

BY
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Talk
Southern
to Me

BY THE
CREATOR OF
YOUTUBE'S
SOUTHERN
WOMEN
CHANNEL

STORIES & SAYINGS
TO ACCENT YOUR LIFE

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Introduction

The minute I open my mouth outside of the Deep South I'm asked the same question, "Are you from Texas?" So let me set the record straight. *Yes*, I have a big fat southern accent that I wear as proudly as my Granny's pearls but I'm not from Texas. I was born and raised in the little town of Gaffney, South Carolina. Although *my people* are humble country folks who weren't rich, they gave me the richest foundation a gal could ever ask for—a Southern upbringing.

My childhood was saturated with Jesus and fried okra, lightening bugs and flip flops, yes ma'ams and no sirs, casseroles and cheese balls, taffeta and pom-poms, fishing and tubing, sponge rollers and hair spray, thank you notes and social rules, pageants and tiaras, honeysuckle and honeybees, creeks and crawdads, moon pies and hayrides, pickup trucks and football games, magnolia trees and broken arms, sweet tea and skeeters, Myrtle Beach and mason jars and umpteen lessons. Lord the lessons . . . clogging, tap, jazz, ballet, piano, singing, baton, modeling, banjo, Irish step dancing, macramé, sign language, and endless hours of practicing my cursive writing. Thank you Mama—I'm pretty darn proud of my handwriting, although admittedly, I've got no clue how to say that in sign language.

All those lessons led me down a path of lunacy called *show business*, where I found myself forced to live in two cities that were the polar opposite of the South—New York and Los Angeles. I have been blessed to work in TV, film, and on Broadway, and throughout, I've been constantly harassed about my Southern accent and grammar. When I would say things like, "Sugarbritches,

unlatch that doomafloochie and raise that window down,” city slickers would just stare at me like I was nuttier than a fruitcake.

Desperately missing the South and tired of being misunderstood, I decided to release my frustration through comedy. I gathered some my best friends, who are hilarious Southern women and made a video that celebrated the “Sh%t Southern Women Say” and the humorous ways we say it. I had no idea if anybody would even watch my first video. But, my stars in heaven, the thing went viral and my YouTube *Southern Women Channel* was born.

Millions of views and many videos later, I have found a huge Internet community of folks who, like me, are proud as punch of their Southern heritage and parlance. There’s just nothing like a good Southernism. While one could say, “Loretta had a bad facelift”; a Southerner says, “Loretta’s had her face pulled tighter than a gnat’s ass!”

While one could say, “I’m very busy”; a Southerner says, “Hun, I’m busier than a two dollar hooker on nickel night.” And while one could say, “That is useless”; a Southerner says, “That’s as useless as a tits on a bull.” No matter the situation, Southern folks always have an ’ism to fit the occasion.

This book is a love letter to the South. As you read, I hope the stories, slang, and sayings will elicit memories of all the colorful, rib-tickling Southerners who have left an imprint on your life. Ultimately, it is Southerners who are responsible for keeping Southern traditions, and phraseology alive. And if you’re not from the South, bless your heart, pay attention cause there’s a ton of wisdom to be found in these heartfelt, humorous expressions. Mama always said, “Sugar, your strength lies in your uniqueness,” and she was right. Southerners speak their own unique version of the English language. It’s a linguistic art. And it’s gooder than grits, y’all.

Talk Southern To Me 'Bout Charm

“DON’T COST A NICKEL TO BE
POLITE”

Southern hospitality is as indigenous to the South as magnolia trees. Having proper manners and displaying social grace in everyday actions is simply a way of life. It’s an institution. And if you fail to follow these traditions then your Southern family is liable to throw you in a mental institution. There are rules: You don’t show up empty handed to a dinner party even if you recently had both your hands amputated; if an elderly person is standing, then your younger butt better not be occupying a seat; and you never take store-bought food to a funeral reception even if your archenemy died. Southerners pass these kinds of rules down to the next generation so that they understand they are part of something bigger than themselves. The distinct Southern culture that has long defined the South would be extinct if older generations of Southerners weren’t working harder than a one-eyed cat watching two mouse holes to preserve it.

In the South, good breeding is your legacy. And good breeding has nothing to do with money or education. I was raised by a blue collar family who taught me that it “don’t cost a nickel to be polite.” Mastering the South’s etiquette code and developing a sense of pride through social graces is considered more important than academics or wealth. Good manners teach you respect and

self-discipline. Social graces give you composed confidence. When you combine these essential ingredients you get the most delectable Southern dish of all: Southern charm.

Southern charm is the art of making everyone around you feel at ease. But Southern charm doesn't come naturally, y'all. No no no! You can't make other's feel at ease unless you yourself have enough poise to feel at ease in a myriad of social and professional situations. So Southerners must start training early in life to develop the very charm that is the signature of the South. I graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Carolina but I will assure you many more grueling hours of effort were required pursuing my PhD in Southern Charm. In order to acquire this degree one must master four fundamental subjects: Politeness, Kindness, Table Manners, and Social Graces.

