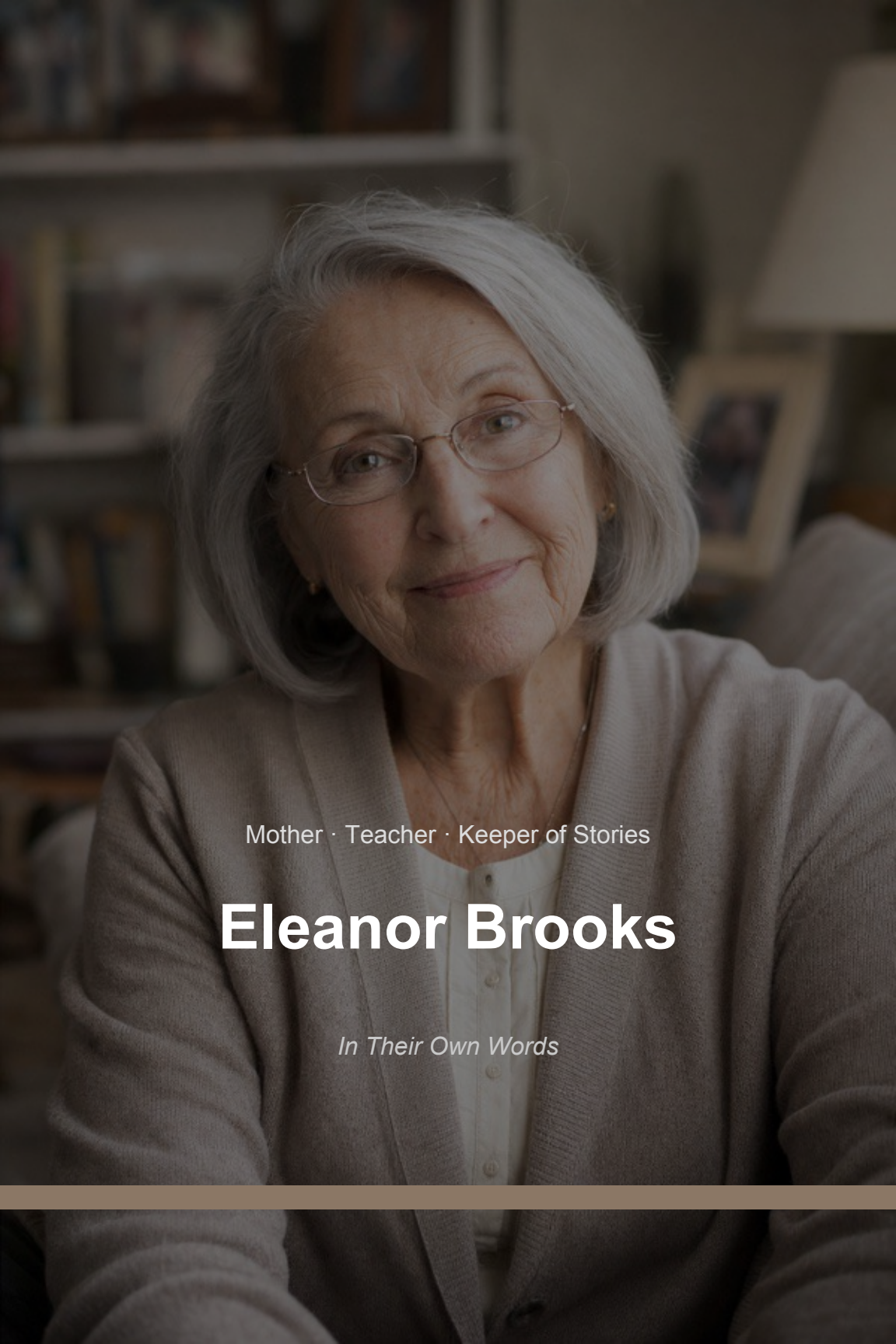


A portrait of an elderly woman with short, wavy white hair and glasses. She is wearing a light-colored cardigan over a white button-down shirt. She has a gentle smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a softly blurred interior, showing a bookshelf on the left and a lamp on the right.

