

## **MEMORIES OF PEOPLE I HAVE ENCOUNTERED IN MY 90 YEARS (A VERY VARIED BUNCH OF FOLKS)**

**by**

**Anabelle Winfrey, August 14, 2023**

I have been told that I have an extremely good memory. My memory will let me jot down names and memories of famous or infamous folks I have met or seen in years gone by.

Years of following the news allows me to recognize celebrities, political and social people in the news, movie stars, and international newsmakers. Several of these listed were popular in the 1900s.

When I was in grade school in Mt. Vernon, Illinois I was a Girl Scout. Our Scout Troop raised money to give flowers to Wendell Willkie, a Republican candidate for President of the USA. Willkie was coming through Mt. Vernon on the train. In 1945 trains had a caboose and Mr. Willkie's train paused and he walked out on the caboose with his wife. Our Scout Troop moved in closer and one of our girls presented the flowers to Mrs. Willkie. As the train moved out of the station, Mrs. Willkie threw the roses to the crowd. I was sad and mad because pennies and nickels were scarce in those days and we had worked diligently to raise money for the flowers for the Presidential candidate.

My Scout Troop also saved or collected dimes to put in a long line around the city square. The MARCH OF DIMES was a very popular endeavor. Famous movie star Edward G. Robinson, a famous tough-guy actor of the 1930's and 40's made an appearance and congratulated the Scouts for their patriotism.

I was six years old when my parents took me to a local department store in Somerset, KY to see the "tallest man in America," Robert Wadlow of Alton, Illinois, who was 8ft 11in tall. My dad lifted me onto a counter so I could see the "Giant of Illinois." Robert was born in 1918 and died in 1940. In today's world, in the field of sports, we are used to seeing boys and men near 7 feet and even a few nearly 8 feet tall.

My high school years were spent in the small town of Flora, IL, population 5,000. I returned there for a reunion in 2006 and the population was still 5,000. Some folks died, some were born, and yet the population remained the same for 50 years. In Flora, we didn't have opportunities to see many famous people. Sidney Romberg and his marvelous orchestra performed in our school in 1949. On a trip to St. Louis, MO I attended the Muni Opera's performance of "Show Boat" with the handsome lead singer ROBERT GULETTE.

In high school, while visiting friends in Mt. Vernon, IL, we had a hilarious time at the high school watching the crazy basketball of the Harlem Globe Trotters founded in 1926. In 1951 the Globe Trotters played before their largest crowd ever – 75,999 – at the Berlin, Germany Olympic stadium. Following that trip, the Globe Trotters began using the moniker "Ambassadors of Goodwill" from a letter of congratulations written by the U.S. State Department.

Finally, I was 18 and "off to see the world!" I graduated high school and took the train to Washington, D.C. to visit my Aunt Loraine Rosenberry. Aunt Loraine knew famous people due to her many years as a secretary on Capitol Hill in D.C. At the time of my visit, my aunt was secretary to Senator Alben Barkley, of KY who now was Vice President Barkley of the USA. She continued working for him and when he died she had been with him 28 years.

I met the Vice President as soon as I arrived in D.C. Aunt Loraine took me to the Senate Office Building and introduced me to him. Hugging me, Vice President Barkley whispered to me, "Hi there, pretty girl. Can I have a kiss?" I turned my cheek to him and he laughed saying, "Girl, how old are you?" "18," I replied. "And that is how you kiss?" he questioned. He was a 74-year-old, gentle, affable man. I took the private underground railroad car to the location of his temporary office. The Vice President's private office was being redecorated at that time. As we stood at the office entrance and watched folks wandering past, the "Veep" (a nickname he had acquired), explained to me his theory that "there is something beautiful in every woman." I sat in the swivel chair with him and it almost tipped us over. Vice President Barkley, a recent widower, married Mrs. Hadley in the fall of that year.

At the Shoreham Hotel in Washington D.C., I met a most interesting man from Rock Island, IL, who was either an employee or family member of the owners of Otis elevator company. While we were dancing, he said, "Look over there and you can watch yourself dance." That was my first view of a television. This intriguing, handsome man was twelve years my senior and he wanted to date me. My aunt refused to let me date him. He called me and insisted I meet him and keep our rendezvous a secret. We never met. Wrong time-wrong place.