POLITENESS

Before I was even potty trained, my Southern family began training me to address my elders as "ma'am" and "sir" and to end sentences with "please" and "thank you." I was endlessly corrected and conditioned like a lab rat until eventually muscle memory kicked in and it became an ingrained habit. It's such second nature now that I have actually caught myself responding "yes ma'am" to an automated phone system. Southern boys are shaped into Southern gentleman by this same method. But in addition to learning phrases like "ma'am" and "sir," Southern boys must also be schooled on Southern chivalry such as opening doors and pulling out chairs until it becomes cemented in their brains that all women should be treated as politely as they treat their mamas.

Southern politeness also requires that you learn to write Pulitzer Prize-winning thank you notes. My penmanship is exquisite

because Mama drilled me on it like Archie Manning drilled Eli and Peyton on football. Seems down right unfair I can't get a multimillion-dollar contract writing cursive. In any case, good handwriting is crucial because proper thank you notes must be handwritten with a pen on decent card stock, preferably monogrammed, and the wording must be specific and thoughtful. And most importantly thank you notes must be written and mailed in a timely fashion. Emailing a thank you note is the kiss of death and will get you thrown out of the Junior League faster than a cat can lick its butt.

Southern politeness also demands that you greet everyone you encounter, friend or stranger, with a smile and a "Heeeeeeey, how are youuuuuuu?" And forgetting to wave when you drive by your neighbors or someone else you know is a cardinal sin. Even if your engine is on fire and your dog is biting your baby's ear off in the back seat you must not forget this. Waving is of utmost importance while driving. We call this the Southern "throw up." If you throw up one finger it means, "Hey!" if you throw up two fingers it means "How y'all doing?" if you throw up your whole hand it means, "How's your mama and 'nem?" Throwing up nothing means, "I'm a jackass."

KINDNESS

To secure a degree in Southern Charm it's not enough to be polite, you must also become proficient in kindness. Kindness requires that you train yourself to constantly think of others. You must remember birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, acknowledge job promotions, and welcome new neighbors. This should be done with homemade cookies or cakes, homegrown vegetables or flowers from your garden, or thoughtfully selected notecards. Never send an Edible Arrangement—this screams tacky. You must also

host and/or attend a gazillion baby and bridal showers and watch patiently as the gifts are opened in an elaborate display. And Southerners are competitive with their kindness so one must go the extra mile to have gifts personalized with monograms, dig up a family heirloom, or at the very least spend half a year crocheting booties, needlepointing a pillow, or making a quilt the baby or the groom is certain to puke on within weeks.

Kindness also demands you acknowledge and engage in polite conversation with people in all walks of life: cashiers, plumbers, parking attendants, waiters, exterminators, secretaries, janitors, bail bondsmen. Southerners can learn a bank teller's entire life history while making a deposit. This is time consuming and contributes to the slow pace of the South but Southern charm stipulates you embrace this turtle pace.

And no matter what, you must make time for the elderly. Southerners are extremely respectful of the elderly and go out of their way to extend kindness to them. I spent a substantial amount of my childhood performing in nursing homes. I did little shows featuring monologues, dance routines, piano playing . . . whatever my mama deemed acceptable nursing home entertainment. Mama rehearsed me as if I was prepping to perform at Radio City Music Hall, and she didn't care how much time it took. Mama's kind heart was on a mission to bring joy to the residents of the nursing homes. She taught me that this was the charitable thing to do even though the residents often slept and drooled through my mesmerizing clogging rendition of "Wabash Cannonball."

Kindness also dictates that you remember folks in their time of loss or despair. In the South, the appropriate response to every tragedy is a casserole. You must become a master chef of casseroles and you should develop an outstanding reputation for one variety that is your "signature casserole." I know women who make sure

to keep a casserole frozen in their deep freezer so they are prepared when tragedy strikes. This is called a disasterole. Doesn't matter if the disaster involves death, disease, or destruction—the Southern remedy is an avalanche of casseroles.

TABLE MANNERS

One of the primary reasons Southerners value both the Cotillion and Debutante tradition is because proper table manners are taught and they are key to evoking Southern charm. Table manners are to be observed every time you eat whether this is at a fancy wedding, your Granny's kitchen, or at the Cracker Barrel. I have survived many intimidating dinners and navigated many elaborate table settings by relying on the knowledge I acquired in Debutante training. I went through a small town Debutante program that was not predicated on your family's prestige or wealth—if you weren't in jail or pregnant, you qualified. Nevertheless, I was taught the same table manners as high society Southern Debutantes: don't drink from the finger bowl, never place used flatware on the table surface, don't use the linen napkin to remove your lipstick, and the most important rule of all: do not begin eating until everyone at the table has been served.

Furthermore you must place your napkin in your lap, keep your elbows off the table, sit up straight, and chew with your mouth closed. You always pass to the right and you never divorce the salt and pepper shakers—even if the person who only requested the pepper is in the midst of a heart attack. You must never reach across the table and eat off of another person's plate like a wild animal and you should never discuss religion or politics at the dinner table. You must also never use a toothpick at the table. Do y'all hear me? Never. Even if you have a bacon cheesesteak melt hung up all in

your molars at the Waffle House. It looks low rent—and you should never look low rent even if you can't afford your rent.

