

Laying Our Stories Side by Side: Grandma, Janie, and Me

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[Personal narrative] is the validation of women's experiences; it is the communication among women of different generations; it is the discovery of our own roots and the development of a continuity which has been denied us in traditional historical accounts.

—Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

The "text" [my grandmother] gave me was a map, a sketch abstracted from the multidimensional reality of her experience, her culture, her self. Critics applaud the novelist's careful development of a fictional character. How much more amazing was my Grandmother's gentle artistry that found a way to glimpse reality.

—Sandra Dolby-Stahl

I TURNED FROM THE CALENDAR TO FIND the diary in my bookcase. It was hard to miss; the orange and red cover stood out like a sister at a priesthood meeting. I started to reach for it but stopped and just looked at it. A voice in my head rose above the confusion, "The prophets have said to keep a journal." Yet I could not pick up the journal and write. The memories were too painful. I had been through too much to start remembering the pain now. She was gone and I could not stand the feeling of loss that came with remembering. Yet somehow I knew I had to pick up that book and write once more. My life was recorded on its pages, my mission, my two engagements, my answer from God that he loved me, my successes, my sorrows.

Yet this sorrow was too big to handle. My mind drifted to what I had just read with my English 115 students. Neil Postman in "Learning by Story" argues that our lives must be surrounded by stories that help us to decide what is important in life and what is not: "ever since we can re-

member, all of us have been telling ourselves stories about ourselves, composing *life-giving autobiographies* of which we are the heroes and heroines. If our stories are coherent and plausible and have continuity, they will help us to understand why we are here . . ."¹ The personal reflects the community; the personal gives us detail through which we can better see the whole. As Postman says, "Without air, our cells die. Without a story, our selves die."² Perhaps if I wrote about Grandma it would help me accept her death and understand it. As I pondered picking up the journal, memories from the funeral came creeping into my mind.

The day wasn't dark and rainy like most funerals on television; it was a beautiful day in May. As I walked out of the chapel I could hear the birds in the distance and the rush of automobiles from the freeway. The sun warmed my black, floral dress, the most somber dress I owned, and I squinted my eyes to see the casket my cousins and brother were carrying. She was gone and had broken her promise. Only a month before she and I had sat in the dining room at Sizzler. It was my graduation day. The flower on my dress was from her; it smelled of spring and new life, yet we talked of death. She was tired; she looked older. The lines on her face were becoming bags of skin; her hands shook as she sat at my side and ate her salad. "Grandma," I said, "I'll make a deal with you." Everyone in my family was bugging me about when I would get married. I was a twenty-four-year-old returned missionary entering graduate school and I was happy. I did not care to get married right away. I enjoyed my life and had plans for a career and travel. But everyone else wanted me to "be happy" and get married. Why is it married people think they are the only happy ones? "Grandma, what if we make a deal about death and marriage?" I was scared she would die and I had been thinking of a way to keep her motivated to live longer. She was Chopin's "mother-woman" and my idol. "I want you there at my wedding, yet that will not happen for many years. You live long enough to be at my wedding, and I'll look for someone to marry." Grandma wiped the salad dressing from her lips and smiled, "I would love to be at your wedding. It's a deal." Reassured and praying to God that he would honor our commitment, I nodded, gave her a kiss, and returned to my salad. Yet there I stood on the walkway and watched the boys put her casket into the hearse. She broke her promise to me. How could she; she never had done that before.

I stood up from my bed and walked across the room, shaking my head to lose the image. I saw a pile of papers and moved them to cover the diary as if this would keep me from remembering. Once I opened the journal, the feelings would come back and I would be forced to bare my soul. I would cry and the ache of loss would begin again. I thought of the

1. Neil Postman, "Learning by Story," *Dialogues and Conversations: A Reader for English 115*, ed. Grant Boswell and Gary Hatch (Needham Heights: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 184.

2. *Ibid.*

folklore class I was taking from William Wilson that semester. His article "Personal Narratives: The Family Novel" had said something that I found interesting. When we reveal and discuss personal narratives, we do so "at great risk of exposure."³ Wilson "do[es] not believe we can understand the emotional force narratives might exert in the lives of others until we have dealt with that force as honestly as possible in our own lives."⁴ Was I ready to risk exposure of my soul? Was I ready to share that pain with my posterity through my diary?