Mother · Teacher · Keeper of Stories

Eleanor Brooks

In Their Own Words

HeartTold

Family stories

hearttold.com

*Interviews conducted and memoir crafted with HeartTold. All content belongs to the family of
Eleanor Brooks.*

The Story of Eleanor Brooks

Born Impatient by the River

I was born on the 14th of March, 1948, in a farmhouse just outside Marietta, Ohio, on a bend of the Muskingum River where it runs down to meet the Ohio. The doctor didn't make it in time, so the midwife, Mrs. Pruitt, caught me. Mother loved to remind me that I came into the world impatient and never quite grew out of it, and I have never had much of an argument against her.

Ours was a corn-and-hog farm, eighty acres my grandfather Samuel cleared. The house had no telephone until I was nine, and the privy was out back until I was twelve, but I never once felt poor. The river fog coming off the water in the mornings, the smell of bacon and woodsmoke. I can shut my eyes right now and I am standing in that kitchen.

The very first thing I can remember is standing on a kitchen chair to reach the windowsill, watching my father walk the fence line in the snow with the dog. I couldn't have been more than three. I remember thinking he was the biggest, surest thing in the whole white world. I have carried that picture my entire life. Whenever things have been hard, I can find my

way back to that window, to the fog and the snow and the certainty of my father out in it, and something in me settles.

What that memory means to me now, at this distance, is simple: I was safe. Genuinely, completely safe, in the way that children should be and not all of them are. I was lucky in that, and I spent thirty-eight years in a classroom knowing full well that not every child had a kitchen like mine to come from. I have never forgotten it and I have never taken it for granted.



My father, walking the fence line in the snow

Where We Came From

The Hales came down out of the Scotch-Irish who poured

through the Cumberland Gap. My people were in the Ohio Valley by the 1820s, farming the same kind of hill ground their grandparents had farmed in the old country. Mother's side, the Whitfields, were English stock who had come through Pennsylvania. So I am river-valley on both sides, generations of people who could read weather and soil, who never had two nickels to rub together but never owed a man a dollar either. My grandfather Samuel used to say we had been poor but particular for two hundred years.

He cleared those eighty acres with his own hands. I want my grandchildren to know that: that they come from a man who took raw ground and made a farm of it, and from a grandmother who kept lace curtains straight through the Depression because she said a person had to remind herself what she was working toward.

Of my great-grandparents I know almost nothing, which is the grief of it. On the Hale side, my great-grandfather was Ezra, born somewhere in western Virginia before the Civil War, who came into Ohio as a young man with a wagon and an axe and not much else. We have one photograph of him, a tintype, a serious man in a collarless shirt, with hands like my grandfather's. On the Whitfield side there is even less: a name in a Bible and the county they came from. That is all. I

think about them sometimes: all that living, and almost no trace of it. What I wish, more than anything, is that I had thought to ask while I still could. What it felt like to cross the Appalachians with everything you owned in a wagon. What you hoped for. Whether the Ohio Valley looked like what you had imagined. I had grandparents who knew people who had done exactly that, and I never once thought to ask. That is my great regret of curiosity, and it is a good part of why I am sitting here telling you all of this now. The window closes, and you don't hear it go.



Grandfather Samuel cleared the eighty acres

My Grandparents

Grandfather Samuel Hale was a stone of a man, born in 1888, with hands like cured leather and a tenderness he would have denied to his dying day. He would slip me peppermints from his vest pocket and put a finger to his lips. Grandma Cora ran the house and, truthfully, ran him. On Mother's side, Earl and Ada Whitfield lived over in Athens County; Grandpa Earl played the fiddle at every barn dance in three townships. I got my music from him, I think, and my stubbornness from all four of them in equal measure.

Grandfather caught me fibbing about a broken jar when I was six. He didn't raise his voice. He just said, "Ellie, a man's word is the only thing he owns outright; everything else is borrowed or can be took." I have thought about that sentence at least once a week for seventy years. It is the finest thing anyone has ever said to me about character.

I have imagined, more than once, what those grandparents would say if they could speak to my grandchildren today. Grandfather Samuel would say: do the work in front of you and don't make a performance of it. Grandmother Cora would say: set a proper table, even when it's just you, because it matters what you think you're worth. Grandpa Earl would tune up that fiddle and say nothing at all, because he believed music said it better than words could. And Ada would say: be

particular about who you give your word to, because once given, there is no taking it back without cost.

They were plain people, and their wisdom was plain, and it holds up. What I want to say back to them, across all that time, is only this: thank you for getting through. Thank you for making the farm, making the family, keeping the Bible with the names penciled in. You had hard lives and you did not let the hardness make you hard. I see it now, and I am grateful for it every single day, and I hope I have been a worthy next link in that chain.