SOCIAL GRACES

Even if you master politeness, kindness and table manners you will be denied a degree in Southern charm unless you become proficient in social graces. I must warn you this is the most exhausting fundamental. Many Southern boys attend Cotillion classes to learn social graces such as social dancing. But social grace training is much more complex for females. Long before Southern girls are old enough to go through the charm schooling required for Cotillion or Debutante they are enrolled in Dolly Dinkle Schools. These are schools of tap, ballet, jazz, gymnastics, clogging, music, voice, pageantry, modeling, fire eating, baton twirling, pom-pom shaking, and parade float riding . . . all skills meant to foster social grace and potentially land you in the Miss America Pageant.

When I was two and half years old, Mama began my Miss America training by enrolling me in Miss Marion's School of Dance. Mama was not deterred by the fact that she could not afford the lessons. Sacrifices must be made in the name of social grace! So Mama took a side job working at Miss Marion's and saw to it that I studied every form of dance. Other lessons followed: piano, voice, banjo . . . Mama was determined for me to have a sensational talent routine prepared for my inevitable participation in Miss America.

Of course you can't possibly win Miss America without years of pageant training so Mama got on top of that as well. I won my first pageant title, "Wee Miss Gaffney," when I was five years old. I participated in hundreds of pageants and was coached by various Southern pageant experts, like Rita Allison, who worked diligently to correct the unfortunate fact that, due to my ballet training, I

walked turned out like a duck. Interview skills were honed, charity work was encouraged, smiles were perfected, gliding across stages in layers of twinkle material was refined, dancing in eighty pounds of ruffles and sequins became second nature, and losing with grace was refined. I'm an excellent loser.

The irony is after all the pageants, Dolly Dinkle Schools and Debutante training, I graduated high school with zero interest in pursuing Miss America. Mama is still recovering from this news. But learning to smile under pressure, hold my head high and my shoulders back, remain poised in the spotlight, speak knowledgeably about current events, complete a routine or task despite making mistakes, and the ability to glide across any surface without resembling a duck are all social graces that have served me well both socially and professionally.

Due to my career, I don't currently have the privilege of living in the South but the South follows me everywhere I go. I strive to be polite, kind, mannered, and display the social graces that were instilled in me. I will never chew gum in public, get a slutty tattoo or give a limp noodle handshake. I home-cook meals for guests and immediately offer anyone who enters my home something to drink or eat to make them feel welcome. And I will never show up to a dinner party without a "happy" which is a hostess gift because to do so would be tacky beyond words. Like most Southerners, I would rather be accused of being a devil worshiper than tacky. Pursuing a degree in Southern charm teaches you "how to do" and knowing "how to do" is a far more valuable education than any slick Ivy League institution can provide.

STUFF SOUTHERN FOLKS SAY ABOUT CHARM

Pretty is as pretty does.

Good manners never go out of style.

Can you believe that b*%ch didn't write a thank you note?

Hospitality is making your guests feel at home even is you wish they were.

Charm is making the poor feel rich and the old feel young.

It's best to measure charm so you don't drown in your own sweet tea.

A good attitude spreads like kudzu.

It's ill advised to be ill-mannered, ill-dressed or ill-informed.

Sweetie, your cell phone was not invited to dinner.

*

Good manners are not to be taken on and off like pearls.

You can judge a person's character by the way they treat the waiter.

The most valuable item in your wardrobe is your smile.

Always leave your house clean in case you die.

Being real doesn't dictate being rude.

Make folks feel good about themselves and they'll feel good about you.

Kindness is not predicated on your mood.

Charm disarms.

Having no manners is worse than having no money.

*

There's nothing tackier than being tacky.

She's so tacky she chews gum in the choir loft!

She's so tacky she uses dark meat in her chicken salad!

She's so tacky she puts on lipstick at the dinner table!

Can you believe she showed up without calling?

It's rude as can be not to RSVP!

Cleavage is an evening accessory.

Keep both feet out of the gutter.

If Mama wouldn't approve it, don't post it.

Don't go from Debutante to doublewide.

*

There is never an excuse for bad manners.

Thank you, sugar!

Excuse me, darlin'.

You're as welcome as sweet tater pie!

When dancing the man leads, when dining the host leads.

When in doubt ask folks about their favorite subject...themselves.

Never let on how bored you are.

Don't speak with your mouth full especially when it's full of bull.

Good posture speaks louder than your resume.

Never underestimate the power of inner sparkle.

*

Horses sweat, Southern ladies glow.

Southern ladies don't get drunk they get over served.

Southern ladies don't smoke in public.

Southern ladies don't sit with their legs spread wide as Texas

Talking ugly makes you ugly.

A whistling woman and a crowing hen always come to no good end.

Always be aware when you've had a gracious plenty

Good manners are free but forgetting them costs you dearly.

Talk Southern To Me When Chewing The Fat

**“SOME OF THE BUTTER HAS SLID
OFF HER BISCUIT.”**

Anybody who’s ever met a Southerner knows that we can talk the ears off a hobbyhorse. We’re long-winded by nature. In fact I would venture to say that the only thing we enjoy more than good food is good conversation—we literally chew the fat while “chewing the fat.” Now a good chewing the fat session usually includes some friendly chitchat, a tall tale or two, and of course, gossip. Although we Southerners don’t like to admit it, all of us, even the most religious, tend to have something to say about someone, and have been known to lend an enthusiastic ear to get the scoop. If a Southerner says, “I don’t mean to sound mean but . . .” you’re about to hear something that’ll make you drop your teeth.

