

# The Making of a *Memoir*

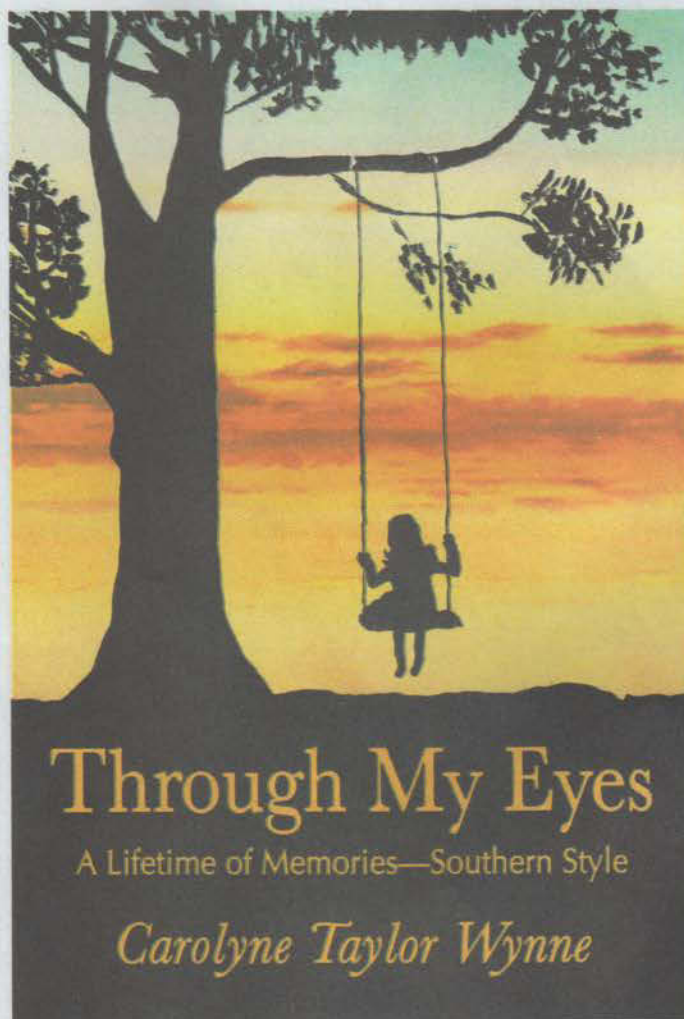
By Terry L. Wynne

I'm the youngest daughter of Carolyn Taylor Wynne, author of the book, *Through My Eyes, A Lifetime of Memories – Southern Style*, published by Graphite Press. Before my mother died, she completed her charming, historical, and educational book of memoirs appropriate for adults and children of all ages. This book is not a typical memoir because it doesn't delineate every detail of my mother's life. Instead, my mother writes her true tales (mainly her mishaps) in the form of short tales with a laugh at myself punch line at the end of each.

In looking back, I realize how effortlessly this book began. My mother always knew how to tell a good tale and she had the perfect opportunity to put her tales into writing when she retired and started taking local enrichment courses including creative writing. She really liked the creative writing course and took it multiple times. The assignments were the same – write about a favorite childhood memory. After each assignment, inevitably she would ask me, "Terry, will you put this assignment on your computer for me?" As I read her tales, I liked them so much that I asked her to write even more of them and to record them all. We sent the recordings and her writings to a publisher, Graphite Press, which immediately offered her a contract to publish her book. Immediately she accepted.

My mother had already chosen a title for her book, *Through My Eyes*. She explained that she chose the title because people may have different views of the same experience and she wanted to write how she viewed her experiences. With a title and a publishing contract, the work began. I was the "behind the scenes" worker because I had more computer experience than my mother.

*next page*





The publisher asked her to arrange her tales into parts and those she chose equated to major phases of her life:

*Part One:*

*Life in South Carolina – Country Girl*

*Part Two:*

*Life in Atlanta – Southern Lady*

*Part Three:*

*Life With a Passport – International Traveler*

*Part Four:*

*Life Among Relatives – Legacy of Memories*

*Afterword:*

*Life Through My Eyes – My Reflections*

Part One: Life in South Carolina – Country Girl, describes her life growing up in the low country in the small town of Ridgeland, South Carolina. Reading her true tales, I realize how different country life is from city life. I've never seen hog killings, sugar cane grindings, tasted Floating Island, ridden a horse into town, picked blackberries and huckleberries for making jams and jellies, or pipped. From her book, I learned that pipping is when two people click together the sharper ends of hard-boiled eggs that are still in the shell. The winner of pipping is the person with the egg that doesn't crack.

