

Chapter 1: *The “Little Hell-Raiser”*

(On the Letterhead of the Clarion-Ledger and Jackson Daily News - “Keeping Step with Jackson and Mississippi for over 118 years”)

December 15, 1955

Dear Little “Hell-Raiser”;

“Your grandma and I have often been thinking about you - also about Barbara, Susan and your Dad and Moma - for many months.”

So began the first letter ever addressed to me - shortly before my 2nd birthday. It was from my grandfather, sending wishes to all from him, grandmother, and their dog Gumbo. He must have had a hunch about my life, which would appear quiet and reserved, but with an undercurrent of an inquisitive mind and an irreverence that would send me down many *“roads less traveled.”*

I wear the moniker proudly because of the man who pinned it to me, John Bridges Breazeale. My grandfather was adventurous, having ridden the rails, worked the logging roads and shipped out on a four-masted square-rigger, all before joining the Navy (*under legal age*) in 1915. World War I would take his hearing... *“one of the saddest hours of my life was taking off my old uniform for the last time. I left my hearing, my youth, and the privilege of serving under the flag behind, and turned to face the long years of silence. Young and battered, a twisted wreck, I cried.”*

With a never-ending resiliency, and a touch of *“hell-raiser”*, my grandfather became the first deaf person to graduate from Tulane University. His spirit was not satisfied with a profession in pharmacology - he wanted to be a newspaper reporter. Completely deaf, too impatient to read lips, he nevertheless succeeded. He became the United Press Representative for the State of Mississippi. His favorite things to cover were murder mysteries and the Mississippi State Legislature.

My Grandfather died on Christmas Day, 1965, when I was 11 years old. He had continued to call me the *“Little Hell-Raiser”*. I was always amazed and inspired by my Grandfather Breazeale’s spirit, and I believe he would be proud of me for entering this tough race to become a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives.

Chapter 2: *The “Little Hell-Raiser” silenced (...just for a while)*

Personality development and a sense of self are impacted by traumatic events. My mom had open heart surgery in 1960, and I thought she was going to die. As is common for a 5 or 6 year-old, I thought it was because of something I did. I became quiet and tentative. I did all I could to behave, not to call attention to myself, and to be “invisible”. I became very observant, seeking social cues to tell me I was OK. Looking back at my old report cards, there are two notes about a need for improvements - both noting a lack of contribution in class discussion. A favorite teacher noted that I enjoyed writing short stories and riddles.

I remained quiet and invisible. I was average. I did not want to call attention to myself. I became Editor on the school newspaper club in middle school, and soon, the “*Little Hell-Raiser*” was writing editorials about the 1968 race riots and the importance of the civil rights movement. The reaction wasn’t good, and my supervising teacher edited my writing to such a watered-down version that it was no longer mine. The Little Hell-Raiser was hurt, and tried to disappear again... but, it was 1968, the world was changing, and I was coming of age.

(I had found my voice and learned and the importance of contributing to the “greater good”. I carry that experience with me still. Determined to bring that voice and my commitment to contributing to the greater good, I am a candidate to be your voice in the Tennessee Legislature).

Chapter 3: *Changing Times; Early Adulthood (...if you could call it that).*

Yes, the Little Hell-Raiser was a Hippie. In the late 60’s and early 70’s, I was in the Youth Group of the First Presbyterian Church in Wichita, Kansas, enjoying volunteer work for early education programs. In this group, many of us became more aware of social injustice, bigotry, discrimination against women, and the blight of community economic imbalance. The Vietnam War was raging, with no way out. Young men were drafted and dying. Our view of the world was formed in our neighborhoods, our mostly segregated churches, and barely integrated schools. The outside world began to come in, mostly through television. The world was

becoming smaller as we were becoming more mobile, and our news more national. We had Watergate and began to see the impact of corruption and financial influence in politics. Woodstock and the growth of a counter-culture railed against social and economic injustice.

I am the youngest of 3 daughters. Mom didn't work outside the home, but she had a BA Degree in Sociology. I recall her watching the Watergate hearings on a small portable TV in the kitchen while cooking or ironing. My dad was an administrator at Wichita State University. My parents were strong believers in letting us develop our own identities, social positions, politics and religion. They provided us with a rich educational base, beginning at school and church, and continuing at home, with discussions offering contrasting views, debate and problem solving. We learned our first opinions were not always right, and we were taught to research and consider opinions held by others as well.

