

Wish You Were Here - Memoir of a Truckers Daughter by Kristine Hall

Acknowledgement

For my Mom. As you say the umbilical cord was never severed, it's just stretched over time. I'm lucky to have you in my life, thank you for always being there for me. I love you to the moon and back.

For Jonathan. Where to begin, as the oldest you taught me how to be a mom. Through trial and error, and laughter and tears, I learned how to love unconditionally. There has never been a mountain too tall that you haven't willed yourself to climb. I like to believe you get your drive and determination from me. Just know it's been the pleasure of my life watching you grow from Jonbaby, Jonboy, Jonathan, to Jon, and I couldn't be more proud of the man you've become. Stay strong, let those Burgess Blues shine, and never forget those who loved you the most.

For Justin. I've always said from the moment you were born that you came into my life just in time. My heart was overjoyed with love and devotion when I looked into your big brown eyes. Ever the mischief maker, with nicknames like Justinroo (because you are so unruly), Roo-tabaga, and J-Roo, you have filled my life with light and laughter. Like me, you have a good heart and will forever touch the lives of those around you, just remember to not lose yourself in the process.

To my Daddy. I wouldn't be the person I am today without you. From the shit-eating grin, the curly blonde locks, to the Burgess Blue eyes, no one could deny I'm your baby girl. But I'm also made up from the parts of you that weren't visible to the human eye. Qualities such as strength, honesty, compassion, mirth, righteousness, not to mention a myriad of insecurities. It's both a curse and a gift, but I believe it's the choices I've made along the way that have come to define me as a person. I'm thankful for being a trucker's daughter. Each lesson you taught me is a mile marker on this non-refundable, one-way way trip we call life.

And last but not least...to my Joe. I couldn't have picked a truer partner in crime, best friend, and lover. You are always here for me. Solid, reliable, unwavering, my rock. But even the toughest rocks aren't immune to erosion. Little by little the sands of time eat away at the layers leaving just a fragment of the stone it was before. I honestly wish you would share the burden of the demons and decisions you carry within. But as the proverb states, if wishes were ponies, beggars would ride, so all I can do is offer my unconditional love and sage advice. The significance of Memento Mori is not lost upon you as you wear it on your sleeve as a dark reminder that tomorrow isn't a guarantee. In contrast, accepting Memento Vivere is just as vital. There cannot be a balance without one or the other, allow yourself to live in the light.

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Introduction

As in any project or undertaking, the first step is always the hardest. I've dreaded putting words on paper regarding my father and the miles that kept him away from our family, and the trips that brought us together. Maybe it's because I don't want to rekindle the grief of my father's death? Or fear that there is so much to share? Moreso I'm afraid that when I start writing I know the white washed memories I have kept in the snow globe of my mind will become tarnished, that once acknowledged, those memories I've sheltered from the truth, will no longer have a home in my heart. Regardless of the reason, the time is now...

Chapter 1 Point of Beginning

It was December 19, 1974 and my mother was giving birth to me (her 5th child) at Maricopa County General Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona. She was pissed because she'd gone into hard labor that morning and as normal my father had yet to make an appearance. I had already been birthed, bathed, fed, and placed in a bassinet beside my mothers bed by the time my dad and uncle came stumbling into the hospital room.

Like Burt Reynolds and Jerry Reed in Smokey and the Bandit, my father and my Uncle Mike had made a quick turn-around from Phoenix to L.A. for some fly by night trucking company, but had stopped off at Pete's Place to have a congratulatory drink to mark the occasion. Well one turned into many, until they eventually lost all track of time.

My mother, much to her chagrin, always had a hard time staying mad at my dad for long. Their battles could wagger for days, but sooner or later she'd always give into his shit-eatin grins and his Conway Twitty style "Darlins." But ole Conway didn't have anything on Fox, and my mom couldn't help but love him for it.