The problem is that we Southerners are taught from birth to be polite—even if it kills us. So when Southern folks gossip, they have to somehow find a way to maintain an ounce of the politeness that’s been drilled into them. This is what I call the art of *Southern snark*. Language is such a vibrant part of Southern culture it’s no wonder we excel at crafting colorful insults. But in order to make

ourselves feel less evil about making a snarky comment we utter the three words that are guaranteed to be the most confusing of all to a non-Southerner, “BLESS YOUR HEART.”

Now proper heart blessing requires skill as the undertones and nuances of this phrase can be perplexing to navigate. For example, this phrase can be used in earnest sympathy such as, “Bless her heart, she just buried her Daddy and now she’s eat up with the gout.” Or this phrase can be used to indicate, “Thank God it’s you and not me,” such as, “Your house has termites and your teenager is pregnant? Well bless your heart.” It can mean, “You’re a flaming idiot but I’m too polite to say so,” as in “You’re in pain from your latest round of liposuction? Bless your heart.” But this phrase packs the most punch when we use it to alleviate our guilt about gossiping and to soften the blow of delivering stupendous Southern snark like, “Bless his heart, he’s so dumb if brains were dynamite he wouldn’t have enough to blow his nose.” I realize such warmhearted meanness is confusing and contradictory but it makes perfect sense to us Southerners.

While “bless your heart” is arguably the South’s most popular gossip diffuser it is by no means the only one. Another common expression is, “I’M JUST SAYIN’.” This phrase allows a Southerner to feel open minded while simultaneously being judgmental. For example: “If she wants to wear white at her wedding, that’s her business—I’m just sayin’ that woman’s seen more ceilings than a house painter.” And oftentimes it’s used as a thin disguise for envy such as, “I’m just sayin’ I can’t believe they spent all that time and money building that humongous house and didn’t even bother to hire a landscaper.” It’s also routinely used when a Southerner has been proven wrong while disparaging someone, but can’t bring themself to admit it. For instance:

HUSBAND: Did you see our fool neighbor got chickens? That city slicker doesn't know the first thing about raising chickens!

WIFE: Well, you've got a yard full of ducks that refuse to swim.

HUSBAND: I'm just sayin'!

Perhaps one of the South's most brilliant gossip qualifiers is, "GOD LOVE 'EM." I was raised a Baptist in the Bible Belt and this phrase was as common at church potlucks as CorningWare. For example: "Poor old Buford. His lazy grandchildren are gonna suck him dry of all his money. God love 'em." And I've personally had some version of this warning whispered in my ear at many a potluck, "Do not eat Nettie Mae's lemon pound cake. She insisted on bringing it, God love her, but her pound cake is always off." And I've lost count of how many times I've heard, "God love him, that man's so mean he's going to hell on a scholarship." As you can see, this is an extremely useful adage when a Southerner spews criticism but at the same time is grateful that God loves the victim of the criticism. God love 'em . . . 'cause somebody's gotta.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention my Granny Fowler's favorite Southern snark sanitizer, "I'M GONNA PRAY FOR HER." Granny Fowler was a strong, hardworking, kind, classy, charitable, and religious Southern woman who taught Sunday school most of her life. She used to preach, "A dog that brings a bone will carry one." This basically means if somebody comes to you with gossip then they will carry their tendency to gossip elsewhere and talk about you. She knew that the Lord frowned upon the destructive force of gossip and did her best to live like Jesus but Granny was also human, so sometimes she slipped.

If Granny had something ugly to say about someone, she was careful to frame it like this, "That woman hasn't worn a napkin's worth of clothes since her divorce. I'm gonna pray for her." Or, "That man's so negative he'd depress the devil. I'm gonna pray for him."

And there was nothing worse than when Granny hurled this particular phrase directly at you, "Julia Fowler, I heard you went out on a date with that hooligan Ronnie Haggarty! I'm gonna pray for you."

Granny made it her business to protect my reputation as well as her own because in the South everybody tends to know everybody so gossip spreads faster than kudzu. But despite Granny's best efforts, she once found herself in serious danger of being the topic of town gossip. Granny agreed to babysit her uncle Gene's pet myna bird while Gene was out of town. Myna birds are talking birds and they learn to talk by imitating the words and conversations they hear from their owners.

Granny brought the bird home one night and went to bed early because the next morning she was hosting Bible study at her home. As she cooked breakfast and prepared for her church guests she began talking to the bird and was tickled she taught it to say things: "I'm making biscuits . . . I'm frying bacon . . . I'm hosting Bible study." When her Sunday school class arrived Granny bragged to the church ladies about how quickly the bird had learned to imitate her.