I pushed society's accepted limits for several years, always stretching, always learning, creating a path truly my own. I made mistakes. I made good and bad decisions. I did things that were harmful, and more things that were helpful. I went to college, earned a Sociology degree, got married, gave birth to Nathan, became a chef, and turned 29. I needed to calm the "Little Hell-Raiser", and plan a more stable future before I turned 30. It was a turning point.

(These formative years had helped develop my innate sense of social justice. If I am fortunate enough to become your State Representative, my early experiences will well serve the residents of District 44).

Chapter 4: *My Name Is Rachel...*

Some of you reading my story can finish such a sentence. For me, it is ***"My name is Rachel, and I am an addict."*** Let me share a little of this story.

In 1991, I was on top of the world. I had graduated 10th out of a class of 150 at Washburn University School of Law and had a great job lined-up at a true blue-blood law firm. I remember thinking that my future was bright - the Little Hell-Raiser had grown up and found her place in the world. Not so fast. I struggled at work. I became unsure of myself, didn't fit in, and didn't have the bravado of most lawyers. My son Nathan had grown sullen and angry as a middle-schooler. I lost my job, and became depressed. For some temporary ailments, I was prescribed pain and anxiety medications, and became addicted. The dark path

downward ultimately spiraled out of control. The drugs kept me from feeling my failures while they assured more failures would follow.

Only those who have been there, personally or with a loved one, know the horrors and devastation addiction brings. I would wake in the morning and tell myself that I was not going to “use” that day. Sometimes I made it till noon. Prayer failed me. Self-control failed me. Even losing Nathan to his dad was not enough to spur change. I felt I would die without the drugs - then misguided self-preservation kicked in and I would use. The cycle continued.

I survived. I landed in ICU, a treatment facility and a halfway house. I worked hard. I went to meetings and heard success stories earned one day at a time. I gained hope and had what some call “*a spiritual awakening*”. I realized I was part of something much bigger than myself, and that if I tried to live by a few simple principles, I would be OK. The principles, summarized as “*Trust God, Clean House and Help Others*” have brought me to where I am today. I trust God, as I understand God...I do my best to live right and make amends when I make all-too-human mistakes, and I try to do something that helps others every day.

(Consider the plight of those who have fallen to Tennessee’s opioid addiction crisis. Who better to address this issue than one who has experienced, and overcome, the horrors of this spreading epidemic?)

Chapter 5: *The Biggest Test of Faith*

Over the years I rebuilt my relationship with Nathan. I practiced law. Friends supported me. In 2001 I married one of those friends, Steve Mackey. Life was good. In the fall of 2002, Steve and I moved into a small home on 6 peaceful acres north of Topeka, Kansas. Noting that many small “hobby” farms had names, Steve named ours “*Lingering Issues*” as a tribute to our characters.

We planned a big family Thanksgiving that fall. My sisters, their children, and my parents would be there. My son Nathan, who had moved to Portland, Oregon, flew in for the gathering. The weather was perfect, the food plentiful, and it could not have been a better day. The next day was Nathan’s 24th birthday, and on Monday, he flew back to Oregon.

A week later, on December 8th, I received the phone call; Nathan was in ICU in Portland. He had a “bleed” in his brain...stable but not conscious. I was needed right away. My sister Barb was able to get to him that night, Steve and I arrived the next morning, with frequent assurances from the hospital that he was stable.

When I saw Nathan, I realized for the first time that “stable” meant that he was on a ventilator with a big bolt in his forehead that I learned was measuring the pressure on his brain. His eyes were closed, he was warm. His bright tattoos contrasted with the clean white sheets. He was alive, but after another 24 hours of observation, we were told he would not survive. Nathan took his final breath on December 14th. I was there for his first...and his last. Although Nathan was gone, he left a commitment to help others as an organ donor...and a couple other lives were saved. His spirit remains as big as the sky. *“Trust God, Clean House, Help Others”*. Nathan’s spirit guides me today as I make my way.

(Throughout this story, health care issues consistently appear...as they do in most everyone’s life. Serious illness can lead to devastating results in the lives of Tennesseans, and it has become the No.1 one issue for voters in our state. Read on...and you will learn how my experiences have uniquely prepared me to address this issue).

Chapter 6: *Things Will Be OK...Things Will Be OK...Things Will Be OK...*

Life goes on. Nathan has been well remembered. I took our Organ Donation story to health care providers all across the country, encouraging them to adopt the protocol that allowed us to fulfill Nathan’s wish...and many more lives were saved because of that story. My son’s spirit and energy sustained me during other difficult times. Steve became disabled from railroad track maintenance, work he had done for almost 30 years. My parent’s health declined in 2009, and I moved into their nursing home room until my mother died from congestive heart failure. After mom died, dad began to refuse food and water, and he passed nine days later. The links in my family chain directly above and directly below me were now gone. I was fortunate to have been with them all at the end.