Fox. That was my dad's CB handle. It was even tooled into the center of his western belt for all the world to see. His real name was Lonnie Carl Burgess II, but no one ever called him that except my mom and my grandma. My Aunt Helen often called him Wormy, which later in life I learned was due to him being terribly skinny from working the tobacco fields as a child on their

family farm in Yell County, Arkansas. She would laugh and say “everyone thought he had worms until he was a teenager.”

From his starched Wrangler jeans, cotton pearl snap yoked shirts, to his pointed toe cowboy boots, at age thirty-seven my father was the epitome of an old school All-American truck driver. A perfect mix of James Brolin in Steel Cowboy, Kenny Rogers in the Gambler, and dash of the country music legend Don Williams.

When my dad was only fifteen my grandpa lost the lease to the tobacco farm after he and his wife divorced. He didn't offer to take my dad and my Aunt Helen, just packed his bags and took a job in Texas for the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. My grandma, my dad, and his sister took what little belongings they had and moved into a tiny apartment in Little Rock, Arkansas.

My Aunt Helen, being three years older, worked at a car hop until she met my Uncle Mike a year later. They married and struck out for Arizona with my Grandma Alene in tow. My dad, being sixteen, wanted to stay behind to make his own way. He lied on an application to the city bus lines, stating he was eighteen years old. They believed him and put him to work driving the downtown route. It was more money than he'd ever made in his entire life, and it ultimately put him on the path to being a truck driver.

After a couple years in Little Rock, and a dozen letters later from my Aunt Helen begging him to come out to Arizona, he took a bus to Phoenix. He stayed with my aunt and her husband just long enough to get on his feet. He worked odd jobs driving a dump truck, a tow truck, even driving local shuttle around town until he landed a driving gig with a little company running loads to Los Angeles and back.

It wasn't long thereafter that he hooked up with a woman by the name of Virginia and they were married by the end of the year. Four kids and fifteen years later they divorced and he found himself broke and homeless. Drugs and alcohol had run rampant during the marriage. Virginia had checked herself twice into a hospital for rehabilitation, but in the divorce she still got to keep the house, the kids, and the new car. His only option was to move into a broken down trailer with a work buddy out in the middle of the desert.

My Aunt Helen would tell the story about how she woke up one morning "with the feeling that if she didn't go check on Wormy something bad was going to happen." She then drove herself to the dusty outskirts of Phoenix and found the front door of the trailer open for all to see. But what she found inside would get her laughing, she'd say, "Right there in the front room amongst all the beer bottles, sand, and dust was a horse! And your daddy passed out in the bedroom and didn't even know it!" She said, "I grabbed a bucket from outside, filled that sucker in the kitchen sink and walked back there and poured the whole damn thing on his head. I told him Wormy you have got to change the way you are livin'."

A year later he was back on his feet but made the same mistake twice. He remarried Virginia and moved back into the house only to find out she had been cheating on him while he was gone every other night working. The marriage lasted less than a year and they found themselves fighting it out in court once again. This time she was allowed to keep the house but my father was no longer responsible for making the payments. The judge also granted him joint custody. However, being a single dad with an odd work schedule he had a hard time trying to keep the kids. Virginia took them back and asked the court for child support.

It was at this point my father had sworn off women all together. He rented a small apartment and purchased an old Ford pickup that got him back and forth from work just fine. He

had a stable job and was able to put some money in the bank. One morning at the local truckstop where he fueled his truck before he left out each trip he decided to grab breakfast. He'd say "when the waitress came over to take his order, it was at that moment I met your mother and I knew she was the one for me. I would someday marry her."

More to come...

Courting my mom

And it was a tv set for the win

Golden Rings

Chapter 2 Arizona

The life my family shared in Arizona happened mostly before I was born, but I grew up listening to the stories my parents shared about how they struggled to make ends meet. It was in the early 70's and the economy had taken a nosedive. My father who was in the transportation industry and a new member of Teamsters found himself working the extra board for freight companies trying to get hired on as a full-time driver.

