

Retrospective

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When is something more than just what it appears to be? Is a house still a house after the warmth of a family has abided in it for several years, or is it a home? If that home, when it inevitably fades to a memory, remains a subconscious scrapbook of tender, innocent moments that continue to shape a person's life, is it just a memory, or a foundation? When I look back on my childhood memories of my great grandma Burdette's home in Bogalusa, Louisiana, I see more than just a house and a few memories. I see a foundation for retrospect, one that has shown me just how precious one day can be.

My dad's side of the family, the Burdettes, grew up in Bogalusa, a charming, almost storybook cliché, small town. He always told me these great stories of he and his cousins riding dirt bikes to a sandy creek and swinging from a fireman's hose in a tree that stretched and shot them into the air, then they would plunge into the shallow water. These were the kinds of things I always wished I could do, but growing up in a small suburb, never had the chance to. But things were different at Grandma Burdette's house. Limitations came only from my imagination, not busy highways and subdivisions.

The Burdette's gathered at Grandma's house on any occasion, whether it was Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, or just summertime fun. I remember Saturday mornings, and Sundays after church, when my dad would get a phone call, and five minutes later, we were getting ready to leave for Bogalusa. The trip took about an hour, but always seemed like forever. When the car turned down the quiet, blacktop road where she lived, I vividly remember watching

tall pines, and majestic, seemingly ancient oaks roll by, with their endless shadows passing over the car, allowing blinding rays of sunshine to dance across my face. As the car neared her house, a flurry of excitement would shoot through my nerves, making it impossible to remain calm. One short curve later, and there it was-Grandma's house. Her home was about eighty years old and, typical of that era, was a one-story, white, cottage style home, lifted off the ground by cinder blocks. The pine straw-laden front lawn had a walkway that extended from the road to the concrete steps, which led to the front door. The inside of her house was typical of Southern charm, and a formal dining room greeted visitors with its warm and inviting splendor. Spotless white carpet covered the dining areas and bedrooms, and authentic wooden floors, complete with creaking, lay elsewhere. Each room had its own charm, but the sunken family room was a magical place where the men watched football, kids played checkers and card games, women gossiped the latest news, and the entire family crammed in for Christmas gift exchanging. The home was beautiful, and I spent much of my time inside, but the foundational memories were made in the wonderland backyard.

The backdoor led from the family room to the back patio where a jacuzzi, a picnic table, and handmade, wooden benches that wrapped around a large, moss covered oak tree, invited everyone to spend time outside. The rolling backyard expanded hundreds of yards in any direction, and that couldn't contain a child's frenzy; a forest, full of adventure, lay directly behind. One of my fondest childhood memories was the clubhouse, a small building, created especially for kids by my great grandfather, with a single, open room, complete with lounge chairs, couches, and lots of windows that let the feeling of being outdoors remain prevalent. The clubhouse had some peculiar residents, however. A bee's nest lay hidden between the front and back wall panels, and my cousins and I always put our ears to the wall, and listened to their

constant buzzing, wondering how they got in and out of the nest, and what they were up to. The clubhouse sat on the right edge of the yard before it banked steeply down to a sandy creek about ten feet below. My cousins and I explored the back yard and took all the adventures it had to offer until ready to pass out, then we would go to the house, grab something to eat, and return to finish a game of hide and seek. Never once did I pause to think about time, responsibilities, or insecurities. All burdens, what little there were at my age, were lifted when that front door opened at Grandma's house.

Much of my hope rested there, a place where I didn't have to worry, or even want to think about growing up. In fact, it was a place where everyone, even the adults, didn't worry about life's curveballs quite as much. But life threw a fastball in 1998, when Grandma Burdette passed away, and the house sold shortly after her funeral. I haven't been back to Bogalusa much since then. I'm in college now, and those days when the world seemed like a nice place are but a warm, distant memory, ever-present but shrouded by the anxieties this world has to offer. But, I constantly look back at those moments and think about how much my hopes and dreams have changed since then.

Looking forward versus looking back—there are such opposite desires between the two. As a child, it seemed like every fancy of my imagination revolved around being "grown up." I couldn't stay up late and watch movies until I was "grown up." I couldn't understand what my family members were laughing about in their conversations until I was "grown up." I couldn't drive, or get married, become a rock star, or anything fun until my age and status would allow it. Yet now, at the age of nineteen, well on my way to becoming an adult in the eyes of the world, I would love nothing more in this life than to relive those early years. A time when I was free, controlled only by my parents, and responsibilities meant nothing more than cleaning my room

and getting schoolwork done. My "real world" wasn't stereotyped by MTV, but reality simply didn't exist. *My world* was one of fantasy, freedom, imagination, superheroes, action figures, video games, birthday cake, and people who defined the word "friend." I didn't care what people thought of me. Childhood was a period of innocence when fashion wasn't a statement, friends didn't know what it meant to let friends drive drunk, and Life was just a good bowl of cereal. But as I look back on those years, it teaches me a simple life lesson. Every day is just a memory, and if those memories are to become foundations, one must live every day to *make* it a memory.