**MEMOIR SAMPLES – TY HAGER**

**From *Not Here To Be Served***

*“Your brother Alonzo was in here earlier to buy some rope.”*

 The statement from one of the guys who worked at the Mr. Auto Parts Napa – a store in Waynesboro where many of the local men would congregate to shoot the breeze – puzzled me.

 “Rope?”

 “Yeah, he said he needed some rope strong enough to pull a car.”

 That puzzled me even more.

 “What the hell’s he need rope to pull a car for?” I asked. “Alonzo doesn’t own a car.”

 It’s my nature to try to make sense of the illogical. Most times, it turns out it wasn’t that illogical to begin with.

 “He’s probably helping Miss Ada with something,” I said.

 Miss Ada was a black woman in her eighties who seemed a hundred. Alonzo was always helping out the old and needy folks in the community: He’d been ordained a Baptist minister (I remember his first sermon, about Jonah and the whale) and – although he wasn’t employed by any church (or, mostly, at all) – still did his best to be of service and spread God’s word.

 My intention was to track my twin brother down and see if he needed any help. Then I got distracted (I’d left something at the Dairy Queen after lunch that I needed to retrieve), then I got busy. It slipped my mind.

 The words “If only” are among the most pointless. Hindsight is 20/20, but only serves any purpose when a lesson is learned. Usually we learn too late.

 There were as many reasons Alonzo could’ve needed that rope as there are such late-learned lessons. Not a one of them makes any difference, and none will ever change the sad fact that, on a Thursday in August of 1998, my brother hanged himself from a tree.

**From *Beyond Theory: The Making of a Music Teacher***

*Music comes from God.*

Even if I weren’t a man of deep faith, I would believe this. There are simply things science can’t explain, aspects of our humanity which don’t come from the mind but from the heart and aren’t arrived at through logic and reason but spring from our souls.

Music’s like love that way.

Until 2007, I don’t think I’d really made the connection between music and the soul. I knew from singing in the church choir that there was such a connection, but I was a kid and didn’t feel it like many of those in the congregation for whom we performed. I didn’t quite understand the power of music – both spiritual and secular – to convey a depth of meaning which goes far beyond just tapping our toes and singing along.

I knew music was *cool*: I just hadn’t taken the time to figure out *why*. I was intellectualizing art, relying on knowledge and muscle memory in my playing and songwriting, with no real purpose except the furtherance of my own plans. As with so much of my life to that point, I was just being selfish.

Josh Revak helped me see the magic of music and the power of selflessness. He also helped me find God.

**From *Ain’t Been No Crystal Stair***

I was only twelve the first time I had to wring a chicken’s neck, and I was *terrified*.

I mean, I’d *seen* it done plenty. Living in rural Hephzibah, Georgia (in Burke County, a stone’s throw south of Augusta, a stone’s throw west of the South Carolina border), I was no stranger to the macabre spectacle of chicken-killing or hog-butchering. My grandfather was a master at both: He could break a chicken’s neck before the chicken even knew it was in trouble, and his hammer never failed to hit the soon-to-be-eaten hog directly between the eyes.

I’d grown up planting, pruning, and picking collard greens, cabbage, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, onions, bell peppers, and okra. Like many a Black family in the Deep South, our lives revolved around “working the land.” After all, we’d been doing it for generations. At least these days we were doing it for *ourselves*, providing food not just for our own dinner table but the tables of our neighbors.

I’d only been two weeks old when I was sent to live with my paternal grandparents, Margaret Brady Lockhart (she was always Grandma Bunch to me) and Isaiah “Tut” Lockhart (Grandpa Tut). My mother, Kim, had only been sixteen when she had me, and neither she nor my father, Isaiah, were ready to be parents.

Although I still *saw* them—my father several days a week, my mother most weekends—I was my grandparents’ charge to keep.

Looking back, it was a magical childhood, and I was a happy little girl. I don’t recall a time when I ever thought of us as “poor.” We were too busy to think about such things.

**From *I Want To Believe***

This period was a turning point for me on a few levels: Firstly, school politics gave me a glimpse into how government *works*. At least how the U of M-Dearborn *student* government worked. I also honed my public speaking skills—the university was quite keen on showcasing their new Interdisciplinary Studies program, so I was asked to give speeches for alumni and community members at various dinners and events.

It was at one of these functions that I learned an important lesson the hard way. There was a fancy luncheon, attended by several hundred alumni and business leaders, after which I was set to deliver a speech. I’d *wanted* to believe that could eat chicken cordon bleu without getting it all over my nice silk tie. I was mistaken. I’d *then* wanted to believe that the stain might come out with a little water, applied at the men’s room sink. Of course, as I said, it was a *silk* tie, so I was wrong again.

Okay. That may not seem like a particularly *important* lesson, but it was for me. To this day, I never go to an important function without a spare tie in my pocket.