Just as she Granny began to lead the Bible study the phone rang. Granny decided to let it ring because she was didn't want to interrupt the lesson. And that's when the bird started hollering, "Sheeyut the phone's ringing! Answer the dayum phone! Somebody answer the dayum phone!" As you can imagine Granny was totally embarrassed and the church ladies were horrified. Granny finally answered the phone so the bird would stop cussing and she attempted to resume the Bible study. But it wasn't long before the phone rang again and the bird went nuts again, "Sheyut, will somebody answer that dayum phone! Jesus!" Granny wisely took the phone off the hook and scrambled to explain that the bird was her uncle's but realized this only verified that the bird was technically family so unfortunately Granny was further humiliated.

Granny told me that after that incident she got several sideways glances around town and in church. She didn't know for certain what the church ladies said about her but she was keen enough to know that stories like that travel faster than lightening. Don't worry Granny. You keep resting in peace. Even if the church ladies did spread the gossip about your cussing bird . . . I bet they prayed for you.

STUFF SOUTHERN FOLKS SAY WHEN CHEWING THE FAT:

That woman's so annoying she could raise a sty on a pig's ass.
That man would pull up a sign and argue with the hole.
She should just skip the pleasantries and strap a mattress to her back.

There she goes, ass swinging like church bells at Easter.
He's so dumb it took him three days to study for a urine test.
She's so dumb she sits on the TV and watches the couch.
He's so dumb he could throw himself on the ground and miss.
She's dumber than a box of hair.
She's so fat when she hauls ass she has to make two trips.
She's so skinny she's gonna fall through her butt and hang herself.

*

He's so dumb he couldn't pour piss out of a boot with instructions on the heel.
She don't have all her chairs in her parlor.
His cornbread's not done in the middle.
That man's only got one oar in the water.
She's nuttier than a fruit cake.
She's not even a hot mess . . . she's a lukewarm mess.
He's so lazy sweat won't run off his head.
She's so lazy she wouldn't work in a pie factory licking spoons.

Her nose is stuck up so high in the air she could drown in a rain-storm.

I'd like to buy that man for what he's worth and sell him for what he thinks he's worth.

That woman's wound up tighter than an eight-day clock.

*

That woman wouldn't warm up if she was cremated.

He's meaner than a sack full of rattlesnakes.

She's so ugly if she wore a stamp nobody would lick her.

He's so ugly he'd scare a buzzard off a gut pile.

His breath smells so bad it could make a funeral turn up a side street.

That woman talks enough for four sets of teeth.

That man could talk the balls off a pool table.

Her face looks like she was weaned on a pickle.

I wouldn't trust that man if his tongue came notarized.

He's so crooked if he swallowed a nail he'd spit up a corkscrew.

*

That woman's full of more crap than a constipated elephant.

That man's slicker than pig snot on a radiator.

He's as useless as a milk bucket under a bull.

She's as sorry as a two-dollar watch.

She's so sorry I wouldn't wave to her if my arm was on fire.

She was so drunk she was stumbling around like a blind mule in a pumpkin patch.

He was so high he could sit on Wednesday and see both Sundays.

That woman's got more issues than Better Homes and Gardens.

That man would complain if you hung him with a new rope.

He couldn't find his ass with both hands and a road map.

The only culture that woman will ever have is a yeast infection.

Talk Southern To Me 'Bout Life

**“SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA HANG IN
THERE LIKE HAIR IN A BISCUIT.”**

I was in Philosophy 101 class at the University of South Carolina listening to my professor prattle on about the merits of famous philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, when it dawned on me that I had been raised by philosophers. Being taught “Southern philosophy” is a rite of passage in the South. Southerners have their own particular system of philosophical thought that’s not always rooted in formal education but rather in life experience. And that life experience is passed down from generation to generation. And although much of this philosophy doesn’t make a lick of sense to us in childhood, as we grow and begin to view life through the prism of adulthood we come to appreciate the tremendous value of this homespun southern wisdom.

My Granddaddy, who I called “Papa Cooter,” was a cattle farmer, an auctioneer and a war hero. Now Papa Cooter wasn’t eat up with book smarts but he was certainly eat up with life smarts. He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease when I was young and lived with my family for many years so I got a full dose of Papa Cooter’s philosophy. He used to say, “Never kick a cow turd on a hot day.” As a kid, I thought to myself, “Why on earth would ya kick a cow turd?” Later in life I understood the lesson he was teaching me—timing is everything. I also came to learn that this was a quote

attributed to former President Harry Truman, who like my Papa Cooter, had a grounded sense of philosophy informed by years spent on a farm.

Lord knows I couldn’t have been farther away from a farm when I moved to New York City to pursue Broadway. I was so young and naïve and had to navigate my way through that urban jungle and all of the dangers that lurked within it. I attribute my survival to the treasure chest of southern philosophy accumulated from family folks like Papa Cooter. When I first landed in NYC I had a sublet apartment but the term was only for a month so time was a-tickin’. I knew I had to immediately hunt for a place to live and thought, “How hard can it be? My cousin Billy and my Uncle Jimmy are first rate deer hunters—hunting’s in my blood. Hunting comes natural to Southerners.” It only took a skinny minute for me to learn that getting an apartment in New York City is more competitive than a Texas beauty pageant.