I sat back down on my bed and glanced around the room. In the bookshelf I saw the tattered copy of my favorite book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston. Janie, the protagonist, is a strong woman who takes risks to make her dreams come true. Reading the book was a revelation; I had never found a book that spoke to my experience so strongly. While reading it in a college course, I thought of what Paul D. talks about in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* when he compares his story to Sethe's. I began placing my "story next to hers" (Janie's); placing them side by side to observe them, not to judge or totalize, but to enjoy and listen.⁵ I know Janie is fiction, but her stories speak of life.

Hurston set up her first paragraphs in such a way that I felt the voice of a woman rising and crying out from the male stereotype that had held her silent.

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.⁶

"True," I had thought, "Some dreams you just have to give up on." However, Hurston woke me with the next lines she wrote:

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do accordingly.⁷

At this I came alert. Quickly rereading what I had just read, I could not imagine that someone would separate men's and women's dreams in such a manner. Yet Hurston did—women's "dream[s are] the truth. Then they act and do accordingly." I found a pen and wrote: "A woman's point of view. How refreshing." I wish at times that I could rewrite the impor-

3. William Wilson, "Personal Narratives: The Family Novel," *Western Folklore* 50 (Apr. 1991): 130.

4. Ibid.

5. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume Books, 1988), 273.

6. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 1.

7. Ibid.

tant texts in my life from a woman's point of view. How much different the Book of Mormon would be if Sariah had written on the plates. And Nephi's wife, think what she went through when bearing children in the wilderness. Why have so many woman's voices in the church been silent or marginalized? Eve has one great speech in the Pearl of Great Price, but then another strong woman's voice is not heard until Mary. And her voice is not her own but is transcribed by Matthew or someone else.

Leaning forward, I pulled out the copy of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In the book Janie is a young black girl being raised by her grandmother, Nanny. Janie's grandmother escaped slavery soon after her half-white daughter was born; likewise, Janie's mother was raped and ran away from home soon after Janie was born. Despite bad experiences with men, Nanny forces Janie into marriage with Logan Killicks, a land-owning, older, black man. For Nanny marriage is protection and a warm place to sleep; however, that is not what Janie is looking for. She discovers Logan does not want a wife; he wants someone to work beside him in the field. So Janie runs away with Jody Starks, a man with big dreams about building an all black community. However, he does not fulfill Janie's ideas of love either; he wants a wife to look beautiful and honor him. Again her dreams of romance fall. After Jody dies, Janie's last husband Tea Cake appears. He is a free spirit with no money and no steady job. However, he plays checkers and goes fishing with Janie, something no one else would do. They leave Eatonville and go to work in the swamps of Florida. During a flood Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog and becomes sick. In defending herself against the rabid Tea Cake, Janie shoots and kills him and soon after returns home to Eatonville.

I remember arguing with some in my class about the end of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. They said it has a sad or negative ending, implying Janie could not survive without a man. Yet I saw her as discovering herself and her voice through her relationships. Not only does Janie survive, but Hurston through her use of language created a feminine text full of imagery, folklore, and emotions that helps us to understand the women's community better. It is often through the individual that we glimpse the community. I argued that through these stories "personal experience is transformed to cultural experience through the telling of personal narratives . . . they help the world witness an individual's most fundamental yet difficult task—the momentary 'breakthrough' from personal reality into cultural reality."⁸

As I thumbed through the pages of the book, I thought about my grandma's voice and identity. Her voice had always been heard when

8. Sandra Dolby-Stahl, *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 120.

dealing with family issues and her identity came through being a homemaker and wife. However, I have no family of my own. How can I make my voice be heard in my culture and how can I find an identity? By Mormon standards I am hard to define because I do not have a husband or children. I have no one through whom I speak. I know I am not the only woman who has difficulty finding her voice in this community. Married women are also frustrated at times at their lack of personal identity or voice because they are defined by their relationships to husband and children.

My mother and I were driving to the store for forgotten dinner ingredients. Mom was upset and crying. I peeked her way occasionally to see if the anger was gone and eventually I worked up the courage to ask her what was wrong. Shaking her head she said she was tired of being the "Bishop's wife" or "Cheryl's mother." My heart beat quickly as I prepared for the worst. Was she getting a divorce; did she not love me anymore? She continued and said that she would like to be defined as a person not belonging to others. She wanted to be Karen, a woman with her own talents and identity.