Earl, the river man

Tom and Me

There was just my brother Thomas and me. He came three years ahead of me, in 1945, while Daddy was still overseas. Tom was the careful one and I was the reckless one, so naturally we drove each other to distraction and loved each other fiercely. He taught me to swim by the simple method of throwing me off the Devola lock wall and rowing alongside in case I sank. I didn't sink. We had a rule we never told our parents: whatever trouble one of us got into, the other one was already in it too.

Summer evenings were ours. We would run the fence line down to the river and swim until we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces, and Mother would stand on the porch and call our names once. Just once. We were never late for that call twice in the same summer.

The adventure my mother never quite forgave came the summer I was eight. We built a raft out of fence rails and lard cans, certain we would float clear to Cincinnati. We made it about a half mile before the whole thing came apart under us. Tom hauled me to the bank by my pigtail. We walked home soaked, and Mother took one look and didn't even scold. She just laughed until she had to sit down on the porch step. That was the shape of it between us: the recklessness and the

rescue, always in that order. He was the one who threw me in and the one who made sure I came out. I have never had another person in my life who would already be in the trouble with me before I had finished getting into it. That is a particular kind of love, and it belonged to childhood, and I have been grateful for it my whole life.



The raft on the river: Tom hauled me out by my pigtail

Supper Was Sacred

Supper was sacred in our house. No matter how the day had gone, we were all at that oilcloth table by six, and nobody ate until Daddy said grace, the same nineteen words every night of my childhood. Mother cooked from the garden and the

smokehouse: ham and beans, fried mush, tomatoes still warm from the vine, and on Sundays a chicken that had been clucking that morning. We talked over each other and Daddy let it run, and then he would tap his coffee cup with his spoon, and that meant the floor was his. I would give a great deal to hear that spoon tap one more time.

The dish that felt like home in a way nothing else did was Mother's blackberry cobbler. We picked the berries ourselves along the railroad cut and came home scratched and purple to the elbows, and she would have it on the table by evening with the crust browned just so. I make it every August still, and the smell brings her right back into the room.

That table taught me more than food. We paid what we owed. We showed up when someone needed help, especially when it was inconvenient. We didn't make a spectacle of ourselves, and we looked after our own and our neighbours' own. Work was not optional, and complaining was discouraged, not because feelings didn't matter, but because complaining without doing something about it was considered a waste of perfectly good breath. None of that was ever posted on a wall. It was just the water we swam in. The value that took me longest to fully understand was the one about showing up. When I was young I thought it meant being physically

present. Later I understood it means being present in the full sense: paying attention, not going through the motions, not being there in body while your mind is somewhere more comfortable. My father showed up like that. It took me most of my life to do it as well as he did, and I am not sure I have fully managed it even now.



Blackberry picking along the railroad cut

We Made Our Own Fun

Before television was everywhere, we made our own fun, and I have never been convinced we got the worse end of that deal. Radio on Sunday nights was the great event: the whole family pulled chairs around the big Philco for the Jack Benny

program, and Daddy, who almost never laughed out loud, would. Summers were the river and the woods. Winters were checkers, jigsaw puzzles, and Mother at the pump organ while we sang.

But the thing that saved me was the Bookmobile. It came to the crossroads every other Thursday, and I would be waiting on the step a half hour early with whatever I was returning hugged to my chest. Books were my way out of those eighty acres and into the whole world, long before I had ever left the county. I read everything they would let me carry home, and then I read it again.

The book from childhood I still think about is *Little Women*. I read it when I was nine and it wrecked me in the best possible way. I wanted to be Jo March so badly it was nearly a physical pain. I have been chasing that feeling ever since (the feeling of a character who refuses to be small) in my reading and, if I am honest, in myself.

I have thought a great deal, over the years, about what a child gains from being a little bored on a farm with a shelf of books and a radio that only comes alive on Sunday nights. You learn to fill your own time. You learn that the world is enormous and that you can reach it with a library card before

you can reach it with a train ticket. That crossroads step, and the half hour I spent waiting on it with a book already open, may have shaped my whole life more than anything that came after. I became a teacher, in the end, so that I could be standing where a child first meets a book. It started on that step.