Now this was back before the Internet so the apartment listings were in a weekly newspaper called *The Village Voice*. I would run to a newspaper kiosk at dawn to purchase the latest edition encouraged by my Daddy’s motto, “Luck favors the backbone not the wishbone.” I would immediately scour the classifieds and begin the grueling process of calling and setting up appointments with people looking for a roommate or with real estate brokers showing an available apartment. Then I would haul my tail all over the city meeting weirdoes I could never live with in spaces that were either inhabitable or outrageously expensive and were usually taken by the time I got there anyway. And the real estate brokers were all slicker than snot on a doorknob. They were fast talking Yankee sharks who’s fee was 15 percent of the yearly rental rate and that fee was required on top of two month’s rent and a security deposit.

The hunt had to be repeated each day, and there was no amount

of deer corn that could help me attract a NYC apartment. Every morning began with such optimism and every evening ended in despair. How would I ever make it to Broadway if I couldn't even find a place to live? I went to bed night after night crying crocodile tears but found strength in the philosophical words of my Granny Winnie, "Sometimes you gotta hang in there like a hair in a biscuit."

Sure enough, Granny Winnie was right. Mere days before my sublet was up I met a lady who had an enormous, sprawling, stunning apartment. She was a widow whose husband had recently died. She said she liked to spend most of her time at her house in the Hamptons so she was looking to rent one of her bedrooms to someone who could house sit since she was hardly ever at her city apartment. Not only was my hunt a success I had broken the Boone and Crockett Club record! Score! I quickly wrote her a check for nearly half the money I had saved teaching dance back home in South Carolina and skipped through the streets of Manhattan happier than a tick on a hound dog.

I moved into this gorgeous apartment and was so relieved I could finally focus all my energy on getting a job. Unfortunately, this lady focused all her energy on me. She never went to her Hamptons house. In fact she barely left the apartment. She had everything delivered: groceries, dry cleaning, medicine. I caught her listening to my phone conversations. She rearranged my food in the cabinets and refrigerator. She plastered "No Smoking" signs on my bedroom and bathroom door. I reminded her I was not a smoker. But she insisted the signs were necessary, "In case I had a visitor."

Well one afternoon I did have a visitor. A friend of mine worked on a cruise ship and it was docked in Manhattan for the day so we went to dinner then he came over to see my new place. When he left this lady had a meltdown and said I was never again allowed

to have a guest in the apartment because they might "steal something" and that "strangers made her uncomfortable." My childhood friend, Leslie, had a sassy Southern Mama named MurMur who used to preach to us, "To argue with a fool makes two." So instead of telling this fool she was overreacting, I quietly retired to my room. And that's when I noticed that the clothes in my closet had been rearranged. My heart sank. I knew I had to immediately find a new place to live 'cause my Granny Fowler taught me, "There's never enough makeup to hide crazy."

I left early the next morning for an audition and when I got home in the afternoon two policemen were waiting to inform me the owner was evicting me. I explained that I had paid for three months rent. They explained that my name was not on the lease so I had no legal rights. My jaw dropped . . . I was homeless. The police forced me to pack on the spot and haul my things down to the lobby. I sat on the stoop of that building incredulous that I was back at square one, and not sure what to do. But eventually, I wiped my tears and accepted reality. As Papa Cooter used to say, "Sometimes you gotta lick that calf all over again."

Thankfully I had a friend from Tennessee, Tabb, who was a dancer in NYC. Being a true Southern gentleman, he rescued me and allowed me to stay in his crowded apartment until I could figure something out. I was determined to find my own place—no more lunatic roommates. I searched for another few weeks then one day I made an appointment with a real estate broker handling a vacant studio apartment on the Upper West Side. I put on my nicest dress and heels, did full hair and makeup, and took the subway from Tabb's apartment in Queens to Manhattan. New Yorkers were melting from the oppressive summer heat but being a Southern woman weaned on humidity, I was unfazed and simply applied more pressed powder. I was on a mission.

When I walked in the office, the real estate agent gruffly shooed me towards a chair then yelled and cursed on the phone while I waited. And waited. And waited. As time passed my red headed temper began to boil but I remembered my Mama's philosophical mantra: "You catch more flies with honey than vinegar." When he finally spoke to me, I proceeded to unload every bit of Southern charm inscribed in my DNA. The ruder he was, the nicer I was. Mama always taught me to "Kill 'em with kindness." The more he tried to dismiss me from his office the more questions I asked him about his life and family. Charm disarms and I eventually got him under the Southern spell. Despite the fact that he had a huge stack of applications for that apartment and I was the least financially qualified candidate, he became exhausted by my cheerfulness and said, "Fine! If you'll leave so I can get back to work I'll help you get this apartment."

I had to bust through a lot of red tape, beg my friend's husband who worked on Wall Street to co-sign the lease, and make oodles of pleading phone calls to my Daddy who reluctantly helped me with money, but I got that apartment. It was so small when you sat on the toilet you had to put one foot in the bathtub but I was proud as punch of my palace. Despite an army of roaches, I slept like a baby my first night there feeling as if I had conquered New York. Little did I know I was about to face a mountain of new obstacles trying to make it to Broadway. But a blind mule ain't afraid of the darkness. So I chased my dream with gusto. And when I made it to Broadway I got that real estate broker tickets.

