

Robert L. Young

From Bayou to
Bay and Beyond

A Memoir

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**FROM BAYOU TO BAY AND
BEYOND**

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A Memoir

ROBERT L. YOUNG

with Leslie Morris

The Memoir Writer, LLC

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PROLOGUE

This book has come about at the request of my family so that future generations can know this part of our history. I hope you gain as much from it as I have through my journey of reflection and documentation.

Each person who reads it will view my truth through their own lens. As I've told my story with honesty and, in some cases, more candor than I have previously provided, it's truly up to you to find your own meaning in these pages.

I am proud of what I have accomplished in spite of my meager beginnings, what Ellen and I have accomplished together, and the people that our children have become. My family is everything to me.

Robert L. Young
Danville, California
October 2023

In the Beginning

My first memory is of eating oysters in Venice. It was 1948 and I was three years old. Doesn't that sound glamorous? It wasn't. This wasn't Venice, Italy. Nor Venice Beach, California. This was Venice, Louisiana, a tiny unincorporated fishing village in the southern part of the state, population 168. This small speck barely even on the map is two hours from New Orleans though I had no way of knowing that; my first trip to New Orleans was to a bachelor party two decades later. On this particular sunny day my mother, father, older sister Carol, and I spent a few hours in the stifling humidity of early fall poking around the "gumbo mud" with sticks until we found the oysters. We pulled them up and then my father gave them a quick rinse off and pried them open with his knife. We slurped them down right then and there. There was no lemon garnish or mignonette sauce. This is the only happy memory I have of all four of us.

My childhood is not my favorite topic so I'm covering only the basics here in the hope that I don't have to come back to it. My childhood was mostly unpleasant. Over time I came to realize that

we lived below the poverty line and that not everyone spent their earliest years sleeping on old newspaper in an abandoned shack without running water or electricity. My father did odd jobs when he wasn't on a bender and disappeared for good when I was six. He was a violent man, with his anger directed mostly at my mother but occasionally at me and my sister. After he left, my mother, sister and I moved in with my maternal grandmother, who we called Meemaw, in Houma, Louisiana, 150 miles north. My mother found work as a housekeeper and Carol and I were enrolled in school for the first time in our lives. Wearing shoes every day, along with regular bathing, eating meals at a table, and doing chores, were big adjustments.

I don't remember much else about growing up in Houma (pronounced Hoo-mah) beyond Meemaw dragging us to church every Sunday, and that I spent my summers wearing a hairnet and working at deep fryers in restaurants that served shellfish. I didn't like either and to this day, the smell of fried food makes me nauseas. I never did figure out if Meemaw was actually religious or if we went to church because the church ladies took pity on us by delivering an occasional tuna noodle casserole and hand me down clothes and shoes in that "The Lord Will Provide" sort of way. Regardless, weekly church attendance, along with shoes that pinched, were part of our new routine.

You could tell that Meemaw was once very pretty and that life had worn her down. If there was a Pawpaw in the picture at one time he was never mentioned. There were many things we didn't discuss in our family, this being toward the top of that list along with the whereabouts of my father. My mother obviously got her looks from Meemaw because she was a beautiful woman who had many gentlemen friends, none of which stuck around very long and even fewer whom we met. She knew exactly how to use her height, hourglass figure, dark almond-shaped eyes, long legs, and

full lips to her best advantage and surely that helped her land my father though, in hindsight, he wasn't much of a catch after their first years together.

I'd like to say that my mother was a good role model but the definition of good varies depending on the situation. I'm pretty sure she stole food from the houses she cleaned. She was often coming home with a tin of this or a jar of that and never mentioned that they were gifts. After all those years of living on the economic fringe with my father, some of which included dumpster diving, this had to be her survival instinct. What I do believe is that she did the best she could to provide for me and my sister. She didn't have much of an example to follow. Meemaw was 16 when my mother was born; in turn, my mother was 16 when Carol was born. I followed four years after Carol, on January 3, 1945, and learned much later that my parents never married. I also learned that my parents had two sons born in the years between me and Carol, and that neither had lived past a year old. It makes me sad to think about those boys; I would have enjoyed having older brothers. Given how we lived, I'm surprised any of our births or our siblings' deaths became public record at all.

