

## Personal Narrative: Who Stole The Pickles?

I grabbed two little arms and hobbled inside. I felt a cool wet sensation on the tip of my nose that soaked into my skin, straight to my spine, chilling my body from the inside out. As I walked, I looked up at the dark gray clouds, when I felt another sensation on my forehead. It was starting. My only goal was to get inside.

Our rental car jostled as we rode over the thick tree roots incrusting into the ground. Our tire marks trailed behind us like a snail's slime. My dad parked in between two trees trying to avoid the baby running around. I sat in the seat looking out the window thinking about the next two days. I'm about to meet my family. *What do I say? What if we didn't have anything in common?* I was so nervous. I felt a nudge on my leg. It was my brother, Jordan, urging me to get out of the car.

My siblings and I got out of the car one by one and we made our way over to a lady in a chair. All I could think about was meeting my cousins. I mean, I never even heard of them before two hours ago. This was going to be interesting.

On our short journey across the lawn to the lady in the chair we were not walking on grass or concrete, we walked on sand and dirt. It was weird. The lady in the chair was my aunt, Laila. As I hugged her, I felt a hand on my leg. It was a little hand. I turned around to see a baby, my cousin, Stewart. He was a familiar face, thanks to *Facetime*. He smiled with his chubby cheeks and looked straight at me.

"Hello, Stewart." I said as I kneeled down to his level.

"Hi," he replied, and I thought I might die of cuteness overload.

He put his arms out which I assumed meant he wanted to be picked up. As I lifted the baby up, my elbows jammed. The veins were popping out of my arms. I put him down and tried picking him up another way. It was successful. I got a shirt full of sand from his feet. After clearing my shirt I looked up to see exactly the person I wanted to see. My grandma.

Everyone looked at her in awe. Her smile was bigger than the sun and tears rolled down her cheeks like raindrops. She gestured her arms out at my dad and anticipating a hug. It's been twenty-one years since they had one. My father leaned in and wrapped his arms around her.

"My baby," she said softly, "My baby."

Later in the day, my cousins started arriving. They clambered out of a few cars one by one. There was a lot of them. I was shocked and overwhelmed by the abundance of cousins. There was Nary, KiKi, Stevie, Lucy, Vince, Draven, Jimmy, Ty, Ques, Britney, Leslie and so many more that I can't even name them. We all introduced ourselves and made our way to the chairs.

I was playing with Stewart and Bailey, another baby cousin, who was also two years old, when I heard commotion. I walked over to the noise and I saw one of the many dogs grab hold of a pig's ear. I felt myself trying to hold back the laugh that creeping up my throat, but I couldn't help it. Squeals and barks filled the air. I grabbed the boys and ran away so they wouldn't get hurt. When we emerged from behind the cars, everyone was asking me what happened. I replied with a simple,

“The dog is attacking to pig.”

Little did I know that the pig was my Aunt Rose's. She stood up in a state of fury and grabbed the plastic wiffle ball bat. She ran towards the dog only to drop the bat and pick up an extension cord. She flung the extension cord at the dog like a lasso. It was no help. My cousin, Nary, started hitting the dog's tail with a stick and it opened its jaw. The pig was free at once. We all laughed and appreciated the moment the we all just shared as a family

I resumed playing and dancing with Stewart and Bailey. It was weird how all the gnats and flies had vanished, but it hadn't bothered me. We laughed and played until I felt a cool wet sensation on the tip of my nose that soaked into my skin, straight to my spine, chilling my body from the inside out. I picked up both of my cousins and I walked towards the house. I looked up at the dark gray clouds when I felt another sensation on my forehead then on my lips, my eyes, and my arm. It was pouring.

It took me back to a time three years prior...My feet sloshed in the water that was rising higher by the minute. Our day at Hershey Park was ruined and I just wanted to go home. My eyes burned as my wet hair dripped gel into them. My body shook as I felt the goosebumps forming on my arms, my legs, and my face. The rain smacked my body with all its might and I let it win...but three years after it I had experienced it again...

The golden, sandy ground turned brown as soon as the water touched it. Puddles where forming left and right, people were scrambling, and food was cooling. I was now safely in the house where it was dry. I looked out the screen door to see water dripping down on the glass, gone forever. It set the somber mood. Our day was ruined. It seemed like all of the kids had the same idea as me because I was not alone. Two girls my age were sitting on the couch holding babies. It looks like we just became the babysitters.

Most of the adults sat outside huddled under the tents but all of the little kids were inside. The youngest was Skyler. She was 3 weeks old. I sat down on one of the many couches and gave juice boxes to Solomon and Breylin, who were now munching on the candy that was on the table. One of the girls looked at me and asked,

“Wats yo' name?”

“Ali, how about you?”

“I’m Vasi dis Niyah,” she said gesturing towards the girl who was sitting next to her on the couch.

“Wanna hold da baby?” Niyah asked standing up now.

“Sure,” I walked over to her, grabbed Skyler, and sat back down on the couch that I started at. Skylah was so fragile. I felt like the slightest movement would break her. Most of the babies were fighting over who I would hold next. Especially Stewart and Bailey.

After about thirty minutes the rain had stopped and the sun was shining. Almost ten minutes later most of the puddles were dry. The mud was damp but it wasn’t thick. Looks like our day wasn’t ruined I was so relieved. The only thing was...the bugs. They had come back in full force. As if the giant mosquito bites on my arms weren’t enough.

The speaker took its place on the center table and started blaring music. Which was very surprising because if you played music that loud in New Jersey you would get a visit from the police. But since there was no one for miles, I guess it was okay.

The food was done shortly after that and everyone ran to get some. It had taken Grandma all-day to cook it, but she couldn’t be happier. Baked beans, potato salad, pasta salad, chicken, a taco-like dip, and cake. Oh, it was heaven for sure. My family was piling their plates high. It was awesome.

“Gramma, how did you make this potato salad?” I asked, while shoveling it into my mouth with one hand and holding Breylin in the other,

“I’ll never tell.” she said, as she walked away to get some chicken.

The food was great, but everyone was looking for the pickles. The day before, my dad had purchased a gallon of pickles. And they were now missing. The hunt for the stolen pickles was on.

“Uncle Bubba, did you take the jar of pickles home?” I asked kindly hoping he wouldn’t go on a rant.

“No. And if I did, God take my breath right now!” He repeatedly said.

There he goes again. Who on earth would need so many pickles? I asked myself. Everybody gave up looking to enjoy the food.

My grandma had invited her friend, Cookie to come to the party. She was crazy so thankfully she had left early with Bailey’s mom.

“Oh, y’all are looking for da pickles?” Bailey’s mom asked as she arrived back at the party.

“Yes.” everyone replied in unison.

“Cookie put ‘em in my trunk.”

The truth was out. This did not make my grandma happy. She stormed into the house and called Cookie telling her to return the pickles tomorrow.

On that note we all started dancing. I had Bailey in one arm and Stewart attempting to climb into my other one. Laughter filled the air as feet were kicked and hands were flailed. I looked around the yard at my smiling family. This was what memories were made of. No matter the weather, we didn't let it stop us from having fun. That's what was important. Not muddy shoes or dirty clothes. The fact that we didn't let anything stop us was important.

The next day my Mother, Father, Brother, Sister, and I arrived to say our final goodbyes before our plane back to Atlanta. I hugged Stewart first cause he needed to take a nap. I walked over to my aunt Niece and hugged her, then my aunt Tracey, then my grandma. As we walked out the door I looked in the house one last time. Then something caught my eye. Right there on the kitchen counter stood the pickle jar, in all its glory.