STUFF SOUTHERN FOLKS SAY ABOUT LIFE:

Don't let your alligator mouth override your hummingbird ass.
The sun don't shine on the same dog's tail all the time.
Don't go up a hog's butt to see how much lard is in a pound.
Don't bolt your door with a carrot.
Sweep your own back porch before sweeping somebody else's.
Sometimes the juice just ain't worth the squeeze.
The grass is always greener over the septic tank.
No need to fear the wind if your hay's tied down.
Anyone can eat an elephant one bite at a time.
Don't worry about the mule going blind just load the wagon.

*

Turnip tops don't tell you the size of the turnips.
Worrying is like a rocking chair, gives ya something to do but gets you nowhere.
Don't stir up crap unless you're willing to lick the spoon.
No matter how slick you are you can't slide on barbed wire.
You plant a butterbean you get a butterbean.
Live like a peacock; don't ruffle your feathers unless you're prepared to fight.
Don't bring a knife to a gunfight.
Even a blind hog finds an acorn now and then.
Many good flowers get chopped up by associating with weeds.
Let sleeping dogs lie.

*

You can put boots in the oven but that don't make 'em biscuits.
Tend to your own knitting.
Don't air your dirty linen in public.
Some folks are all hat and no cattle.

When getting your ducks in a row remember that some may not be your ducks.

If you ain't the lead dog then don't expect the view to be a changing.

The guilty dog barks the loudest.

Everybody walks up fool's hill.

An ounce of pretension is worth a pound of manure.

Some folks think cow horns won't hook.

*

Never wrestle with a pig; you'll both get dirty and the pig likes it.

Life is full of folks who want to lick the red off your candy.

Your chickens will always come home to roost.

You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

If you're gonna dance you gotta pay the fiddler.

If you can't hang with the big dogs then stay on the porch.

If you find yourself in a hole, quit digging.

Don't take any wooden nickels.

Never chew your cabbage twice.

Bloom where you're planted.

Talk Southern To Me 'Bout Parenting

“YOU CAN GET GLAD IN THE SAME BRITCHES YOU GOT MAD IN.”

Southern parents are 'bout as subtle as a tornado in a trailer park. They call it like they see it and rarely sugarcoat it. In order to be considered a true Southerner, you gotta be raised by one. I was raised by a village of Southerners: Mama, Daddy, two sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, preachers, and babysitters. None of these folks put up with my shenanigans. As a child, I was confused by their quirky philosophies and annoyed by their strict rules. But, I now realize I was brought up with tremendous love and wit and am forever grateful that my family molded me into a strong Southern woman with social graces.

Traditionally, Southern children are taught to respect their elders and do not call their elders by their first name. It's always “Ms. Honeycutt” or “Mr. Littlejohn.” These are the rules. “Yes, Ma'am,” and “No, Sir” are not optional—these phrases are required for survival. On several occasions I have offended a non-Southerner by saying, “Yes, ma'am.” And believe me, there wasn't enough time left in the universe to get them to understand I was simply being polite.

A healthy amount of fear is instilled in Southern children. The most dreaded thing Mama could say to me was, “Just wait till I tell your Daddy.” And all my Granny Fowler had to do was simply cut

her eyes at me in church and I knew immediately that I better sit up, shut up, and respect the Lord if I wanted to live to eat another piece of her mouthwatering Minnehaha cake.

Southern children aren't raised in a democratic fashion. They aren't given much of an opportunity to negotiate with their elders. A phrase I heard a million times as a child was, "Cause I said so, that's why." End of discussion. Bellyaching (aka whining) is frowned upon and hissy fits, especially in public, are not tolerated. That's 'cause Southern mamas do not like to be embarrassed in public . . . *ever*. Lord knows, I'm no parenting expert, but I do know that the South has its own particular style of child rearing; a style that I haven't observed while living in other parts of the country.

Here's a li'l story to illustrate my point:

While in a fancy department store in Los Angeles on a crucial mission to find the perfect shade of coral lipstick, I saw a little girl running amuck in the makeup department. She was putting her hands all over the makeup samples, knocking over displays, climbing on the makeup stools and using the lipsticks as a body crayon. We'll call this precious child, "Little Miss Nightmare." I thought the weary sales ladies' eyeballs were gonna pop right outta their sockets from holding in their anger.

Now Little Miss Nightmare's mother was unaware of this madness 'cause she was too busy talking on her phone and puckering her silicone-injected lips in every mirror she encountered. When Little Miss Nightmare sprayed her mother with some foul-smelling perfume, her mother finally took notice and calmly said to her child, "I'm shopping, please behave." That's when Little Miss Nightmare proceeded to have a full meltdown. She threw herself on the department store floor, kicking, screaming, and crying uncontrollably. I watched as the mother casually sampled hand cream and chitchatted with her screaming extraterrestrial.