Waiting for the Bookmobile



Sunday nights around the Philco

Two Rooms in Devola

School was a two-room brick building in Devola, all eight grades, two teachers. Miss Harkins had the upper room, and she was exacting in the way I came to understand was actually love. She assigned us Longfellow to memorise, and she meant it. I walked the mile and a quarter each way and was never once late, which I attribute entirely to being terrified of Miss Harkins. The library was twelve shelves in the corner, and I had read every book on them by fifth grade and started over.

My favourite subject was reading, always, though Miss

Harkins called it Language Arts, as if giving it a better name would make the boys appreciate it. They did not. Arithmetic was a close second. I liked the certainty of it, the way a column of numbers couldn't argue with you. That appealed to something in my character that has never gone away.

I did not know it at the time, but the most important thing that ever happened to me in that upper room was the day Miss Harkins let me explain long division to a girl who had been absent. I was probably eight. Something happened in that moment that I couldn't name then but can name now: I felt useful in the specific way that matters, which is when you can see someone understand a thing they did not understand a moment before. That feeling never got old. Not in thirty-eight years of my own classroom.

Miss Harkins would have been horrified to be told she was warm; she ran that room like a woman who expected the world to test her students and meant for them to pass. But she gave me the two things that made the rest of my life possible: a love of the exact word, and the first taste of what it feels like to teach. I have been in her debt since I was eight years old, and I have tried to pay it forward one child at a time.



The two-room schoolhouse in Devola

A Room of My Own

Tom and I shared the upstairs room until I was about ten, when he was moved to the summer kitchen and I finally had four walls to myself. The ceiling slanted (I could only stand straight in the middle) and there was a braided rag rug Mother had made from our old clothes. I had a shelf for my books, which was the most important piece of furniture in the house as far as I was concerned. In winter the window would frost on the inside, and I would draw in it with my finger before I could bring myself to get up.

From that window, on a clear morning, I could see the river

bend and the walnut tree Grandfather planted before I was born. That walnut is still there. I drove past it two summers ago and had to stop the car and sit for a while. Some things outlast what you expect them to, and a tree a man plants before his granddaughter is born, still standing after she has gone gray, is one of them.

It was a small room and a cold one, and it was entirely mine, and I loved it the way you can only love the first space in the world that belongs to you alone. I read under the covers in it. I did my Longfellow in it. I lay awake in it and made plans for a life much larger than eighty acres, with no earthly idea whether any of them would come true.

When I think about that room now, what I feel is not nostalgia exactly; it is gratitude for having had a door I could close and a shelf I could fill and a window that showed me the river and the tree. A child needs a corner of the world that is hers. I had one. I have tried to give every child I could a version of it, a place in a classroom where they felt the four walls were, for that year, partly theirs.



My first room of my own

My Mother and Father

Mother was a piano player who happened to end up on a farm, and the farm never quite got all the way into her. She kept lace curtains when everyone else kept plain ones, and she read to us every night even after she had worked a full day. She had opinions about everything and shared most of them. She could be sharp (if you said something sloppy she would come right back with the correct version), but her sharpness was never unkind. She expected more of you than you expected of yourself, and that is not the worst thing a mother can do. What she taught me that I have carried all my

life is to use the right word. She hated a vague word. "Nice isn't a word, Eleanor," she would say, "it's a placeholder." She was right. I hear her every time I am about to be imprecise, which is often enough to keep her very present.

Daddy was a man of very few words, and every one of them counted. He had come home from France a quieter man than he left, I think, though I only know the after. He ran the farm without complaining and without explaining; you watched him and you learned. There was warmth in him, but it came out sideways, a hand on your shoulder, a sandwich left on your desk when you were studying late. The Depression I understood only later: I once overheard him, through the floor, having to ask his own father for ten dollars to cover a feed bill, and Mother crying quietly while he talked. I had never heard her cry before. I understood then that pride has a price, and that a good man pays it when he has to.

The moment I have held onto longest is the night I told him I had been accepted to Ohio State. He read the letter at the kitchen table, folded it exactly, set it down, and said, "That's good, Ellie." Then he went back to his coffee. But his hand was shaking. If I could say one thing to him now (he has been gone since 1997), it would be this: I saw your hand shake, and I understood that you wanted it for me badly enough that

the wanting showed through, even though having it was going to take me away. I did not have the words at eighteen. I have had them for decades.