Russell Stover, the candy king, and his wife took Aunt Loraine and me to dinner at the Mayflower Hotel. He was 71 years old. I don't remember that he had many conversations with me, however, I do remember his delight in observing my excitement when the flaming baked Alaska dessert he had ordered was served. From Flora, IL to DC...my mind was in a whirl. In those days cameras weren't everywhere. Oh, how I wish I had a photo of dinner with Russell Stover.

The most long-lasting, and precious memory of my eighteenth year was meeting Tom "S" in the office of Vice President Barkley. Tom was seeking an appointment at the Naval Academy. He talked to my Aunt Loraine about the fact that each senator has two appointments and he was hoping to get an appointment for the Fall class. Tom was 24 years old and that is the cut-off age for midshipmen to enter the academy. He had already been in the Navy for several years. I followed him when he left the office and we sat and talked. He asked if I'd like a guide around Washington. We had a brief time together during the rest of my visit to D.C. Tom and I visited with his parents in the Chesapeake Bay area. Most senators had used their appointments but Aunt Loraine was able to secure one for Tom with a Senator from Washington State.

Tom wrote letters all the next year when he was a midshipman and I was a freshman attending the University of Kentucky. We never saw each other after the wonderful days in D.C. I married a college friend, Hank, several months later. And then Tom resurfaced. He called to invite me to the Army/Navy football game. Too late. The romance was over. I wrote to Tom in 2010. He wrote back about how thankful he has always been for Aunt Loraine's help with his appointment. We exchanged 2 or 3 brief notes. Choices in life leave questions unanswered.

In my early years of marriage, we saw a few famous people in our years in Germany, Fulton, KY, and Jackson, TN. We moved to Lexington, KY in 1957 so that my husband could attend the University of KY and finish his degree.

In Lexington, I went to Ashland, the home of Senator Henry Clay, a noted politician, statesman, and orator from KY who helped form the Republican Party. He ran unsuccessfully for President three times in the mid-1800s. At the historical homesite, I attended a reception for Pat Nixon, wife of President Richard Nixon. I recall that she had a cold, limp handshake, barely touching her fingers to my hand. Guess that was her style as she had so many hands to shake.

In Louisville, KY we attended the State Fair with our daughters Debbie, Becky, and Rainey to see the Cartwrights from the very popular TV show Bonanza. We were all big fans of the show. On huge horses, the Cartwrights came galloping close to our front-row seats. The horses were enormous, the actors were handsome, and the little girls were so thrilled with the experience.

Hank and I went to see Bob Hope in 1956. We, like many Americans, were fans of golfers. We attended the PGA golf tournament in Columbus, OH, and got close to all the current famous golfers, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, and Lee Trevino. We became a part of "Arnie's Army" following Arnie all around the golf course. In those days the crowds at the golf tournaments were quiet. No yelling as the ball was hit and continuous patrolling by guards of the crowds who edged closer to the golfer as they were hitting the ball.

In 1957, after Hank graduated, he took a job with IBM. We moved to Kingston, NY where we lived from June until late October. While there we went to New York to attend the Crusade of Evangelist Billy Graham at Yankee Stadium. George Beverly Shea sang "How Great Thou Art," a gospel song that was his trademark. Vice President Richard Nixon sat on the stage with Reverend Graham. It was Labor Day weekend June 20. The stadium was packed with 100,000 and another 20,000 outside. Ironically there were few local folks out and about as we drove through NYC. Guess they left town to escape the 98-degree heat.

After my divorce, I left Raleigh, NC, and moved to Jackson, MI. The Alvin Ailey dance troupe came to a local high school. This outstanding group has been thrilling audiences since 1965. The lead performer when I saw them was the renowned Judith Jamison, who quickly became an international star. The dance troupe was a new group in the 70s but is still thrilling audiences in 2023.

I was enchanted watching the celebrated movie star Jimmy Stewart in the play "Harvey" on the University of Michigan campus. I was working on my Master's degree at Michigan State University and took time out to enjoy Ramsey Lewis playing piano in a bar near the Michigan State University campus.

In 1974, I chaperoned a group of students on a 6-week tour of Europe. In Italy, we had an audience with Pope VI at the Palace of Castel Gandolfo, the summer residence and vacation retreat for the pope.