The mother said, "Tell me what you are feeling." The child squalled uncontrollably. The mother said, "Use your words and tell me what you're feeling." Little Miss Nightmare squalled louder. The mother, who could not have cared less that her daughter was causing a scene, continued this line of questioning, "If you could describe your feelings as a color what would it be?" To everyone's delight, Little Miss Nightmare squalled *even louder*. The mother casually said, "Try to articulate what would make you feel less distressed." The child replied through sobs and tears, "Chocolate." The mother, still wrapped up in her lotion sampling, said, "You've already ate some organic cacao today, remember?" Little Miss Nightmare sobbed and stomped and yelled, "BUT I WANT REAL CHOCOLATE!" The mother, who had moved onto eye shadow sampling, said, "We've discussed this. Chocolate is bad for your skin." This sent Little Miss Nightmare into full dying duck fit frenzy mode screaming, "I WANT CHOCOLATE NOW! I WANT CHOCOLATE NOW NOW NOW!!!"

The mother refused to fold on the chocolate but I'm sure that's because she couldn't bear facing the Los Angeles mommy cliques with a chocolate-eating, sugar-consuming, acne-prone kid. I watched in awe as the mother went into full negotiation mode agreeing to buy something for the child in order to get the kid to calm down. I stood there, jaw dropped, looking like a carp as the mother bought Little Miss Nightmare a tube of Chanel lipstick. *Chanel* lipstick. Good gussie! You can't make this stuff up.

Now, here is how that scenario would typically play out down South.

The very moment the child begins destroying the makeup department the Southern mama says sternly, "I've got two words for you: BE-HAVE." The Southern child, being a child, still proceeds to pitch a fit. The Southern mama narrows her eyes and

warns, “Quit actin’ ugly.” The Southern child, testing boundaries, continues the fit. The Southern mama, now in full on embarrassment mode, smiles apologetically to everyone watching then turns to her child and snaps, “Stop making a spectacle of yourself!” The stubborn Southern child’s fit escalates. The Southern mama, now furious, plasters on a pageant smile and under her breathe through gritted teeth gives the ultimate Southern parental warning, “If you don’t stop crying, I’m gonna give you something to cry about.” The child immediately calms down, snuffles and says, “I want chocolate.” The Southern mama dryly retorts, “Yeah well, people in hell want ice water.”

Now I’m certain there are plenty of fancy child psychologists who find fault in this Southern parenting style. Nevertheless, this is generally how it’s done down South. And we grow up knowing it’s rooted in immense love. Funny thing is, Southern parents don’t stop raising you just ’cause you grow up or have kids of your own. No, no, no . . . it never stops. For the sake of sanity, I have learned to never embarrass my mama in public and have resigned myself to the fact that my mama’s way of doing things will always be better than my way. And I know that my Daddy will forever scold me like a five-year-old if he thinks I am acting meaner than a snake. And yes—Southern adults call their parents “Mama” and “Daddy” till the day their parents die. And then ironically, they deeply mourn the fact that all that suffocating, supreme, Southern rearing is officially over.

STUFF SOUTHERN FOLKS SAY WHEN PARENTING:

Y’all play pretty.
You ’bout to poke somebody’s eye out!
Askin’ ain’t gettin’.
Bless your little pea pickin’ heart.
Act like you got some raising!
It ain’t dirty, just blow it off.
When in doubt, ask yourself what Jesus would do.
You better march your behind over there and apologize.
Quit workin’ all that devilment!
Never pays to get too big for your britches.

*

Wait a cotton pickin’ minute!
You’ve done gone and done it now!
Be home by dark thirty or I’m sending the hounds to look for ya.
Eat this . . . it’ll make you pretty.
You’re ’bout to get your skirt tail twisted, little missy!
Suck it up, buttercup.
Do you kiss your Mama with that mouth?
Stop cuttin’ up!
I’m ’bout to jerk a knot in your tail!
Idle minds are the devil’s playground.

*

Don’t you roll your eyes at me in that tone of voice!
You get what you get and you don’t throw a fit.
You ain’t got no business going over to that place.
You are who you associate with.
Don’t act like you were raised in a barn!
Don’t you track up my floors!

Just wait till your Daddy gets home.
Say that again and I'll wash your mouth out with soap.
Did your Daddy teach you that?
Get your hind-end down from there.

*

Keep your dress down and your nose clean
Your face is gonna freeze like that.
If you don't stop doing that you're gonna go blind.
I brought you into this world and I will take you out.
You need to drink some act right juice!
You're cute as a bug in a rug!
Life sucks, hun, get a straw.
If y'all are gonna kill each other then go outside.
Child you gotta cowboy up.

*

Keep it up and I'll cancel your birth certificate.
Quit wigglin' like a worm in hot ashes.
Well, it's better than a stick in the eye.
You need that like you need a hole in your head.
Do not bother me unless you're on fire.
You didn't get that from my side of the family.
Me and you are 'bout to have a come to Jesus meeting.
That's your little red wagon to pull.
No child of mine is going out of the house dressed like that.
Use your head for more than a hat rack.

*

Don't you back sass me!
Piss-poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency
on my part
Get outta that!
You gonna ride to town on that pouting lip?

Darlin', you gotta caviar appetite on a peanut butter budget.
You better give your heart to Jesus 'cause your butt is mine.
Pee in one hand and wish in the other and see which one gets filled
up the fastest.
Can't never could till he tried.
You've made me proud as punch!
You're gonna miss me when I'm dead and gone.