Louise had to plan and cook all meals herself. She did just fine with the everyday food, and continued to bake delicious things. I’ve provided a few of her favorite and most often cooked holiday specialties here.

Cheese Straws

3 ½ cups all purpose flour (plain)
¼ tsp salt
¾ or less tsp. Cayenne pepper
¾ lb. butter or margarine
1 lb. sharp cheddar cheese shredded (about 4 cups)

Sift flour, salt and pepper in large bowl. Cut butter into small pieces and blend into dry ingredients with fingers until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add cheese and continue blending until dough hangs together and is no longer crumbly. Worth with ¼ dough at this time. Roll out to a rectangular 1/3 inch thick; cut into strips ½ inch wide and about 4 inches long, using a pastry wheel or pizza cutter. Place on ungreased baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes, only until very lightly browned. Do NOT overbake. Remove, cool and place in an air tight tin, placing waxed paper between layers. Freezes beautifully. Yields about 125 strips.
Brownies

4 eggs, well beaten
½ cup butter or margarine
4 squares baking chocolate
1 cup flour
2 cups sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. vanilla
1 cup chopped nuts

Melt chocolate and butter in top of double boiler and cool slightly. Then add the well beaten eggs. Sift flour – sugar – baking powder and add. Then add vanilla and nuts. Bake in pan at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Cool in pan and cut but do not serve until cold.

Bourbon Balls
(may be prepared ahead of time)

2 Tbsp. Cocoa
1 c. powdered sugar
¼ c. bourbon (rum may be substituted)
2 Tbsp. Light corn syrup
2 c. crushed vanilla wafers (or similar plain cookie)
1 c. finely chopped pecans or walnuts (or mixed)

Sift cocoa and sugar into a bowl. Stir in bourbon which has been combined with syrup. Mix well; add crumbs and nuts and mix well again. Roll into small balls about ¾ inch in diameter. Drop into a bowl of powdered sugar, roll around to coat on all sides, and allow to dry several hours before using. Freezes well. Yield: 3 dozen; triple the recipe to serve 50.
REFERENCES MATERIALS

Notes on Sources

My most important sources have been the interviews I have conducted with family members and family friends, many of whom reside in Sumter, South Carolina, and my own memories. Aside from that, various books, newspaper articles, and documents on public record played an important role in my gathering information that reflected a complete picture. Below is a more complete listing, chapter by chapter, of all of my sources of information.

Chapter One

Information about Hurricane Hugo is from Laura Parker and William Booth’s article, “Hurricane Hugo rips through South Carolina,” which appeared in the Washington Post on September 22, 1989, and which I accessed at www.washingtonpost.com. Debbie Rhyne’s “Radio station provided comfort, vital information,” from the “Hugo Remembered” supplement to The Item, published September 22, 1999; an interview with my father, Ned Rhame, on April 27, 2005; the article, “Residents stunned by storm’s fury” by John Lynch, which appeared in the “Hugo Remembered” supplement on September 22, 1999; and an email from W.A. “Mayor Bubba” McElveen, Jr., on September 23, 2006, all helped me write this chapter. Reverend Phil Jones’ comment on my great-grandmother was in her eulogy, delivered at her funeral on November 12, 2004, at Trinity United Methodist Church, Sumter, South
Carolina. The transcript of her letter was originally written by Louise Hartin on June 27, 2000, and received by me a few days later.