I taught junior high (later called middle school) in Michigan. Perhaps several of my former students have achieved success in adulthood but few are as famous and admired as Tony Dungy. Tony was an exemplary student who was in junior high when integration problems were rampant in schools. He was an "A" student, a Christian, and an athlete and he remained calm during these volatile times. I didn't have Tony in class but I was the staff advisor of the student council and he was student president of the council. Tony went on to play pro football and then was a head coach in the NFL for 13 years with Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Indianapolis Colts. Since retiring in 2008 he has been an analyst for NBC's Football Night in America and an author of numerous books.

In Detroit, I attended a stage show of the very popular singing group, Fifth Dimension, and went on stage with them to do the limbo. As I started under the pole one of the men in the group took my hand for me to just walk around the end of the set up and not under it. Guess for liability purposes. I'm sure I didn't look too feeble to lean under the pole in those days.

Many of the famous people who crossed my path did so after my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday when I moved to Atlanta, Ga. Ushering at the Fox Theater brought many of them into my world.

Often in the early 80s, I saw Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King, at the theater. She always looked so regal, so calm, so lovely.

Daddy King was MLK, Sr. He was on stage with me as a speaker at the school where I was teaching. I was the MC for the event. He laughed and patted me on the leg while we joked with each other. As students were entering the auditorium Daddy King asked me, "Honey how many children do you have?" "29," I answered. I was referring to my class. He laughed and said, "I mean how many children do YOU have." Oh, three, I mused.

Andrew "Andy" Young was Mayor of Atlanta in the 80s. A politician, diplomat, and early leader in the civil rights movement. Andy was a confidant to M.L. King, a U.S. Congressman (GA), an Ambassador to the United Nations during the Carter administration, and Mayor of Atlanta. I rode the bus with Andy and his wife, Jean, during his campaign for Mayor. Later I visited in their home. I also worked in Detroit a few years previous to that as a teacher representative to the National Teacher's convention and Jean Young was the main speaker. She died in 1994 of cancer.

In 1984 I volunteered in the Atlanta campaign office for Senator John Glenn who was running as a candidate for the nomination for President of the USA. He did not win this nomination. Senator Glenn, a fighter pilot, test pilot, and astronaut was the first American pilot to orbit the earth. Of course, I have a letter from his office thanking me for my work as a volunteer in his campaign.

Atlanta Airport changed its name from Hartsfield to Jackson-Hartsfield Airport to honor and include Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. One day Mayor Jackson was standing looking in the window of the travel agency where I worked and I went out to speak to him. He was admiring the famous poster of the "girl from Empanada," a Puerto Rican Island beauty on the beach. He asked if we had an extra poster but we didn't. I owned one of those popular posters for a long time.

I was an usher at the Atlanta Fox Theater and had arrived early in the evening for a performance by folk singer, John Denver. The singer arrived a couple of hours before curtain time to look over the venue. Few ushers had arrived so I asked him if I could help him. He followed me to the balcony and stopped to talk to me and sign my paper usher's pass which I placed on my chest for him to sign. I told him my name was Anne like his ex-wife's name "Annie" for whom he wrote "Annie's Song."

Stevie Wonder's performance at the Fox came to a rather abrupt interlude one night. He was playing the piano and singing when he got so excited, he jumped up on the piano bench, leaned over, and continued to play. His "handlers" afraid the blind singer would fall rushed to him, one on each side of him, and sat him down on the piano bench.

Singer Marvin Gaye was an exciting, charismatic performer. Like so many performers who appeared at the Fox Theater, he really related to the Atlanta audience. I was ushering for his show only a few days before he was shot and killed by his father.

Dancer, Shirley MacLaine, was accompanied to Atlanta by her charming male aide. My daughter, Rainey, was visiting me and had joined me to usher that night. After striking up a conversation with my daughter, Shirley's aide asked her to take a ride in Shirley's Limousine to go to the chiropractor's office where Shirley had left her jewelry. When they returned the aide drove into the circle drive of the hotel and asked Rainey to drive around the circle while he took Shirley's jewelry to her. Not surprisingly my daughter said she'd just wait in the limousine and not drive it.