These days weren't easy for my Mom. Before I came into the picture my Mom had already had two boys from her first marriage, given up a baby girl for adoption from a one night stand she had a year before she met my Dad (which I didn't finally learn about until I was forty, but that's another book that needs to be written,) and a stillbirth daughter with my father in which she felt that God had killed as punishment for not keeping the other baby.

Heartbroken and remorseful mother told my Dad that she didn't want any more children and they agreed she would have her tubes tied. Six months later she found out that she was pregnant with me. Surprise!!

To keep from being sued, the hospital asked if my Mom wanted a late term abortion, but my Mother refused. Instead they paid for all the expenses and even sent a big basket of supplies

home with the happy parents. My parents said everyone called my Dad Superman...my parents called me a miracle, sadly my siblings called me a mistake.

There were seven of us kids in total making up a his, mine, and ours family. My three older sisters and one older brother from my fathers previous marriage, my two older brothers from my mom's past marriage, and me, the baby. To say my Mother had her hands full would be a gross understatement.

In addition, she had to deal with the fear of her ex-husband swooping into town and kidnapping my step brothers as he had done on two separate occasions, the older siblings hitting, yelling, stealing, doing drugs, constantly staying out late and/or running away from home, and my fathers excessive drinking habits.

To make matters worse, the nine of us lived in a two bedroom single wide trailer in a low budget trailer park with only one working vehicle, my dad's old 1956 Ford pickup. The truck was so old the floor in the cab had completely rusted through and you could see the road pass by as if you were looking out the window. Somehow between food stamps and Goodwill they made it work.

Working an extra board meant you took whatever shitty load the company needed to be done when no other driver wanted to do it. My dad would get calls around the clock. When the call would come in mom would load us lil kids up and take him to the yard, 10 hours later he'd call her to come pick him up and she'd load us kids back into the truck. No matter the time, be it two in the morning or noon, my mother would be there without fail.

Well that is unless the old truck would break down, which it did often, and there she'd be with a baby on her hip and two young boys holding onto a belt loop trying to flag down help. As

she states those were “the Fuck My Life” days and she would would have just up and left it all behind.

Instead, to cope with the stress of a new infant and the chaos of life, she turned to taking the same little “White Crosses” my dad would crush and swallow to help him burn the midnight hours.

At some point the endless nights and days add up and your body has to rest. When I was just 3 months old my mom came down sick. She had lost weight and was weak when her sister Cathy called to tell her their mother had died.

My dad, always looking to find a better way to provide for the family, had driven to California for a week to apply for a job at a new trucking firm. My mom, not having any money to see a doctor or close family to drive her, could only lay in bed and cry the day her own mother was put to rest. Her sisters cleaned out the house and the contents in an afternoon and dropped off the family bible on the porch. Nothing more. When my dad came home he found her nearly unconscious and my oldest sister taking care of me. They later found out she had been suffering from Double Pneumonia.

More to come...

Adios Step kids

It's Paycheck Time

Moving to California

Chapter 3 California

Our move to southern California came out of necessity rather than adventure. Six weeks after my father had put in his application he got a call to come to work. With my brother Wesley between them, me on my moms lap, and everything we had in the back of that old Ford, my dad drove us to the Land of Milk and Honey.

As rentals go, the house my parents rented wasn't much, just a simple two bedroom shotgun home on a corner lot. The plus side was it was right next door to their friends Ray and Lavonne, the down side was the other three corners were occupied by local churches.

My father, with his bald head shining, his lamb chops framing his face, frayed cut off jean shorts, and wearing his old holey (or as he would call it "Holy") brown and orange striped tank top, would sit and drink beer on the front porch every Sunday and wish passing church-goers "good day." He got such a kick out of it he would even ask them on their way out of church if they'd like to stop off and have a beer.

Between the cursing, belching, and the napping that would ensue on my dad's part, and the gasps of mortification that could be heard from the church flock, my mother kept herself busy in the kitchen to avoid being dubbed a heathen. The irony is my father was a licensed preacher, but by his looks and actions, none of them would have guessed it.