I was too young at the time, only thirteen years old, to fully understand her meaning. However, as I now am without husband or children, and people have difficulty defining my identity, I understand what she was saying. Why is it I am often overlooked as an individual and people think I should belong to someone else? Dolan Hubbard, in "Recontextualizing the Sermon to Tell (Her)story," an article about *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, says Hurston raises many questions about the black female's experience. I find these questions are relevant to my experience:

What does it mean to be black and female in America? What are the terms of definition for women outside the traditional hierarchies? Is female status negated without a male defining principle? And [Hurston] raises these questions to reveal to the black community the one face it can never see: its own.⁹

So what does it mean to be Mormon and female? How am I defined outside traditional hierarchies? Is my status negated with a husband?¹⁰

As I remembered those questions, Janie again came to mind. Janie's voice is silenced in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, just as mine has been silenced at times in the church. The position of power for the black man is on the front porch telling stories, yet women are not allowed on the front porch. Storytelling controls a person's place in the society and can bring a person into the society when one knows how to create and tell stories. Hurston defines black women's status by showing Janie's move from the

9. Dolan Hubbard, "Recontextualizing the Sermon to Tell (Her)story," *The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 48.

10. *Ibid.*

kitchen to the porch. She is silenced repeatedly but eventually finds her voice and way onto the porch. She begins her move by praising Jody, her second husband, when he saves an old mule. She speaks her gratitude and the men praise her voice: "Yo' wife is uh born orator, Starks. Us never knowed dat befo'. She put jus' de right words tuh our thoughts."¹¹ Yet this is only the beginning of her move to the front porch.

I remember struggling to find my voice in Mormon society as a young girl. I was sitting in Primary during song practice and the chorister suggested we sing "I Hope They Call Me on a Mission." This happened to be one of my favorite songs and I squirmed in my seat in anticipation. The chorister asked for volunteers to help lead this song. I quickly raised my hand and waved it, hoping to catch her eye. Yet I shouldn't have even bothered. She had someone different in mind, a boy. She called Moroni up to the front of the room, "What a fine missionary Moroni will make someday, boys and girls. He is a wonderful example to all you young men." I remember thinking that Moroni was not all that good of an example. He chased me home from school every day and pulled my hair at recess. No, not a good example at all. Yet the message that really angered me was that the chorister said that only the young men would go on missions. What about me? Didn't the Lord want me to serve him too? I decided at that moment that I would serve a mission. I would be a better missionary than Moroni or any other man and would show all the world (at least the Mormon world) girls could be missionaries too.

Smiling at my young ideas of feminism, I let my mind wander further. That resolution stuck. I did serve a mission, and I eventually developed other reasons to serve. Although I had prayed and received an answer from God to go on a mission, people continued to discourage my desire to serve.

I stood in the hall of the seminary building. It was lunch time and the students were laughing and joking with the seminary teachers. Graduation was nearing and Brother Jones asked me what my plans were. I had been accepted to Brigham Young University with a scholarship and was quick to share this information: "I want to study English and get my Ph.D. so I can help others to love English as much as I do. And I also want to serve a mission." At the announcement of these plans Brother Jones laughed, "You will be married before you are twenty," he said, "and have your first child by the time you are twenty-one." I felt as though he had slapped my face or, worse, patted me on the head like a child who still had silly dreams about what life held. I did not reply, but his words have never left me.

11. Hurston, 55.

I reached forward again this time touching the diary. My hand shifted to another diary beside it. I pulled it from the shelf, again turning away from the empty journal. This was the journal I wrote when I was younger. These memories were not as painful to share as those in the one I was struggling with now. Fortunately I had been raised in a loving LDS family who believed in working together. Life was pretty easy at times, at least my family life was fun and romantic to my little girl eyes.

I remember being a little girl and watching Grandma and Grandpa. They were so in love, even after thirty years of marriage. I did not know that marriage was otherwise. It seemed a happy, blissful state where romance and love abounded. I remember Grandma telling me stories of how they met and fell in love and kept the romance alive in later years. The last year Grandma was alive, she was in the hospital but still wanted a special anniversary. As I remember it, she was determined to celebrate with Grandpa and make it a romantic evening for him. So she talked to the nurses and they helped her prepare a small party. They talked to the cook who said she could prepare a special dinner. Grandma then made a poster and decorated the lounge. Then she called Grandpa and told him to bring a camera and come to the hospital. When Grandpa got there, they went down to the patient lounges; everything was all set up and the cook brought the food including an anniversary cake.