Nat King Cole had three brothers who, like Nat, played the piano. All of them played Jazz and at least two of them made appearances in Atlanta in the 80s. I sat on the piano bench with Ike, one of the brothers, and he instantly told me not to expect Nat's kind of music as he was a jazz pianist. I talked to another of Nat's brothers in a hotel lounge in Atlanta. He sang popular songs of Nat's but I don't know if that was Freddie or Eddie.

Sitting on the curb on Peachtree Street in Atlanta watching a parade, TV star, David Hasselhoff was in his talking car 'KITT' approaching us. My daughter, Debbie, a fan of Hasselhoff's TV show, told me to take a quick picture. All I photographed was my fingers.

Gregory Hines, 1946-2003, a black tap dancer, was in 40 films, and winner of an Emmy, Tony, and many other awards. Hines was one of the most celebrated tap dancers of all time and perhaps the last of the movie tap dancers of notoriety.

Dancing in a club, I twirled around once with Bo Diddley who played a key role in the transition from blues to rock and roll. At another club, my partner and I were dancing next to Evander Holyfield, champion heavyweight boxer.

Lisa Minnelli, Judy Garland's daughter, changed her list of songs for her performance at the Fox when she experienced a warm reception from the Atlanta audience. She said she wanted to do something special for this audience. Lisa had a long relationship with dancer/actor Ben Vereen. Their biracial romance was one of the first in Hollywood to create so much attention in the press.

In my mind's eye, I sang along with singers/TV stars Eydie Gorme and her husband, Steve Lawrence as they were performing. Later that night they received word that their son had committed suicide.

I saw Bob Hope on the night he was 90 years old. He did his famous "soft shoe" tap dance and told the audience, "Please don't wait for me at the outside door because I will be in a hurry to get to bed because I have an early golf game." Years later, at Hope's home in Palm Springs, I drove to the gate in front of the house. A guard inquired as to "how I got up past two other gates." I told him that the gates were open so I just drove on up the hill to the house.

Many plays came to the Fox. I saw Annie several times. One of the old-time movie stars, Martha Raye, was Mrs. Hannigan in Annie.

Liberace asked that additional ushers be in the back hall as he returned to his dressing room after his performance because he wore so many precious, expensive jewels. My friend Elaine and I were asked to go backstage. What kind of protection would we be? We were excited to be so close to Liberace.

George Peppard, a busy actor of the 80s, was also at the Fox. I have one of his T-shirts which advertises the play.

Singer Julio Iglesias arrived very early for his performance. The theater was empty and he sat near the stage hugging and kissing a young girl. I interrupted them to get his autograph.

I also ushered at a smaller theater in mid-town on the evening the author of "Driving Miss Daisy," Alfred Uhrey, who produced the play. The audience was made up of his friends and his extended Jewish family. Miss Daisy was written to honor the relationship between Mr. Uhrey's grandmother, Miss Daisy, and her chauffeur. The play was made into a movie. In the movie, there is a realtor's sign for Harry Norman realtors in the yard of Miss Daisy's home. I had a realtor's license with that prestigious Atlanta company in the mid'80s.

I also ushered in 1982 for the New York Metropolitan Opera. This was the last time the Met came to Atlanta.

I saw singers Leontyne Price, Neil Diamond, Fifth Dimension, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Pavarotti, and Kenny Rogers at the Convention Center.

In 1983, I flew from Atlanta to New York and was thrilled to watch the treasured actor James Earl Jones in Othello. A little extra bit about James Earl Jones was that his mother lived in Jackson, MI and I went to a wedding of a Jamaican couple where Jones' stepfather (or his mother's boyfriend) was taking wedding photos. He asked me to let him take photos of me to enter in the state fair. I wish I had said yes as I was probably at my attractive best at that age.

Dancers at the Fox were Ann Miller, a tap dancer, and Mickey Rooney who were terrific in "Honey Babies." Dancer Mitzi Gaynor was still performing her "one woman" show in 1983.

One of the most thrilling of shows was my opportunity of seeing the greatest ballet dancers of the century, Russians Rudolph Nureyev (who died in France in 1993), and Mikhail Baryshnikov, born in 1948, who defected from the Russian Ballet and made his home in the USA. He had his own dance troupe and he also acted in various TV shows. He was married to movie star Jessica Lange from 1976 to 1982.

The talented, actors Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy performed the play "Fox Fire" at the Atlanta Museum Theater. It was a marvelous opportunity to see this notoriously famous married couple in their later years. The Foxfire books are based on Appalachian culture and traditions in North Georgia.