Chapter Two

Information on Louise’s all-black wardrobe came from a conversation with my father, Ned Rhame, on April 24, 2005. Information on the architectural style of the home at 255 Broad Street was found in Stephen R. Sennott’s Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Architecture, Volume One, published in 2004; a Sumter County property card for 255 Broad Street from the 2004 tax year; and from an interview with Mayor Bubba McElveen, Jr. on October 13, 2005. The information on the Windsor chair came from both my own memories and from Harold H. Hart’s Chairs Through the Ages: A Pictorial Archive of Woodcuts and Engravings, published in 1977. The 1937 City Directory was published in 1937 by Baldwin Directory Company in Charleston, South Carolina, and was shown to me by Mayor Bubba during our visit together on October 13, 2005. My father told me about how my great-grandmother hid her silver during a conversation on September 6, 2005, and he told me about finding money under the bathmat on June 11, 2006. Information on the television watched came from an email from my cousin, Honey Truesdale, on July 13, 2006. Information on my great-grandparents’ purchase of their home was provided by my grandmother, Dot Rhame, in an interview on April 14, 2005. The interview with my great-uncle, Jack Rhame, was conducted on July 7, 2006. Information on Broad Street’s busyness came from my father, Ned Rhame, on June 11, 2006. The interview with my uncle, Joe Rhame, Jr., was conducted over the telephone on July 5, 2006. The population and growth of Sumter information was provided by Ed
Hartin, Jr. on July 8, 2006. All the information gathered from Mildred Shaw was done during our visit on July 6, 2006. I learned about the circumstances of the sale of the house at 255 Broad from my great-aunt and great-uncle, Jack and Betty Rhame on July 7, 2006, and from various documents found in the Register of Deeds in the Sumter County Courthouse, all recorded November 2, 1995, including: a mortgage of real estate by mortgagors Ernest J. Porter and Alfreda G. Porter in volume 634, page 354; a survey of the property conveyed to the Porters in plat book 95, page 1151; and a title to real estate for Louise Sharp Hartin, grantor, and Ernest J. Porter, Jr. and Alfreda G. Porter, grantees, in volume 634, page 351. Information about the spring break trips to Florida was provided in an interview with Donna Windham and Laurelle Hartin on July 7, 2006. Betty Rhame’s interview was July 7, 2006. Information about Swan Lake-Iris Gardens was gathered from the park’s web site, www.sumter-sc.com/VisitingUs/SwanLake.aspx, and a visit to the Sumter County Museum on October 14, 2005. Sumter’s current population is from the 2000 United States census, accessible at www.census.gov. My phone interview with my great-aunt, Betty Rhame, took place June 30, 2006. During my visit with Mildred Shaw on July 6, 2006, her plumber waved at us while she was showing me around town. The City of Sumter’s web site may be accessed at www.sumter-sc.com/Default.aspx.

Chapter Three

Mayor Bubba provided me information about Epperson’s Grocery during our interview on October 13, 2005. My father, Ned Rhame, relayed to me the scene where he held the flowers in the trunk on the way to the cemetery. He also told me about Alma and
Sam Martin, and Paul McCracken. These conversations took place on June 11, 2006 and September 6, 2005. Betty Rhame told me about my great-grandmother’s dangerous habit of recklessly backing out of her driveway on July 7, 2006. Several people provided me with information concerning the burning of Trinity United Methodist on June 10, 1960, including Ned Rhame (November 3, 2005; June 11, 2006; April 24, 2005), Dot Rhame (April 14, 2005), Ed Junior and Laurelle Hartin (July 8, 2006), Mayor Bubba (July 7, 2006), May Sharp (July 8, 2006), and Jack and Betty Rhame (July 7, 2006). Information on all the committees to rebuild Trinity Church was gathered from the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* published February 28, 1963. I gathered information on the Biblical significance of the stained glass window my great-grandmother gave to Trinity Church from a pamphlet the church office gave me called, “I am the Light: The stained glass windows of Trinity United Methodist Church, Sumter, South Carolina,” written by Robin Stanley Konieczny and printed in August 1994.

*Chapter Four*

published in 1993, and the web site of the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs, available at www.strom.clemson.edu/strom/bio.html. Dot Rhame’s comments on my great-grandmother’s admiration of Thurmond came from phone interviews on October 19, 2005 and September 12, 2005. The Dr. Bob Jones quote was pulled from The Sumter Daily Item, which published text from Jones’ weekly radio address, on April 21, 1960. This article was courtesy Mayor Bubba on October 13, 2005. Information on Louise’s extracurricular activities and charities was from Ned Rhame (June 11, 2006), Dorothy Willis (July 7, 2006), and Jack and Betty Rhame (July 7, 2006). Information on Murr Hall was provided by Ned Rhame in an interview on June 11, 2006. I’ll note here just because it didn’t fit in well in this chapter, that “Uncle Murr” lived until the age of 105. He’s the oldest person I’ve ever known. He is both Mildred Shaw’s and my grandfather, Big Joe’s uncle.

Chapter Five

Information about Louise’s running of her home was given to me in interviews with her children, Dot Rhame (April 14, 2005) and Ed Hartin, Jr. (July 8, 2006), and her grandson, Ned Rhame (June 11, 2006). Stories about segregation were provided to me by my uncle, Joe Rhame, Jr. (July 5, 2006), Mayor Bubba (October 13, 2005), Mildred Shaw (July 6, 2006), and Honey Truesdale (July 10, 2006 – email one). The interview with Betty Rhame took place on July 7, 2006. She provided some information on Shaw Air Force Base. The current racial breakdown for District 17 Sumter schools was provided to me in an email from Shelly Galloway, public information specialist for
Sumter School District 17. Information on race and population is Sumter County is from www.census.gov.