Since Ray and Lavonne went to church (unlike our family) my mom would use that time to cook enough for both families. Both my dad and Ray had Sundays and Mondays off so Lavonne and mom would take turns hosting the weekend Canasta card game.

Even though the guys were working, money was still tight and Lavonne and my mom would pool their grocery resources to help make ends meet. They would buy meat in bulk and make meals they could freeze. They were the OG of meal prepping on a budget, but the one thing both families didn't give up was beer, smokes, and cards.

My dad used to say, as if reflecting on a proud moment, that "the smoke would be so thick in the dining room you could cut it with a knife." The stories they shared about Canasta nights used to make me laugh and wish I could remember. Like how Lavonne would tell my mom when her arms would give out "to pass that baby to me," and she would hold me against her big black bosom for the rest of the night.

As I started to talk Lavonne taught me to call her "Mammy." When the ladies went grocery shopping Lavonne would carry me. When I cried, she would comfort me and say, "shhh now child. Mammy is here." Lavonne and Ray were the closest friends my parents ever had. Yet my father made the mistake of one day saying "Nigger" in conversation and Lavonne quickly corrected him by saying. "Mr. Lonnie. I am not, and will never be a Nigger, to you, or to anyone. I am a Black woman. Now I know you didn't mean no harm as you were raised in the South, and I'm guessing no one ever told you any different. Ignorance can no longer be an excuse, because now you know." Lavonne was incredibly intelligent. It was Lavonne that noticed when the Mexican restaurant down the street changed their meat and wondered if they all were eating horse meat.

My dad always loved telling me this story because it had been a favorite place for him and my mom to grab a cheap meal out, especially with the rising cost of hamburger meat due to the beef shortage. My dad said "Really the whole damn neighborhood would eat there because it

was so damn cheap. But little did we know, the City of Downey California had been watching the restaurant in a sting operation, and shortly after shut it down for serving dog meat.” He would laugh and his blue eyes would twinkle and he’d say “ and here Lavonne thought they were serving horse. That would have been much better than dog meat any day.”

More to come...

Trip to the Redwoods,

The Search for Bigfoot,

and the decision to move to Texas.

Chapter 4 Texas

In the summer of 1978 we moved to Balch Springs, Texas a lil suburb on the outskirts of Dallas. My father had become a full time union driver with Teamsters and had received a transfer to the East Texas Motor Freight for work. It finally seemed like life was starting to look up for my parents as they purchased their first home together. A brand new 3 bedroom 2 bath brick home with a privacy fenced backyard.

My mother picked up oil painting as a hobby and enrolled me in ballet and tap so we had things to do, but her days were still filled with the needs of two young children and making sure my dad stayed clean enough to drive.

Every morning she'd drop off my brother at school in the old pick up, then me next to pre-K, then she'd pick me back up at lunchtime, we'd grab a bite to eat, and then she'd drop me off at dance class. Some days she'd stay and watch, and others she'd run various errands and go grocery shopping. Afterwards she'd pick me up and we'd finish our day by swinging back by the elementary school to pick my brother.

One day she picked me up from dance class in a brand new midnight blue Pontiac Firebird. I can still remember the golden dash and how the dark blue paint sparkled in the sunlight. The gear shifter had a beautiful solid wood knob and the stereo even had an Eight Track player. My mom and I would sing along to Crystal Gayles "Don't it make my Brown Eyes Blue", Charley Prides "Burgers and Fries", the Gaitlin Brothers "All the Gold in California", the Nitty Gritty Dirt Bands "Mr. Bojangles", and Barbara Mandrell's "I was Country when Country Wasn't Cool."

The car, a five year anniversary gift to my mom, was purchased off the showroom floor and she absolutely loved it. There wasn't a mom on the block that was cooler than she was.

But all that changed in a blink of an eye when my father, late one summer night, wrecked the car while driving home drunk from a bar. Somehow he managed to park it in the driveway without my mom knowing, but the next morning as my mom looked out the kitchen window while drinking her coffee she spotted her car.