At Chastain Park in Atlanta, I saw singer Billy Eckstein, Pearl Bailey, and her husband, Louie Bellson, a famous drummer. Dick Gregory, an entertainer and comedian came to the Fox. I listened to comedian Eddie Murphy and counted how many times he said the "F" word.

Bert Reynolds was at the Fox Theater, introducing his movie Sharkey's Machine. He had used the basement of my friend's house in Virginia Highlands in Atlanta for a mystery scene in the movie.

My first job in Atlanta was as a travel agent with Hello World agency in Colony Square in mid-town. In this little mall, which was attached to Colony Square Hotel, there was our agency, an upscale dress shop, and two other small businesses. I saw a man sit at one of the two small tables in front of our agency and "low and behold" it was Joe Namath, the famous football quarterback. As I approached the table he said, "Please sit." I talked to him for a few minutes, probably mostly about Coach Bear Bryant, who was his coach at Alabama and had coached at the University of KY my freshman year there. Joe stood up as I was leaving the table, I told Joe he was much shorter than I thought he was. Wasn't that clever of me?

Duchess of York, Sara Ferguson, Princess Fergie, former wife of Prince Andrew, of Great Britain, was spokesperson for the iconic Wedgewood Fine China Company when I went to her presentation at Belk's store in Raleigh, NC. She was humorous and personable. For a demonstration of the strength of the bone china, she chose a large man from the audience to come forward and stand on a teacup. He was reluctant to do so but his weight did not break the tea cup.

Mary Martin, a stage actress, and singer, was Peter Pan on Broadway and South Pacific leading lady as Nellie Forbush. She was a Kennedy Center Honoree in 1989 and the mother of actor Larry Hagman (I Dream of Geni and Dallas TV shows) Ms. Martin was representing a fine linen company when I saw her at Belk's in Atlanta.

I don't remember the occasion but I saw actor Paul Newman as he exited the lead race car he was driving in a race in Atlanta.

While living in Phoenix I was sitting in a restaurant and looked at the window and saw Senator Gary Hart, a former Presidential candidate. I got up, went outside, saw him sit on a bench, sat down on the bench, and had a nice talk with him. I also saw Paul McCartney and his new band, Wings, put on a terrific show at the football stadium in Phoenix in 1989. His wife, Linda, was still performing with him. They had a ranch in the Tucson area for many years.

In 1995 I lived in Tucson and was an extra in the movie "Boys On The Side," directed by Herb Ross, a famous director and winner of many awards. He was married to Lee Radziwill, Jackie Kennedy's sister. The actors were Whoopie Goldberg, Drew Barrymore, and Mary Louise Parker. I stood in line as Mr. Ross walked by selecting the background actors for his movie and I was thrilled to be chosen. A big scene of the movie was shot at the old mission at Tumacacori where the actors were attending a festival. I thought I'd be in several scenes but I didn't make it to the big screen. It was an exciting experience.

Living in Irvine, CA I drove to the Crystal Palace in Garden Grove to hear Maya Angelou, the noted poet and author. I sat very close to the front in order to not miss a word she said.

I met Alex Haley at a book fair in Atlanta. I had the cover of his new book in my hand. I was the first person in the room and as I approached him I wondered where was his stack of books to be signed and he said, "Oh you have the cover of my book. I haven't seen it yet." I handed it to him, he signed it and I walked away perplexed that his book was in print and he had not seen it yet.

At a mall in West Chester, Ohio I danced the hula with visiting members of Dancing with the Stars in 2006.

In 2007 I attended a UAW rally in Moline, IL and the speaker was the young Illinois Senator Barack Obama. I had never heard of him but I was sitting in the second row from the stage. He was there to announce he was running for President of the United States. How exciting that he won the Presidency!

In 2007 I drove into Cincinnati for a show by Chita Rivera, dancer "West Side Story." She was 74 and danced like she was 24.

My last encounter with a very famous person took place in 2007 in West Chester, Ohio at a performance of The Beach Boys. My son-in-law, Jeff, had engaged the singers for a dedication of a new hospital in the area. Later, Mike Love, lead singer of the Beach Boys, came to our house. I, of course, have a photo with him.

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