Leaning back on my bed, I thought of Grandma's marriage. For her marriage was service and love. She had married young and was raised by the old school of what marriage was. Yet it worked for them. They were happy and she always wanted me to be happy in marriage too. From this example I thought marriage and romance were easy. Yet this ideal was destroyed by my two broken engagements. Likewise, Janie had an ideal of romance and marriage which is destroyed by the first two men in her life:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid.¹²

But life is full of unfulfilled expectations.

I rolled over on the bed and glanced out the window. It has been almost a year since Grandma's death; next month, 20 May, will be one year.

12. Hurston, 10-11.

That is the day after my own wedding. If she had only waited one more year. But how could she; her body was tired. Yet I still needed her. Did God really need her more than I? Is her work on that side so much more important than the work she did on this side to leave before I got married? I leafed through the pages of the open journal, still warily glancing at the neglected diary on the bookcase.

As I jumped from page to page, I found a story Grandma had told me about duty in marriage. Grandma believed that it was the woman's job to stay home and take care of the home and the man's job to work and provide money. That is good if that fulfills a person, but I did not know if that would fulfill me.

I remember one disagreement about this in particular. Grandma was sick and in the hospital again. She had been there a month and I knew I needed to visit her. After church one winter morning, I drove up to Salt Lake City to see her. The sun was shining but was deceptive, as snow still covered the ground and cold air stung my throat and lungs. Later, sitting on the bed next to Grandma, I talked about my upcoming graduation and plans for the future. Soon the topic led to dating. "Was I dating anyone?" she wanted to know. A typical question for unmarried twenty-four-year-olds. "No," I replied. "I believe I scare men off. I have a mind of my own and like to use it. Too many men would like to mold a wife, not have a wife who can think for herself." Grandma nodded at this and said, "Perhaps you are just too intelligent. Maybe you shouldn't show these men you date how smart you are until they like you. That will make your intelligence easier to accept." I could not believe what Grandma was suggesting—put on an act just so I could catch a man? No way. My face reddened in protest but my words were soft, "Grandma, if a man does not love and accept me for who I really am, I could never marry him." She disagreed and we discussed the topic further. I felt as though I were an item for sale, a piece of merchandise to be bought by a man who would select me from a premade list of what he wanted in a wife.

While remembering this experience, I thought how Janie felt pushed into marriage. Nanny did not want Janie to be used the way she and her mother had been used and she thought marriage was the way to avoid this problem. Yet Janie did not want to marry for security, she wanted her pear blossom, her ideal romance. Instead "[Janie] had been set in the market-place to sell. Been set for still-bait."¹³ Forced into the "kitchen" and into a marriage bondage, Janie lost the idea of "true romance": she knew now that marriage did not make love. "Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman."¹⁴ If dreams have to die before I can become a woman, then I will remain a child. Years later Janie looked back

13. Hurston, 86.

14. *Ibid.*, 24.

and viewed this forced marriage as a betrayal:

She had hated her grandmother and had hidden it from herself all these years under a cloak of pity. She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of people; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her. But she had been whipped like a cur dog, and run off down a back road after things. It was all according to the way you see things. Some people could look at a mud-puddle and see an ocean with ships. But Nanny belonged to that other kind that loved to deal in scraps. Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon—for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you—and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her.¹⁵

I certainly do not hate my grandma for her views on marriage. She was only trying to help me feel what she felt. Yet I am afraid that some will fall into the trap of being what someone else is looking for in a wife instead of being themselves. Finding an identity in Mormon culture can be hard. Society is set up for men and their voices. I still am struggling to find me and hear my voice in the din of men around me.

