

Thank you all for coming. Special thanks to South Carolina Humanities, ETV and the ETV Endowment, and to all of you in the audience with whom I have worked over the years. And to my fellow award recipients. John and Bud and I worked together for the better part of a year on a documentary on racial reconciliation called *A Seat at the Table*, and I am grateful to them for that experience.

When I met the wonderful Isabelle Wilkerson in Columbia several years ago and bought her book, she wrote in it, "To Betsy, from a Southerner once-removed." That's sort of how I see myself. I was born in South Carolina but I lived "away" for most of my life. Something draws me back here, though. It's the history of this place, in which the lives of African Americans and European Americans are so deeply interconnected. And my own history reflects this shared experience, in contradictory ways that are cause for pride and for shame.

My mother was a South Carolinian who married a Yankee soldier right after the war. They were very young and idealistic, and they worked for civil rights here in Columbia in 1946. I like to think, though I don't know for sure – that they attended W.E.B. DuBois's speech at the Southern Negro Youth Congress – the 70th anniversary of which we celebrate today.

My parents moved to Chicago in the '50s when I was a small child. We lived on the South Side, not far from the University,

where my father was a graduate student. The neighborhood was mostly white then, but I remember that black people were moving into the building behind ours. Of course I didn't know it at the time, but I was a witness to the Great Migration.

We spent our summers in South Carolina, with my grandmother. We traveled to Florence – my mother's hometown and mine - on the train, in a Pullman car. We had a sleeping compartment and we ate on white tablecloths in the dining car, served by dignified African-American men in white jackets. The train was segregated, but these men were members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first African-American labor union, and they were helping to build the black middle class.

An African-American woman worked for my grandmother as her maid. Her name was Sarah. I didn't and still don't know her last name. When we went to my grandmother's beach house, Sarah came with us. The house had a little apartment in the back where she slept. We called it Sarah's room, even after both she and my grandmother had died. I have three pictures of Sarah. In each of them she's tending to my little brother and wearing a dress, with a half-smile on her face. She couldn't wear a bathing suit on the beach, much less go in the water. When I think of her now, I realize that there was a person in our midst whom we barely knew.

One of the highlights of these summers at the beach was when we visited Genevieve Willcox Chandler at Murrells Inlet. She was my grandmother's cousin, and she had worked for the Writers Project of the WPA during the 1930s, recording the stories of former slaves and their descendants. Cousin Genevieve loved to tell these stories, and listening to them planted in me a seed of interest in and appreciation for Gullah culture and the rich history of South Carolina. Yet Genevieve herself once told me that God made the red bird and the blue bird, and that the two should never mix.

As I mentioned, I lived in other parts of the country for most of my life. I went to college in Ohio, spent the '70s in San Francisco, and the '80s and '90s in New York City. But South Carolina always pulled at me. One day in the late '80s, while I was browsing the stacks of the New York Public Library, I happened to find a book about the Grimke sisters of South Carolina. I couldn't believe that I had never heard of these women - the daughters of a white slave owner and state supreme court justice - who had made a great contribution to the abolitionist movement.

I went on to produce my first documentary, called *Rebel Hearts*, which is the Grimke sisters' story. With one exception, all the documentaries I have made since have been about South Carolina - this endlessly fascinating and frustrating place where African and European roots are inextricably intertwined. I am

grateful that I have had such a close acquaintance with South Carolina, and the opportunity to produce work about it, thanks in no small part to ETV. When I visit friends in the north now, I realize that the 15 years I have lived here have given me a perspective that I cherish. Race, I believe, is our country's deepest wound, a self-inflicted injury that began here, in South Carolina. By facing and understanding our history, we can move on to a better future – black and white together, as we have always been.

I'd like to end with a quote from the speech W.E.B. DuBois made here in Columbia 70 years ago today, on October 20, 1946:

Slowly but surely the working people of the South, white and black, must come to remember that their emancipation depends upon their mutual cooperation; upon their acquaintanceship with each other; upon their friendship; upon their social intermingling. Unless this happens each is going to be made the football to break the heads and hearts of the other.

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