Again, life went on...at least until the “adenocarcinoma” word crashed into our world. It was spring, 2010, and I had breast cancer. I was uninsured. I had a couple of pre-existing health conditions and had been unable to afford the high cost of health insurance. Two surgeries followed by radiation and chemotherapy left me very sick, unable to work. I closed my law practice. We couldn’t keep up. We lost a car to the bank. I lost my hair. *“Lingering Issues”* went into foreclosure. *“Trust God, Clean House, Help Others”* ...and things will be OK. With Steve by my side, we endured a very hard year, but then it ended.

No sign of the cancer. But, the thought of returning to my law practice overwhelmed me. I no longer had the pre-cancer stamina. During treatments, social workers

walked me through my process of applying for disability, which was eventually granted. I wanted to be self-sufficient, but could no longer manage the rigors of running a law office and law practice. My heart led me towards work in the field of Organ Donation. Unfortunately, there were no jobs in the Organ Donation field in Kansas, but Steve just smiled and said; “*You can take me wherever there is bass fishing*”. We landed in Tennessee.

I worked as a care coordinator with Tennessee Donor Services, helping families through the process of Organ Donation. I was guided by memories of those who walked me through the process almost 10 years earlier. We settled in Sumner County. I was earning a paycheck again and had health insurance. We had been devastated by illness, but we were still together, and still in love. But, I will never forget the fear that comes with losing almost everything to a devastating illness.

(How many Tennessee lives are destroyed by the financial crisis of health care expense? If elected to serve in the Tennessee State House, I will use my personal experiences to fight for Medicaid expansion for 300,000 uninsured Tennesseans...including 25,000 of our distinguished veterans.)

Chapter 7: *Another Portland, Another Boy.*

It was almost time for school to start. Steve and I got another life-changing phone call. Due to unfortunate circumstances, our 6 year old grandson, Corbin, in Kansas, no longer had a stable place to live. On August 1, 2012, we were granted guardianship of Corbin.

We drove through Wichita, headed for Tennessee, with this little boy riding along, looking out the window, quiet and content. I felt a surge of anxiety. What were we doing? Questions swirled in my brain. We approached a billboard - simple white with large black letters; “*Bravely Onward*”. I smiled and thought about Nathan; “*Trust God, Clean House, Help Others*”. We moved “*Bravely Onward.*”

6 years have passed. Corbin is in the 7th grade at Portland West Middle School. It is fitting to be raising another boy, in another Portland. It is our home now, and we have added a miniature Schnauzer named Master Shifu to the family. My sister Susan from Houston has joined our household. Steve now works part-time as a driver for Mid-Cumberland, and I do some legal work writing briefs for other attorneys. We still face tough financial challenges. Corbin had been found ineligible for TennCare. Finally, open enrollment allowed us to buy insurance for him on the health care market. He has developed a seizure disorder and ADHD, requiring frequent medication changes. Corbin’s insurance premiums and co-pays are second in monthly costs only to our rent. “*Bravely Onward.*”

We have also had challenges with Corbin's education. We have advocated for some accommodations. We have faced administrative resistance, but we succeeded in our goals. Like all Sumner County parents, we are disheartened by problems with testing systems. We recognize that teachers are underpaid and need additional support, equipment and funding. Under these conditions, we count our blessings, knowing that the struggle is quite different in single-parent households and households where both parents work and commute long hours just to keep food on the table.

I hope for better times and conditions for Steve and I...but especially for Corbin and other Tennessee children. We should not accept limited health care access. We should not accept schools that do not adequately prepare our students for a productive future. As one who has experienced the burdens of life...as one who has "Walked the Walk"...and as one who has graduated with honors from the "School of Hard Knocks," as your State Representative, I will fight for the families and children of district 44.

If I have to be a "Little Hell-Raiser" to do it...so be it!

Thanks for taking the time to read my story.

I hope you will agree that my life's experiences demonstrate an ability to seek...and find...solutions to the problems facing many Tennesseans today. As an attorney, a wife and a mom, I've seen...and lived many of these same issues that will be brought before the Tennessee Legislature. The same "Not For Sale" theme that marks my campaign will guide my decisions in the State House. I will serve only the people of our state - never the moneyed special interests.

Rachel