Chapter Six

Donna Windham and Laurelle Hartin told me the story about Louise’s payment system for her employees on July 7, 2006. Ned Rhame told me about Dorothy Willis’ help on holidays on April 27, 2005. I interviewed Dorothy on July 7, 2006, and her note in the mail to me was postmarked July 21, 2006. Honey Truesdale, in email number two on July 10, 2006, told me about the death of Dorothy’s husband. Ned Rhame (June 11, 2006) and Dot Rhame (June 28, 2006) and Mayor Bubba (October 13, 2005) gave me the information about African American domestic workers. Ned Rhame told me about Alice (April 24, 2005 and June 11, 2006). Mildred Shaw provided all the information about her relationship with Clara, her family’s maid, on July 7, 2006.

Chapter Seven

Ed Junior (July 8, 2006) and Laurelle Hartin (July 7 and 8, 2006), Dot Rhame (June 28, 2006), Donna Windham (July 7, 2006), Joe Rhame, Jr. (July 5, 2006), Ned Rhame (June 11, 2006 and April 24, 2005), and Dorothy Willis (July 7, 2006) all provided me with a wealth of information about Efred White, my great-grandmother’s yard man. I visited the Probate Office in the Sumter County Courthouse on July 7, 2006, and turned up no additional helpful information on Efred.
Chapter Eight

My visit to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, was with Elizabeth Jackson, Lora Tillman, Teresa Amentt Jennings, and Carrie Oakes, and it helped spark my interest in this entire project, but specifically in how the Civil Rights Movement affected Sumter. I credit Mayor Bubba for his help on some of the information for this chapter on October 13, 2005. What he didn’t know off hand, he had a file that could answer my questions. In his files I found newspaper articles to help me, including Jack Copeland’s article, “Negroes Sentenced,” published in The Sumter Daily Item on April 27, 1960. Mildred Shaw also contributed some information on the sit-ins in Sumter on July 6, 2006. Dot Rhame helped me piece together what my family was doing the day of the sit-ins in Sumter during a conversation on October 19, 2005. She provided additional information on Efred on July 10, 2006, as did Ned Rhame on June 11, 2006. Dot Rhame and Ed Hartin, Jr. told me about their father, Ed Hartin, in interviews on July 8, 2006 (Ed Junior) and April 14, 2005 (Dot). Dot talked to me about how her family paid little attention to Sumter’s sit-ins on October 19, 2005. An editorial printed in The Charlotte Observer on February 18, 1966, entitled, “The Constitution and Sumter” was used in this chapter. This was provided to me by Mayor Bubba on October 13, 2005. Mildred Shaw (July 6, 2006), Dot Rhame (June 28, 2006), Jack and Betty Rhame (July 7, 2006), Donna Windham and Laurelle Hartin (July 7, 2006), and Ned Rhame (June 11, 2006) all told me about the period of time when black Sumterites were visiting white churches.
Chapter Nine

Rev. Phil Jones’ comment was from the eulogy he gave at my great-grandmother’s funeral on November 12, 2004, as was his comment about her will to live, appearing at the end of this chapter, and unattributed to him in the text. My great-aunt, Betty Rhame, and her daughter, Zoe Rhame Warmoth, told me about my great-grandmother’s amazing quality of life in her old age on July 7, 2006. Louise’s thank you note for the pretzels was sent to me in March 2003. Her official time of death comes from her certificate of death on file in the Sumter County Health Department and in her estate file on record in the Probate Office in the Sumter County Courthouse.

Epilogue

The conversation Dot and Uncle Joe had about my project was told to me over the phone with Dot on July 10, 2006. Glen Sharp’s compliment to me came from my visit with him and his wife, May, on July 8, 2007.

Recipes

I talked with Joe Rhame on the phone on July 5, 2006. Laurelle Hartin provided me with Louise’s cheese straws recipe. Dorothy Willis gave me the recipe for Louise’s brownies. Dot Rhame gave me the bourbon ball recipe from Southern Living Party Cookbook by Celia Marks and editors of Southern Living magazine.
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--. Email to Betsy Rhame. 13 July 2006.


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--. Letter to Betsy Rhame. 21 July 2006.
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Christy and Betsy sitting on front steps. Personal photograph by Beth Rhame. Spring 1981.


Dot and Joe leaving the church on their wedding day. Personal photograph. 22 June 1946.

Dot and Joe walking across yard. Personal photograph. July 1941.

Dot and Louise, last photo taken together for Louise’s 99th birthday. Personal photograph by Betsy Rhame. 9 Nov. 2003.

Dot at high school graduation. Personal photograph. May 1941.


Dot sitting on steps in front of house. Personal photograph by Ed Hartin. 1943.


Engagement photo of Dot. Personal photograph by Woodlawn Studios. 1945.


Louise (second from right on first row) with group in front of Green Street Methodist Church, Columbia, S.C. Personal photograph. 1912.


Obituary of Alice Naomi “Coffee Maker” Howard. Exact newspaper and date unknown.