Flipping farther into the journal I found the story of how I began to use my voice and how I raised it in defense of woman. I was a Relief Society president shortly after my mission. I enjoyed teaching these women about God and the plan he has for women and men. The priesthood authority sat in on our lessons Sunday after Sunday, and at times it was uncomfortable to have the men in the room. Women enjoy talking as women to women, and some of the sisters mentioned that they wanted time without the brethren. When I brought my request to the bishop, he did not understand, but he knew that I was sincere in my request. So he and I compromised that the brethren would visit the Relief Society only twice a month. One month the bishopric had already visited Relief Society three times and it was the last Sunday of the month. One of the counselors walked toward our room to visit again. When I stopped him and asked him not to come in, he told me that I had no right to deny a priesthood holder access to a Relief Society meeting. When I reminded him of my agreement with the bishop, he told me that it did not matter and that he was going to visit Relief Society anyway. I again insisted that he not visit today but told him he was welcome next week. At this point he was quite angry with me and I was crying because of his anger and his use of what he called "priesthood authority" that allowed him to visit the meeting. He left upset and the bishop had to calm him down. My voice was heard, but it took effort for me to find a voice that could be heard. My

15. *Ibid.*, 85.

voice also could not stand alone but had to have the backing of the bishop before it was valid.

My experience recalled the story of Hurston's Janie finding her voice. She is able to emerge more fully on the front porch when she finally stands up for herself as well. Jody and the other men are laughing "at the expense of women," and Janie speaks back. She changes from not caring to enter the conversation at the beginning of the novel: "She had never thought of making a speech, and didn't know if she cared to make one at all,"¹⁶ to "thrust[ing] herself into the conversation" when the men are making fun of women. She tells them: "It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens."¹⁷ Later Jody makes fun of Janie's body and age, and she again replies angrily to him, accusing him: "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life." The other men in the store are shocked but laugh at Jody's expense. This ruins Jody's place in the community because he has been defeated in public by his wife; however, Janie has found her voice and learned to use it in her defense.

Again I flipped through the diary and the pages fell open to 15 March 1993. My heart felt the familiar ache it had a year ago. I closed the book and laid it on the bed next to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. How similar were the experiences recorded in the books. March 15 was the day my second engagement was broken off. Neither engagement had been my dream of a marriage. I wanted a best friend, love, and equality, yet neither man could offer that. My first engagement began and ended quickly. I was twenty-two and feeling like an old maid after my mission. The day I stepped off the plane the whisper began in the back of my mind: "You need to get married. Fulfill your eternal plan . . . marriage . . . marriage. . . ." This voice was echoed by well meaning friends and relatives who asked me my plans for marriage. So I found a man, felt secure with him, and said, "Yes." But like Janie with Logan, I knew marriage would not make love. Nanny had tried to save Janie from being used as a mule, yet Logan only wanted a mule, not a wife. Likewise, my well meaning members had tried to help me find an identity with a husband; yet I probably would have lost my identity in this marriage.

My second engagement was not much better. Like Jody, Doug had big dreams and plans for the future. I have to laugh when I think about how naive I had been. He said he loved me, yet I often felt like an object. One weekend we had big plans; we were going ring shopping and then to a wedding reception. Doug mentally perused my closet for my "sexiest" outfit and told me what I should wear, hoping to impress his old

16. *Ibid.*, 41.

17. *Ibid.*, 70-71.

high school friends with his new girlfriend. I dressed and we left for the jeweler's. Once there we agreed on a setting but were undecided about the diamond. Finally Doug turned to me and said, "I want you to be proud to walk into Relief Society wearing this ring; so the diamond must be at least one caret." The look on his face was sincere so I shrugged and agreed. The comment was unusual but I said nothing. Looking back I realize he wanted a possession to show off and prove his manliness, similar to how Jody felt about Janie. Jody may have taken Janie away from being a mule, but he dressed her up like a doll and set her in his store to be a symbol of his *manhood*. She is a possession to be admired, nothing more. So Janie and I wait and "save up feelings for some man [we have] never seen."¹⁸

As I examine the two books in front of me, I realize how my stories are a part of my experience. My stories reflect the society in which I live. I was raised by a mother who worked and a grandmother who loved to stay home and was the "mother-woman." From Grandma I was taught that marriage is bliss and a woman's place is in the home. From my mother I learned that she worked mostly because she had to, but that it also brought her a sense of individuality. From these women and their stories I had to sort out my identity. I like who I am. I enjoy my studies; I like being single and I find my identity within my studies and my career. In a way I wish to be like my grandma, happy with raising a family and staying home. I also hope that I will have a love as fulfilling as hers. But I had a hard time believing that love and individuality could mix. That is until I found my Tea Cake.