"You motherfucker!!!" She screamed as she ran out the front door into the yard wearing only her nightgown and bathrobe. The entire driver's side of the car had been damaged. All my father kept saying was "he was sorry and he would fix it."

But my mother didn't care about his empty promises to stop drinking, she was beside herself with hurt and anger. Being a natural redhead, fury overcame her and she walked over to the leftover pallet of bricks in our front yard and throwed every brick through the windshield and remaining windows.

My dad, true to his word, did try to make things right. He contacted an auto body repair shop and a wrecker service to come pick up the car later that day. He even made me and my brother go fetch the bricks from the street.; we even collected bricks from the neighbors yard across the street. That's how far and hard she had thrown them.

It took weeks for the car to be repaired, but the day it came home it looked just as good as the day he had bought it for her...but it wasn't the same. It was used, broken underneath the new facade, damaged...just like my mother. She wouldn't accept the car as it was and never

drove it again. My dad ended up selling it and took a loss, but I think their marriage took the biggest hit of all.

After the Firebird fiasco my mother decided she would go to work part-time when I started kindergarten that fall. A local animal shelter needed a morning person to help feed and clean the kennels and my mother fit the bill. After dropping me and my brother off at school she would head over to the shelter and work till after lunch. I think the time away from me and my brother and the house gave her some time to think about her marriage and my fathers alcohol abuse. She had slowed her drinking down to only having a nightcap with him or the occasional evening out, why couldn't he do the same?

One morning she came to work and someone had tied up a stray German Shepard to the kennel fence with a note that said "Babe is a K-9 unit and needs a good home." My mother looked at the dog and must have recognized another lost soul and brought her home. When my dad came home from his run he found the dog laying on the living room floor. This didn't go over well with my dad, as he was raised with no animals in the house, and Babe found herself living outside. However, the man upstairs must have been watching out for my little broken family when he sent her to us, as she became the family guard dog. Babe would protect me while I was in the yard playing, would go with me and my brother to the ice cream truck, and even chase people away from our fence.

About a month after Babe came to live with us tragedy struck the next door neighbors family. The parents had gone out for an evening leaving a babysitter to watch their little boy and infant baby girl. At some point during the evening a man broke into the home through the baby's window and raped the baby girl and shoved her under the crib. The babysitter never knew what had occurred. When the parents came home they found the baby bleeding to death and tried to

rush her to the hospital but she died in her little brother's arms before they arrived. The police searched the home and fingerprinted the crime scene and the evidence matched the driver of the ice cream truck. My family to this day believes if my mom hadn't brought Babe to live with us he might have targeted our house.

But even with Babe protecting us from murderers and rapists my father didn't want to keep her. Perhaps he was in a drunken stupor or high on some pills but he loaded us all up including Babe into his black Chevy pick up and drove twenty miles into the country. It was supposed to be a learning event, he was dropping the dog off because we had grown to attached to it and in his eyes "it was just a stupid animal."

We drove away with Babe standing in the middle of a dirt road, tail tucked between her legs, head down, and just watching us leave her behind. As he picked up speed the dirt swirled behind us and she was no longer in view. The sound of two small kids crying and my mother wiping away her quiet tears were drowned out by the kicking up of gravel and rocks as my father drank his beer and drove us home.

Three days later as we stepped out to go to school Babe was laying on the front porch. Her feet were cut and blistered and it was visible upon her black and gold muzzle that tears had flowed down her face. She was hot and tired, but still licked our faces and wagged her tail when she saw us. My mother marched right back into the house and told my dad "either the dog stays or me and the kids are going to leave, and we will be taking Babe with us."

The threat had more power over my father than I expected and he let Babe stay. She lived with us till she was fifteen years old and my father never said another word about it.

More to come...

Babe the K9

Lake Tawakoni

Chapter 5
Missouri

More to Come...

Ryder Truck Lines

Horses or Ballet

Member of the Mob

Pills in the Freezer and pills in the car

Wyoming or Utah?

Chapter 6 Wyoming

More to Come...

Ryder/ P.I.E.

