

Cycle 1

Annotate: What details does ea. person remember?

other people's memory

You were born in the morning, Grandma Georgiana said.
I remember the sound of the birds. Mean
old blue jays squawking. They like to fight, you know.
Don't mess with blue jays!
I hear they can kill a cat if they get mad enough.

teacher

And then the phone was ringing.
Through all that static and squawking, I heard
your mama telling me you'd come.
Another girl, I stood there thinking,
so close to the first one.
Just like your mama and Caroline. Not even
a year between them and so close, you could hardly tell
where one ended and the other started.
And that's how I know you came in the morning.
That's how I remember. proof

cycle

diff
8/10/10

You came in the late afternoon, my mother said.
Two days after I turned twenty-two.
Your father was at work.
Took a rush hour bus
trying

stu
#1

stu
1

to get to you. But
by the time he arrived,
you were already here.

He missed the moment, my mother said,
but what else is new. *sad, upset?*

stu
2

You're the one that was born near night,
my father says.

When I saw you, I said, She's the unlucky one
come out looking just like her daddy.

He laughs. Right off the bat, I told your mama,
We're gonna call this one after me. *happy, proud*

teacher

My time of birth wasn't listed
on the certificate, then got lost again
amid other people's bad memory.

Cycle 2: AIR

no returns

Q3. When my mother comes home
from the hospital with me,
my older brother takes one look
inside the pink blanket, says,
Take her back. We already have one of those.

Already three years old and still doesn't understand
how something so tiny and new
can't be returned.

how to listen #1

Q4

Somewhere in my brain
each laugh, tear and lullaby
becomes memory.

haiku

memories are made
even when we are not
exactly conscious of them

Cycle 3: FASE

Annotate: Who is Uncle Odell? mother's brother
JW's uncle
What happens to him?

uncle odell

Q5a

teacher

Six months before my big sister is born,
my uncle Odell is hit by a car
while home in South Carolina
on leave from the Navy.

Is JW born yet?

stu 1

When the phone rang in the Nelsonville house,
maybe my mother was out hanging laundry *daily*
on the line or down in the kitchen

stu 2

speaking softly with her mother-in-law, Grace, *missing*
her own mama back home.

Q5b

stu 3

Maybe the car was packed and ready for the drive
back to Columbus—the place my father
called the Big City—now *their* home.
But every Saturday morning, they drove
the hour to Nelsonville and stayed
till Sunday night.

*imagined/
reconstructed
memories*

teacher

Maybe right before the phone rang, tomorrow
was just another day. *sunday*

stu 4

But when the news of my uncle's dying
change

stu
4

traveled from the place he fell in South Carolina,
to the cold March morning in Ohio,
my mother looked out into a gray day
that would change her forever.

change

teacher

Your brother

my mother heard her own mother say
and then there was only a roaring in the air around her
a new pain where once there wasn't pain
a hollowness where only minutes before
she had been whole.

change

Q6

stu

5

*Find Uncle Odell on Woodson
family tree.
How's he related to JW?*

Cycle 4: FASE

Annotate: What good news is?
Who receives news?

good news

cycle of life
Odell, Odella
Months before

Months before the bone-cold
Buckeye winter settles over Ohio,
the last September light brings

my older sister,

named

Odella Caroline after my uncle Odell
and my aunt Caroline.

legacy

How much time has passed since

"uncle odell"?

"Six months before"

"cold March morning"

↓
"last Sept. light"

In South Carolina, the phone rings.

As my mother's mother moves toward it,
she closes her eyes,

then opens them to look out over her yard.

As she reaches for it,

she watches the way the light slips through
the heavy pine needles, dapples everything
with sweet September light...

Her hand on the phone now, she lifts it
praying silently

Q7a,
b

for the good news
the sweet chill of autumn
is finally bringing her way.

my mother and grace

It is the South that brings my mother
and my father's mother, Grace, = mother-in-law
together.

Grace's family is from Greenville, too.

So my mother

is home to her, in a way her own kids
can't understand.

You know how those Woodsons are, Grace says.

The Woodsons this and the North that

making Mama smile, remember

that Grace, too, was someone else before. Remember
that Grace, like my mother, wasn't always a Woodson.

They are home to each other, Grace
to my mother is as familiar
as the Greenville air.

Both know that southern way of talking
without words, remember when
the heat of summer
could melt the mouth,
so southerners stayed quiet

★
looked out over the land,
nodded at what seemed like nothing
but that silent nod said everything
anyone needed to hear.

Here in Ohio, my mother and Grace
aren't afraid
of too much air between words, are happy
just for another familiar body in the room.

*silence
quiet*

But the few words in my mother's mouth
become the *missing* = *quiet silence* up Odell
after Odell dies—a different silence her
than either of them has ever known. brother

I'm sorry about your brother, Grace says.
Guess God needed him back and sent you a baby girl.
But both of them know
the hole that is the missing isn't filled now.

Uhhh, my mother says. *Odell*
Bless the dead and the living, Grace says. *Odella*

Then more silence
both of them knowing
there's nothing left to say.

*can't fill the "hole"
or fix this.*

each winter

Each winter

just as the first of the snow begins to fall,
my mother goes home to South Carolina.

Sometimes,

my father goes with her but mostly,
he doesn't.

So she gets on the bus alone.

The first year with one,

the second year with two,

and finally with three children, Hope and Dell hugging
each leg and me

in her arms. Always

there is a fight before she leaves.

Ohio

is where my ^{father} father wants to be
but to my mother

Ohio will never be home,

no matter
how many plants she brings
indoors each winter, singing softly to them,
the lilt of her words a breath
of warm air moving over each leaf.
In return, they hold on to their color
even as the snow begins to fall. A reminder
of the deep green South. A promise
of life

← space = separation
- but not here

somewhere.

journey

separation

You can keep your South, my father says.
The way they treated us down there,
I got your mama out as quick as I could.
Brought her right up here to Ohio.

Told her there's never gonna be a Woodson
that sits in the back of the bus. *power*
Never gonna be a Woodson that has to
Yes sir and No sir white people.
Never gonna be a Woodson made to look down
at the ground.

All you kids are stronger than that, my father says.
All you Woodson kids deserve to be
as good as you already are.

Yes sirree, Bob, my father says.
You can keep your South Carolina.