Mother at the piano

Summers, and Burying Jack

Summers on the farm were work, mostly, but the kind of work that feels like living when you are eight years old and the sun is out. We put up hay from first light, hand-cranked the cream separator, weeded the kitchen garden on our knees. I understood that we did not have much, and that neither did anyone we knew, so it never felt like deprivation. Daddy killed a hog in October and we ate from it all winter. Mother canned

a hundred jars of tomatoes every August. You did not buy what the land could give you, and the land gave enough.

The summer that stands out from all the others was the one I was eleven, the year Grandfather's old dog Jack died. He had had Jack sixteen years. We buried him under the sycamore by the barn, and Grandfather stood there a long while without speaking, which I had never seen him do. I understood something in that silence that I did not have words for: that grown men carried losses they could not say out loud, and that a dog could be the whole of something that had no other name.

I think about that afternoon more than seems reasonable for a childhood dog I barely remember. But it was the first time I watched grief happen to someone I believed was too strong to have it, my grandfather, a stone of a man, standing under a tree with his hat in his hands over a dog. It taught me, years before I would need to know it, that the people who show you the least are often carrying the most, and that the kindest thing you can sometimes do is simply stand beside them and say nothing at all. The sycamore is likely still there, the way the walnut is. I have not gone to look. Some graves you keep in your mind rather than visit, because the picture is truer than the place.



Burying old Jack under the sycamore

Leaving the Farm

I went to Ohio State in September of 1966, on a scholarship that Mother had helped me apply for over three evenings at the kitchen table. I remember the morning Daddy loaded my trunk into the truck. He tied it down twice and didn't say much. The farm got smaller in the window as we drove away, and I kept my face forward so nobody would see me cry. The truth was that I desperately wanted to go and was also leaving the only world I had ever known, and those two things sat in me side by side all the way to Columbus.

What surprised me most about being away was how much I

missed the quiet. I had grown up with the river and the wind in the corn and the particular silence of a farm at midnight, and the dormitory was noise all day and half the night. It took me a full semester to sleep properly. I have been particular about quiet ever since, which has occasionally been inconvenient for the people who have had to live with me.

I studied Education, with an English concentration. I had known I wanted to teach since about the third grade, when Miss Harkins let me explain long division to a girl who had been absent, and I spent the next fourteen years confirming that was the feeling I wanted to chase for a living. I briefly considered library science, until Dr. Ruth Seligman, who taught Children's Literature and had read everything and remembered all of it, talked me out of it. She said, "You want to be in the room where children are first meeting books, not cataloguing the books after the fact." She was right, though I spent thirty-eight years wishing my classroom library had a better cataloguing system.

Dr. Seligman told me in my junior year that I had a gift for asking the question underneath the question, for hearing what someone was actually trying to say beneath what they had managed to say. I have thought about that observation my whole professional life. It is the best teaching evaluation I

ever received, and it came before I had taught a single day.



Leaving for Ohio State, 1966

Falling for Raymond

I had a very clear plan when I met Raymond: teach somewhere in Ohio, probably Columbus, save money, see a bit of the world before settling down. Raymond reorganised that plan by being exactly the kind of person I had not planned for. He listened when I talked, really listened, followed up, remembered. That was unusual enough in 1967 that I paid attention.

What made me trust him so quickly was one specific thing. He asked me what I wanted to do with my life, and then he actually waited for the answer. Most men in 1967 asked that question as a formality and were already thinking of their next sentence. Raymond sat there and listened for ten minutes and then asked a follow-up. I thought: this is an unusual man. I was correct, and I have been grateful for it every day since. By the time I understood how serious it was, the original plan had quietly been replaced by a better one that had him in it.

We married in June of 1969, three weeks after I graduated. Raymond had his accounting position in Columbus; I got my first teaching post out in Pickerington. We had the smallest apartment: one bedroom, a kitchen the size of a closet, a bathroom where you could brush your teeth and open the oven at the same time. We were very happy. I think small spaces make you close. We had nothing to fill the rooms with, so we talked instead, and that turned out to be the best habit we ever built.

The hardest adjustment of those first years was learning that Raymond's silence and my silence meant entirely different things. When I went quiet, it meant I was upset. When he went quiet, it meant he was thinking. We had six months of misunderstanding each other before we worked that out, six

months during which I was frequently upset at a man who was simply solving a problem in his head. After that, we were fine. We still are.



