

The Performance of Disappearing

Looking back, I see now that my survival strategy wasn’t just to vanish—it was to *shape-shift* into whatever someone else might want. Be quiet. Be helpful. Be small. Don’t cry. Don’t need. Don’t shine—unless shining earned me a scrap of approval.

I became a chameleon, yes—but not to blend in. I changed colors hoping someone would *notice*.

The truth is, I was starving for attention and validation. I became *anybody’s dog who would pet me*. I wagged my tail at the slightest kindness, sat up straight for affection, and rolled over if it meant I might not be left alone. If I wasn’t loved for who I was, then maybe I could be loved for who I pretended to be.

And that act worked—sort of. I got approval. I got praise. Sometimes I even got love. But none of it felt real, because I was never sure if they were seeing *me* or the mask I wore.

Eventually, I forgot who I was underneath the performance.

It’s taken me years to unravel that pattern. To stop performing, and start *belonging*. To stop chasing pats on the head and start listening to the quiet voice within—the one that says I don’t have to earn love by vanishing, pleasing, or being perfect.

Now, I’m learning to stand still in my own skin. No tricks. No wagging. Just me. And that’s enough.

Chapter 1: Early Life

I was born in 1953 in San Jose, California—but my roots took hold in the red clay and long silences of rural Oklahoma. Though my earliest memories are foggy, a few scenes stand out in painful clarity. One of the first comes from when I was about two. Friends and relatives were visiting—drinks in hand, laughter loud—and I had to use the bathroom. My mother and I had a routine: I’d finish, then bend over the toilet so she could wipe me. But that day, while I was bent over, the bathroom door swung open. A guest—probably Uncle Amon—looked in, saw me, and made a crude joke. The room erupted in laughter. My mother? She yanked me out and beat me—not a spanking meant to teach, but a punishment to save face. That moment stitched shame deep into my bones. I learned then: even innocence could make me the butt of a joke—and the target of punishment.

Prologue

Some people write from a place of certainty. I write from a place of surrender—and that’s what gives this memoir its power. Every insight was earned. Every truth, tested. My voice carries the kind of authority that only comes from surviving myself.

This isn’t a linear autobiography. It’s not a carefully curated highlight reel, and it’s not a courtroom transcript of who did

My Memoir

Byrle S.

Chapter 2: Somewhere Between

Seen and Dismissed

I joined the United States Air Force in 1971, a teenager from rural Oklahoma who was aimless and clueless. I didn’t have a grand plan. I just stumbled into the recruiter’s office one day and walked out as an inductee.