*The Griot, John Hancock, and the Quiet One*

Abstract

My journey with language and technology is connected to my relationships with my family. It begins with me as a passive participant, hearing my mother recite folktales and listening to my father’s record collection. My father loved gadgets, and I was surrounded by them. He introduced me to technology. Then, I became an active participant through reading and journaling. Later on in my adult life, my children try to keep me current by introducing me to new media.

Orality

My earliest memories are of my mother’s voice. She told me *Anansi* stories. I was amazed by her memory. I thought she made them up, but someone told them to her, and she was passing them on to me. I struggle to remember them now. It would have been nice to share that tradition with my own children. I did find the Anansi stories in a book, written exactly how my mother told them to me. Still, reading it is not the same as hearing her voice. Listening, as a skill, would prove to be beneficial to me throughout my life.

Sometimes being the only child in a room full of adults, your job is to listen. I listened to my parents, aunts, and uncles tell stories of their childhoods. They were never talking to me, only to each other. It's part of our culture. Children are to be seen, not heard. My job was to be quiet and listen. None of these stories are written down, and I have heard some good ones. Like the time Uncle Isaac took a shortcut through the cemetery at night and fell into a freshly dug grave, or how Uncle Sylvester learned to swim when he was tossed off a fishing boat. Now I hear these stories at funerals when there is nothing left but memories.

# Literacy

Literacy was important to my parents. I learned to read and write pretty early, around 3 or 4 years old. I can remember the notebook and how it smelled. The times table was printed on the back. I had to learn that too. Our apartment was full of books. Both my parents enjoyed reading novels, with my father having a preference for Westerns. I enjoy novels too. I like it when a story can transport me to another place, preferably a tropical island. I find throughout my life, I've been drawn to books with female characters around my age. I guess I see them as someone I can relate to. My mother and I would take frequent trips to the public library. I can remember the joy I felt having my first library card. Books were everywhere in my childhood. at school, at home, and even in church. When I was bored at church, I would read through the prayer book or the hymnal. My mother didn't mind, as long as I was quiet. My father always signed me up for after-school programs and summer classes. I wanted to play. I thought learning was important too, but I really wanted to play with my friends.

I wanted to write the way my father did. He should have been a doctor or a lawyer with his handwriting. I wanted my pen to slide across the paper and create fancy signatures. Cursive, that’s the way adults write everything. I wanted to write like an adult. My father would bring home old paper from the printer at work. It was perforated with holes on the side for a feeder. I would sit on the floor and scribble, pretending to be in an office. I was five. What did I know about an office. I knew nothing about an office except what I saw on television. People sit at desks and grind away at paperwork. So that's what I did when I sat on the living room floor with my stack of printer paper, scribbling away.

# Technology

My father loved music. We had a nice entertainment system that he put together from spare parts. I wish I had kept it. He played Jimmy Cliff on Sundays. I still have the album, *The Harder They Come*. It opens like a book, with all the lyrics printed inside. I already knew how to read, but seeing the lyrics makes you realize you're singing the wrong words.

My father liked gadgets. We had a television in every room, and a radio too. In his spare time, my father fixed TVs and radios, that’s why we had so many. Too many maybe. I held the flashlight while he worked. Not a fun job for a child, but I learned a lot by watching and listening. I can identify all the inside parts of a television and a radio, but the models have changed. My father watched the news 3 times a day and listened to 1010 WINS in the mornings before work. I thought it was boring, but he said it was important to be informed about what's going on in the world.

In the 5th grade, I asked my mother for a journal, with a lock. The lock made it more than just a regular book. The lock added a level of security. I wanted a place to write about anything but also keep it safe from other people’s eyes, mostly my older brother. He was always going through my stuff. I don’t remember what I wrote in it, but having the lock was fun. I still keep a journal today. It's something I find comfort in. A place to hold my thoughts and record memories. That was the same year I asked my father for a computer, the Commodore 64. I'm not sure what sparked my love of computers (probably a TV show), but I knew I wanted one. He said the computer was expensive and he didn't want to waste his money if I didn't plan on using it. I used it every day. I did my homework. I played games. I learned to program. I was very happy with my computer. I knew this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, play with computers.

My oldest daughter talked me into joining Facebook. I'm an introvert, so this was a challenge. I don't want to share my life with strangers. I use FB to share information, mostly about community events. Instagram and Pinterest I use to keep up with my hobbies, baking, and crochet. I was able to reconnect with many of my high school classmates through social media. They are living in different parts of the world. We get to chat and share pictures of our families. That part is fun, but I am not a big fan of social media. I don’t get into debates or arguments with people online because I don’t engage. I don’t like talking to strangers in person so I'm definitely not going to do it online. I'm still quiet by nature, choosing to observe my surroundings before I dive in.

My children continue to introduce me to new media, but I am hesitant. I find most new media intrusive and anxiety-inducing. I do like ChatGPT though. It does what I imagined a computer would do thirty-something years ago, spit out answers to random questions. As much as I love computers, the most important technology I think I will need in the future is a pen. A good one, with gel ink and a fine point. From the moment I first picked up a pen, I’ve never been disappointed. It soothes me to feel the ink glide across the page. Maybe writing keeps me connected to my father. I imagine my handwriting is as fancy as his now. I hope someone looks at me in wonder and thinks, how does she do that.