While I don't know about country life, I do know about city life because when I was a year old my mother moved to Atlanta, Georgia, as she writes in Part Two: Life in Atlanta – Southern Lady. So as not to spoil the surprises in her book, I'd like to share information not included in her book. For example, although she writes little about her cooking skills, my mother was such a good cook that her friends encouraged her to open her own restaurant. I loved the huge homemade lunch she served our family most every Sunday including fried chicken, white rice with gravy, butter beans, several vegetables, homemade biscuits with real butter and jelly, and hot out-of-the oven banana pudding with meringue. I can still hear my mother saying, "Somebody eat that last helping so I can wash the bowl." She didn't have to coax much for somebody to finish the last helping for her.

Besides being a good cook, my mother was good at interior design and was fastidious in her housekeeping. Here is an example of just how fastidious she was.

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When my mother had her knee replaced, I took a month of family leave from work to care for her. When I arrived at her home, she proudly displayed a box she had prepared just for me. At first, I thought she had bought me a gift, but instead, inside the box were Comet, Windex, Pledge, and a brand new bottle of toilet bowl cleaner. If she couldn't clean her home, she wanted to make sure I kept it clean for her!

My mother was also a multi-tasker and a hard worker. She worked full-time during the day and in the evenings, she prided herself on being able to talk, work a crossword puzzle, and watch television all at the same time. In fact, as a family, we all enjoyed watching television together in the evening. But, if any of us children got up for any reason, quite predictably, my mother would say "While you're up, would you bring me the sewing box, scissors, and scotch tape?" I learned to get any snacks or magazines I wanted before I ever sat down and hope one of my siblings had to get up before I did!

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Because my mother was so young at heart, others were always curious to know her age and often asked her what it was. Many times, I watched her evade the question. With a twinkle in her eye and a sly smile on her face, she simply replied, "Oh, I don't discuss my age, I don't discuss my weight, and I don't discuss my love life." What could an inquirer say to that kind of response?

Part Three of her book is *Life With a Passport – International Traveler*. My mother and I traveled together taking over 35 trips (predominantly international ones) and this portion of her book describes humorous incidents while traveling such as her packing her passport and having a Maasai tribal leader offer to trade his walking stick for her walking cane. Again, so as not to spoil all the surprises in the book, I'll share information not in the book.

On cruise ships and in Las Vegas, my mother discovered a game she really enjoyed on our travels – the quarter slot machines. I was content to watch her, saying that I'd rather save my money for souvenirs, but she

insisted that I join her and gave me a handful of her own coins to use. In just a few minutes, I had won fifty cents! I was ready to stop, but again, she insisted I keep playing until I had lost all of the coins she had given me and she had lost all of her own allotted coins as well. Then, she was ready to leave. When we returned home, I gave her a hand-held poker game and just knew she would love it, but she never played with it. When I asked her why, she replied, "Because when you win, it doesn't play music and have the tinkle, tinkle, tinkle sound of coins falling down like the slot machines."

While our travels gave us many travel memories, Part Four of my mother's book, *Life Among Relatives – Legacy of Memories*, describes my mother's memories of many of the relatives she so loved. One description which I found particularly interesting was about my mother's visit to see her Aunt Lillie, who was blind: "Her lunch was brought in and I marveled at her ability to tell how hot her coffee was, and where the meat as well as other food was on her plate. She explained that the same type of food was always put in the same place on the plate, like numbers on a clock dial. She didn't spill a single thing."

Lastly, the Afterword of my mother's book is a one-page poem she wrote named "Shadows." Rather than divulge the last page of her book, I want to share my own afterword. When I began cleaning out my "behind the scenes" file folders, I found a folder I had labelled as "Mom's signature." In it were samples of my mother's signature which we had sent to the publisher to use to print her signature in the book. In this same folder was a misshapen note in my mother's handwriting that I had never seen before:

Hello Terry, And thank you for doing all the hard work on our Thru My Eyes. May yours be even better than this one! Love and more love, Mom.

This note is unusual in many ways. She would not have written, "Hello," but would have written "Hi" or "Dear." She would not have started the first sentence with the word, "And," but would have started it with "Thank you." She would not have written, "our Thru My Eyes," but would have written "my Thru My Eyes," since she was adamant that this book was hers, not ours. She would not have written "Thru," but would have written out the word, "Through." People tell me that I

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must have already read the note and forgotten about it or that my mother slipped the note in my folder before she died. I know neither assumption is true.

I do plan to write my own memoirs about the lessons I've learned as her note encouraged me to do. I also hope that reading my mother's book will inspire both children and adults to write their own memoirs. (Yes, children are writing their memoirs now too!) As for the inexplicable note from my mother, I framed it and look at it often. It reminds me that I don't have to know all explanations, I just need to accept the signs I receive "Along the Way," which is the title I'd like to use when I write my own book of memoirs.

*P.S.*

Go to [www.CarolyneTaylorWynne.com](http://www.CarolyneTaylorWynne.com) to learn how to order *Through My Eyes*; to see pictures of the people, places, and things in this book; and to read about the author, Carolyne Taylor Wynne.





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