Leaving Louisiana

Despite my 2.0 GPA, living on the proverbial wrong side of the tracks gave me a full scholarship including housing and expenses to Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge. Geaux Tigers! I left Houma by Greyhound bus and never went back.

If moving from Venice to Houma was a shock to my system, moving from Houma to Baton Rouge was even more of a shock. My first surprise was that almost everyone had a full mouth of teeth! This got me to see a dentist for the first time ever. That visit was not pretty, let me assure you. In Baton Rouge there was enough traffic to necessitate stop lights. And buildings more than three stories tall. And manicured lawns with the biggest homes I'd ever seen. There was a huge cafeteria where I worked part-time as part of my scholarship agreement in exchange for meals. Men wore collared shirts and sported cropped haircuts.

My LSU years were formative, that's for sure. I was assigned to one of the cinder block dorm rooms inside Death Valley, the Tigers Football Stadium. Apparently this was an uncommon location for a dorm. Little did I know how much mileage I'd get later in life by sharing this piece of seemingly inconsequential information. I grew

up a lot during my college years. I met people from different parts of the state and even country. These people came in different colors and some practiced religions I'd never heard of. I learned that not everyone grew up not knowing where their next meal would come from, like Carol and I did, and that two-parent families were the norm. While I didn't have a large circle of friends, the ones I made were genuine and those of us who are still living on the north side of the grass remain friends today, gathering as often as we can.

In 1971, LSU awarded me a Bachelor of Science degree in oil drilling engineering and I moved to Houston to work for Shell Oil in its headquarters. My advisor had talked me into an engineering degree with the promise of stable, lucrative work post-graduation. I wasn't an especially strong student but, as it turns out, you can graduate college with barely passable grades. The oil business was growing quickly and engineers were in demand, even less academic ones like myself. In Houma and Baton Rouge we'd walked or taken the bus everywhere. Houston was where I learned to drive and bought my first car, a light brown Ford Pinto.

That year I had Thanksgiving dinner with my co-worker Steven Anderson and his family; their large celebration with family and friends was the exact opposite of the way I grew up; in Venice and Houma we'd barely acknowledged the holiday. Steven was raised in an expansive house with a pool in North Houston and Thanksgiving dinner was both plentiful and served by household help. It was accompanied with lots of liquor and merriment.

I met his twin sister Ellen that night and managed to convince her to marry me less than a year later, in September of 1972. More than 400 people attended our lavish Houston Country Club wedding and we had ten attendants on each side, at the insistence of my mother-in-law. I was overwhelmed and on my best behavior, trying not to embarrass myself or Ellen. Steven was, of course, my best man. Ironically, our wedding was the last time I saw many of those

people, including some of the people who stood up in the wedding! We honeymooned by renting a convertible and driving up the coast of California on Highway 1 from San Diego to San Francisco. One of the things that has stayed with me from that trip was the elephant seals we saw near Hearst Castle in San Simeon. Ellen and I watched them for hours. Little did I know that my fascination with large sea mammals was only beginning.

While I don't generally believe in a higher power, I do suspect some sort of divine intervention led me to Steven, his family and especially his sister. To this day I still don't know how I got so lucky. Ellen is woman of character and a true partner in every sense of the word. She is thoughtful and level-headed, pee-in-your-pants funny, and always up for an adventure. Through her I have learned patience, compassion and to focus on what's most important. Without her I'd be just another old geezer with negligible grooming habits.

Marrying Ellen and into the Anderson family was way above my pay grade so I knew I'd have to step up my game in order to keep her happy. I worked long hours to provide a life similar to the one in which she'd been raised. We soon had our own ranch-style home near her parents, a Ford Country Squire station wagon, a golden retriever, and three children in quick succession: Robert Jr. (RJ) in 1974, Wyatt in 1967, and Jennifer in 1977. Ellen had two miscarriages following Jennifer's birth so, although we would have liked to have a bigger family, three was where we landed. We also had season Houston Oilers football tickets, a team of which I remain a fan today.