Tea Cake is Janie's last love. Tea Cake teaches Janie to be herself and to love herself for who she is. However, in the end Tea Cake goes crazy and tries to kill Janie. To protect herself she shoots him. When Janie is on trial for Tea Cake's death, she is allowed to speak again. In the speech to the court Janie raises her strong feminine voice to proclaim her love for Tea Cake. So Janie

had to go way back to let them know how she and Tea Cake had been with one another so they could see she could never shoot Tea Cake out of malice. She tried to make them see how terrible it was that things were fixed so that Tea Cake couldn't come back to himself until he had got rid of that mad dog that was in him and he couldn't get rid of the dog and live. He had to die to get rid of the dog. But she hadn't wanted to kill him. A man is up against a hard game when he must die to beat it. She made them see how she couldn't ever want to be rid of him. She didn't plead to anybody. She just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed. She had been through for some time before the judge and the lawyer and the rest seemed to know it.¹⁹

18. *Ibid.*, 68.

19. *Ibid.*, 178.

With her simple story of truth, Janie silences those voices against her. Her voice becomes the powerful one. Yet her voice is still the voice of a woman. She did not change; she learned how to get others to listen.

My mind returned to the books in front of me. Because I have not written in my journal since Grandma's death, I have not recorded my story of B. J. He is my mixture of love and individuality in a marriage. As I leaned back on the bed, my mind recalled the first time I knew I loved him. B. J. and I sat on the couch correcting my English 115 papers, yet my thoughts were filing through the possibilities of a relationship with him. I was scared, yet knew the man sitting beside me was my best friend. We talked about everything together. But I was afraid he might want me to be a possession, like Doug did or to be a dedicated full-time housewife/mother like my grandmother was. I could not do either. Yet did I want to live alone? My experiences from the past kept me from listening to the feelings I had for him. My mind wandered to Grandma and Grandpa and to the love they had between them. "Such love does not exist for me," I thought. "If I had such love I would have to be just like Grandma yet I couldn't and still be happy." Yet the thought would not disappear, so I spoke: "B. J. If this friendship were to grow and we fell in love, what would happen?" B. J., knowing my background, became serious. He had seen me become fidgety whenever we talked about a relationship and he knew this was difficult for me to discuss: "You are a strong person with specific dreams. If we got married, I would want you because of your strong identity, not in spite of it." It sounded too easy, so I asked again, "But what about my goal to get a Ph.D.? You have a job here." B. J. smiled and said, "I would relocate to any place you wanted to study." I was startled; no man had ever expressed such an opinion to me before. It was as if he had known my fears and answered them. I did not respond to him but returned to grading papers. My emotions and thoughts were so busy that I could not respond or concentrate. Was this my Tea Cake? I also thought of Grandma. I did want a love like hers, although I did not want her role as "mother-woman." I had different desires, but I never thought they could be combined.

So one year after she left me, I found what she wanted me to find, although not in the exact form she had found. I realize now that each person must find his or her own voice, love, or identity on their own. I cannot say what is important for others, nor can they say what is important for me. As Janie says to Pheoby after telling her story:

It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got tuh go there tuh know there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got to do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves.²⁰

20. *Ibid.*, 183.

Janie realized that no man or woman could show her how to find her identity.

Grandma and Janie's stories speak to places within me that have not often been touched. The stories of life are "passed around [as] the pictures of [our] thoughts for others to look at and see," and the stories, which are "crayon enlargements of life," are interesting to view and think about.²¹ Laying my stories next to Janie's and Grandma's opened my mind to see how telling my stories would help me and others, just as their stories helped inspire me and give me hope. I have experienced life through Janie. I have been the "mother-women" through Grandma. I have seen the joy and sorrows love and marriage brought to them. Maybe my stories of sorrow and love could help someone do this too. I pondered this as I thought of the pain it would cause to write all these emotions down on paper. Janie, by telling her stories, "called in her soul to come and see,"²² and maybe I could too. Sitting up again, I looked at the diary. As I reached for it, I thought of how my voice would be written down and perhaps speak to those to come.

21. *Ibid.*, 48.

22. *Ibid.*, 183-84.