Courtship in the library

Home, and the Morning Daniel Came

Raymond's firm transferred him back this way in 1972, a year before Daniel was born, and it was an easy yes for me. I had spent six years getting out, and I had not expected to want to go back, but there is a pull to a place that made you, and when the chance came I felt it at once. Washington Elementary had a position. We found a house on Gilman Avenue, three blocks from the school, and I could walk to

work, which I did almost every day for thirty-eight years. That walk was one of the underappreciated pleasures of my life. Coming back as an adult was profound and strange. I drove past the farm the first week and sat at the end of the lane a long time. New people had the house. The walnut tree was still there. The river was the same, going on without me in it, the way it always had been.

Daniel arrived on the 3rd of February, 1973, in a February that had decided to make a point of itself. We drove to the hospital at two in the morning through six inches of new snow, and Raymond took one wrong turn and would not admit it for twenty years. Daniel came at half past seven (quickly, which I was grateful for), and Raymond held him and went completely silent in a way I had never seen, the same way my father had gone silent over the acceptance letter. The Brooks men, apparently, express the inexpressible through stillness.

Becoming a mother made me a better teacher, which surprised me. You understand children differently once one of them is yours, not with more sentiment, but with more accuracy. From that snowy February morning I knew exactly how much a child's stumbling matters to someone, and I never forgot it in the classroom. Every one of those children

had a mother who had driven through a snowstorm for them.

Raymond was a present father in a way many men of his generation were not. He went to the school plays. He knew Daniel's teachers' names. He taught Daniel to fish on the Muskingum, the same river my grandfather had fished, and I would watch a line of men reaching back across time, patient with a rod and a boy and the water. We were not perfect parents; we caught things too quickly, smoothed over failures that were his to sort out. But I saw that line of men on the river and understood that some things pass down whether you plan them or not.



Our young family

Room 14, Thirty-Eight Years

My first year was third grade in Pickerington, 1969: twenty-six children in a portable classroom that sat in the school's car park because they had run out of real rooms. The furnace was unreliable, and from November to March we wore our coats half the day. I had studied education for four years and arrived knowing essentially nothing the children actually needed. The first month I went home every evening and sat at the kitchen table for an hour before I could move. By Christmas I had found my footing. By spring I did not want summer to come.

The first lesson that truly worked was a boy named Kevin who would not read aloud because the class laughed when he stumbled. I found him a book about trains (he knew more about trains than I did), and had him teach the class about steam engines, using the book as reference. He read a full page without a stumble, because his confidence rode ahead of his reading. After that he would read anything. I have used that principle my whole career: meet a child where they are already an expert, and let that expertise carry them into the place they are afraid of.

When I came to Washington Elementary in 1970, the building had been there since 1931: heavy brick, tall windows,

wooden floors that had absorbed decades of small feet. My room was Room 14, second floor, windows facing the playground. Over thirty-eight years everything changed except the floors, the windows, and a child's need to be seen. We went from mimeograph to photocopier to computer, and the one thing that never changed was this: a child who does not feel safe cannot learn, a child who does not feel seen will not try, and a classroom has to be both those things before it can be anything else.

There were children I could not reach, because what was happening at home was too large for a classroom to contain, and learning to live with the times it was not enough is the hardest continuing education a teacher receives. But there were the others. Adaeze, in 1991, who arrived from Nigeria speaking almost no English; we traded words across my coffee cup, “cup,” “cup,” and the room went quiet because everyone understood something significant was happening. She became a physician and tracked me down to send a card, which I keep in my writing desk. And a Friday in May, 1987, when a boy named Marcus, who had said almost nothing all year, stood and read twelve lines about his dog dying, and the room went completely still. I said, “Marcus, that's a very fine poem.” He sat down. For a moment that boy existed fully in that room, seen by everyone in it. That is what

school is supposed to do. I got it right that day.

I could not have lasted without Margaret Osei, who taught fourth grade next door for twenty-two years. We shared a wall and knocked on it: one knock meant I'm coming, two meant give me five minutes. She taught me that teaching is not a solo practice. We still have lunch on the third Tuesday of every month, eleven years running.

What I am proudest of is not a moment but a count: former students who became teachers. One of them, Chris Mercer, teaches third grade in the same building I did, and told me last year he still uses a method I showed him for reaching children who feel shut out. That is the thing that goes on after you.