After two years of learning the ropes and working regular hours in the Houston office, Shell sent me offshore to an oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico for 28 days on, 28 days off. While the work was intellectually fulfilling and supported our family, it left Ellen raising

our kids by herself half of the time. RJ had been born six weeks prematurely so he had some unique challenges in his first few years which required frequent visits to the Texas Children's Hospital. I am now man enough to admit that RJ's delay in hitting developmental milestones shook me to my very core. I found it much easier to be at work than to be fully present in the chaos of our family life. Ellen's parents, who lived less than five miles from us, picked up a lot of the slack at this time.

In 1979 Ellen gave me an ultimatum: be present or be divorced. We separated for six months and then I came to my senses, begged her to take me back, and started looking for a new job. One upside of my hard work was that it didn't take long for me to secure an offer for a risky but lucrative engineering leadership role in Alaska with Standard Oil of Ohio, which was increasing its presence on the North Slope in Prudhoe Bay because of the new Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. Instead of being gone from home for weeks at a time, I traveled overnight just once a week.

It broke Ellen's parents' hearts when we separated and, while they were cautiously optimistic when we gave our marriage a second shot, it broke their hearts again when we moved to Alaska. I took my second chance very seriously and promised her parents that we'd visit at least once a year. I have kept my word.

The Wild, Wild West

We moved to Anchorage, also known as The Wild, Wild West, in 1980 and bought a home in the Hillside neighborhood with views of the Cook Inlet. The oil families were a close social community of like-minded people. Many of them were also transplants from southern states and we still wore our cowboy boots and drove big trucks.

These were formative years in my career. I worked hard and with smart people who took me under their wing. I was rewarded with several promotions and went from managing a small team to managing a large team to working on strategy and then managing a large strategy team. My name was often floated for even larger jobs at headquarters. Strong mentors pushed me out of my comfort zone and also tapped me for special projects, giving me new skills and visibility. Let's not kid ourselves, though. The oil and gas industry was and still is male-dominated, a network of hard-drinking, hard-driving men. As it turned out, my meager beginnings gave me the gift of being able to relate to early-in-career and blue collar workers, of which there were many in Alaska. Working alongside those people made me feel at home, like less of an imposter

amongst the oil elite. I mentored many people myself and learned to enjoy people management. The one part of people management I absolutely hated was sending people to alcohol rehabilitation centers, which I had to do far more than one would think. The long, dark winters brought out all sorts of demons. Those people almost never conquered their demons in rehab and going to their funerals became part of my job as well. Later, once we moved to California, that ugly, geographic-specific part of my job was behind me.

Ellen and the kids thrived in Alaska. Those were easy years. Our kids excelled in winter sports, enjoyed academic success, and made friends. Ellen volunteered at the local hospital while the kids were in school. We bought a 28' Bayliner cabin cruiser boat, which I named the Ellen Rose against Ellen's wishes, and spent the long daylight hours of our summer weekends exploring Prince William Sound. We dip netted for pink and king salmon on the Kenai River, sent some to be smoked or dried into jerky, and stored the rest of our bounty fillet-style in our garage chest freezer to be eaten later in the year. A dedicated guest room became a necessity in our Hillside home because between the months of May and August we opened our doors to friends and family who wanted to visit Alaska. We hosted friends and family of friends and family, too.

It's hard to describe the untouched wilderness that is Alaska. The crystal clear freshwater lakes, the snow-covered or capped mountains, the tundra, the plains, the bore tides, the wildlife, the Northern Lights, the pure white snow, the winter stars bright in the darkest of skies. During some of life's harder times, which I'll get to soon enough, I'd mentally go to my happy of sitting at the Bayliner captain's chair watching the glaciers calve. I'll never forget the day I was late dropping the kids off at school because there was a moose standing at the bottom of our driveway, blocking our way, not looking to move anytime soon. We saw Dall sheep and black bears in our neighborhood from time to time, too. There is a joke

that the Alaska state bird is a mosquito and I do understand that. The good news is that there are no snakes of any kind in Alaska. You can figure out why.