The Bunkhouse Bar

Workman's Compensation

4 Corners

Nebraska Bound

Yellowstone

P.I.E. Folds

Chapter 7 Crossroads

More to Come...

Should we stay or should we go?

Life in the Monfort Lane

Bankruptcy

If wishes were ponies...

Going back to Arkansas

Chapter 8 Arkansas

More to Come...

Tyson Foods

Pope County is Dry!

San Pedro, Texas

Grandbabies!!

Gulfport

Taking my dad around the World

Chapter 9 Final Destination

I will forever remember the day my father died, how could I not? Six months prior to the day he had been admitted to the hospital with double pneumonia. That day was December 19, 2008 and my 34th birthday. Unaware of the seriousness of the situation we all thought he'd just be given some meds and sent on his way. Unfortunately the doctors determined my father had a pathogen in his lungs and would need to have his lungs scraped to remove the virus. The surgery was invasive but the pulmonary doctor reassured it was routine and we should have little cause to worry.

That night we celebrated my birthday. We had dinner from the cafeteria and even drank Coke floats made from little hospital ice cream cups before he had to fast for his surgery the following day. Sadly it was the last time my father was ever able to eat or drink again. During the surgery he coded on the operating table which resulted in him being incubated and damaging his trachea. From there forth he was forced to live from a feeding tube.

Day in and day out my mother and I had watched as my father slowly deteriorated to where only a frail skeleton of a man remained. My heart ached to hear him beg for something to drink to the point tears would run down his sallow face or try to lick the chapstick I would apply to his cracked and bleeding lips.

Shortly after the surgery secondary infections began to attack his liver and kidneys and his oxygen levels would fluctuate.

From frantic ER nurses calling during the night informing us he only had minutes to live to daily affirmations that his condition was stable, my family weathered the storm of his horrible sickness.

After six months of long term care we were advised there was no more the hospital could do for him and he needed to be moved into hospice care. It wasn't the healing answer we had prayed for, but I can recall thinking at least my father wasn't going to die in a hospital. He was going home...I'm sure it was the answer to his prayers.

On June 10th, as the EMTs loaded him into the ambulance my mom and I gave him a kiss and he whispered the words "Love you both... see you at the house".

During the hour-long transport from the Little Rock hospital to our family home in Pottsville, Arkansas my father once again coded and endured a severe stroke from lack of oxygen. The EMT's rushed him directly to our county hospital where thankfully the ICU staff was able to retrieve a pulse.

However, on June 17th the doctors confirmed what we had been dreading; the test results showed no brain activity. The Burgess Blue Eyes looking back at us were the same, but he was no longer truly with us. The doctors suggested we take him off the ventilator within the week and wanted to know what day would be best for the family.

The news left my mother heartbroken and me angry. What day is a good day to kill your loved one? We had prepared ourselves to spend the last few days with him at home, but this seemed so unfair.

My father had driven a diesel truck for nearly 55 years without an accident. He had traveled every highway and bi-way across the United States and always said "Every road leads home." How cruel is fate that his last breath would be taken in a hospital only five miles from home?

With a heavy heart the evening of June 19th was chosen because Father's Day was on June 21st and my 4yr old son's birthday was on June 23rd. Since it was also a Friday, my husband at the time could get off work early and take our two boys to his parents house for the weekend allowing my mother and I time to grieve the man who was the glue that had kept our family together.

Did I mention he died of Chicken Shit disease? The unknown pathogen found in his lungs was Histoplasmosis. Yep, my father died from breathing in chicken shit from delivering chicken to damn processing facilities for Tyson Foods. God couldn't have picked a more redneck way for my father to die.

You said you wanted to get more written. You have plenty. I like how you have thought about the structure (the content) of an entire memoir. So, this is a great start. The real strength here is your voice and the dialogue. You sound Southern. I think readers will love the phrasing and the colloquial way of speaking. If you can nail down the voice, as you have, then writing the rest of the memoir is much easier.

Grade: 480/500

It's been a pleasure. Keep working on this.