*Thirty-eight years of grading by lamplight***Raymond, Steady**

If you gave me one word for Raymond it would be steady, and the harder I look for a better one the more I come back to it. In fifty-four years I have never once been in a room with him and felt unsafe, not financially, not emotionally, not in any of the varieties of unsafe a life can present. He has a dry humour that catches you off guard, delivered with such a straight face that you are halfway into a reply before you realise he was joking. When you have spent your working life with children whose days are shaped by inconsistency, you understand what a rare gift it is to come home to the most consistent human being you have ever known.

What surprised me most was his sentimentality, because he shows almost none of it. On our thirty-fifth anniversary I found a shoebox in the closet holding every card I had ever given him: every birthday, Christmas, and anniversary card since 1969. He had never mentioned it. I stood in that closet a long time.

The secret to a marriage that lasts, if there is one, is a high tolerance for imperfection in the other person combined with genuine curiosity about who they are still becoming. Raymond at seventy-eight is not the man I married at

twenty-two, thank God, and I have had to update my picture of him regularly or I would have been married to a memory instead of a person. A lot of long marriages go wrong not from dramatic failures but because people stop being curious about each other. We stayed curious. And we tried never to go to bed without resolving the main thing; we have broken that rule four or five times in fifty-four years, and we both knew each time it was wrong.

We were tested most in the late 1980s, when Raymond's firm was struggling and he couldn't bring himself to tell me how bad it was, because he did not want to worry me, and I knew something was wrong and did not push, because I did not want to add to his burden. We were protecting each other into isolation, and neither of us could see it until his partner finally called me. We learned that year that withholding bad news from each other is not protection; it is a kind of abandonment. We have not repeated it.



*Forty-seven years***Pay Attention**

I retired in June of 2008, and it took me most of a year to learn what to do with a day nobody needed something from by eight in the morning. Teaching shapes your time completely, and suddenly having unstructured hours was genuinely disorienting. I read more. I learned to make better bread. And I started writing down the family stories, which is, in the end, how I have come to be telling you all of this.

The hardest lesson of my adult life came in 1994, the year we lost my mother. She had a stroke in March and was gone by August, and I was not prepared. We had spoken on the phone the Wednesday before; nothing on any worry list of mine that week included losing her, and none of the things on that list came to pass. I never made a worry list again. I started making a different kind: things I was grateful for that day, while I still had them. What got me through that year was the classroom: twenty-three eight-year-olds who needed things from me every single day. You cannot mourn your way through a third-grade Tuesday; they will not allow it.

Becoming a grandmother, after all that, has been pure gift; I get to love without the weight of being responsible for the outcome. My granddaughter Emma knew more about the

world at nine than I knew at fifteen, and I understand now why my own grandparents always seemed more relaxed than my parents. They had finished the responsible part. Last Christmas Eve I sat in my armchair after we had lit the tree, and watched the room: Daniel and his wife on the sofa, the grandchildren on the floor with the dog, Raymond in his chair with his tea. Nobody was doing anything significant. And I thought: this is the room. This is the one I have been making all my life. I sat very still and paid attention to every detail of it.

Because that is the thing I understand now that I could not have understood at thirty, or forty, or fifty: that the ordinary days were the point. I spent years waiting for the significant thing to begin and looking straight past the Tuesdays, and the Tuesdays were my life, actually happening while I watched for something more. So if I could leave one message for the family who comes after me, it is only this: pay attention. Pay attention to the people you are with and the work you have chosen and the ordinary days, because they are not ordinary; they are your life. Tell the stories while you still can. Keep the pocket Bible. Set the table properly, even when it is just you. And understand that love is a practice, not a feeling; it is what attention looks like when it has been kept up for fifty years. When my time comes, I want no long service, only someone to read Mary Oliver: "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with

your one wild and precious life?" It was the question I asked myself every September in front of a new class, and it is the one I hope you never stop asking. Then go somewhere warm, eat something good, and talk about each other, not about me.

Photo Memories



The Hale farmhouse on the Muskingum bend, Marietta, Ohio, 1955



The Muskingum River, just downstream from the farm



Our wedding day, June 14th, 1969



First year at Washington Elementary, Room 14, 1970



Father's Day 1975: Raymond with Daniel, age 2



Retirement: Washington Elementary, June 2008. 38 years.

A memoir of

Eleanor Brooks

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