Winters are tough, though. On December 21, the sun rises in Anchorage at 11:30am and sets at 1:00pm. The sun is never bright nor high in the sky; in fact, it rises just above the horizon making the daylight hours only a tease. It's a hard adjustment and one of the reasons the alcoholism and suicide rates in the state are higher than any other US state. We learned to rely on our watches as the cycle of the sun was not what we were used to in Texas.

Alaskans joke that the city of Lahaina, on the island of Maui in Hawaii, is a suburb of Anchorage. I wholeheartedly agree. We mightily looked forward to our two-week thaw there each February like everyone else we knew, and were often joined by our extended family. Our vacation rules included wearing shoes as little as possible and absolutely no references to time! Fur Rendezvous, aka Furrondy, is the biggest annual celebration of life in Alaska. This Maui reset put us in the right mindset for the 10-day winter festival followed shortly after by the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, which we watched closely on our large TV from the comfort of our own warm family room.

We liked Maui so much that we bought a house in Kaanapali a block from the beach and two doors down from Ellen's brother Steven and his family, who kept theirs on the rental market when they were not visiting from Houston. We actually prepared our home for rental and rented it out only once. It was a disaster of epic proportions, never to be done again. The property between us eventually came on the market and Steven and I tossed a coin to see which one of us would make an offer on it. Ellen and I won and then we had a multi-acre family compound with a pool, koi pond and a grassy field large enough to hold a luau or wedding. None of

our kids have yet married on the property; I remain hopeful that one of our grandchildren will. Our most recent addition to the yard is a bocce court. My in-laws came out for weeks at a time during the miserable Houston summers and we are so glad they did. I like to think that the same humpback whales we saw breaching in the shallow waters between Molokai, Lanai, Kahoolawe, and Maui were the same ones we saw in Prince William Sound.

Unfortunately, my mother, Carol and Meemaw never visited us in Alaska or Hawaii although we invited them numerous times. Long distance travel by airplane was too foreign for them to get their heads around. We did have my mother and Carol to the Bay Area and to Tahoe a few summers, when their weather was at its worst, and they seemed to enjoy our low-key California lifestyle, especially lake life.

Carol, my mother and her husband, and Meemaw were now living comfortably in Houston as well thanks to a bit of help we provided. Meemaw passed away peacefully in her sleep in 2010 at the age of 99. My mother passed away five years later. Carol, who always got along better with animals than with people and who has not married, became a veterinarian in her late 40s and worked in the animal husbandry unit at the University of Houston Animal Hospital until 2015.

Re-Entry to the Lower 48

In 1989 the Exxon Valdez supertanker spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil into Prince William Sound, covering 1,300 miles of coastline and killing hundreds of thousands of seabirds, otters, seals, and whales. This was the beginning of big changes to the oil industry starting with more and more industry regulations. Our friends were done doing their stints in Alaska and started return to the Lower 48. Our times was coming soon enough.

Rather than return to Houston, we moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where I took a middle management job with Chevron, headquartered in the East Bay bedroom community of San Ramon. We bought a modest home in nearby Danville and enrolled RJ, Wyatt and Jennifer in public school. Danville was a good place for the next step of raising our kids. The town has a traditional Fourth of July parade, access to open space, and is in close proximity to the diversity and culture of San Francisco.

The moderate California weather made us realize how much we missed the snow so we scraped together enough money for a down payment on a lakefront vacation home on the west shore of

Lake Tahoe. It was there we spent at least a month in the summer, winter weekends and all of the Christmas holidays. We named it Snow Hous as a nod to our Houston start as a family. In my opinion, the best part of that house is the huge windows facing the lake providing unobstructed water view framed by a few pine trees. Our enormous front door has a stained glass panel inset with snowflakes thanks to our dear friend Laura Emerson. a former Squaw Valley ski racer now a well-known local artist. You can see more of Laura's magnificent work at Riverside Studios on Donner Pass Road in Truckee.

We're Squaw Valley people through and through. For many years downhill skiing was our predominant family activity. RJ, Wyatt and Jennifer all skied on Squaw's recreational ski team. Squaw Valley was renamed Palisades Tahoe a few years ago but us oldies will always call it Squaw, just like we call the competitive Mustang Soccer division by its old name of Al Caffodio. Winter is my favorite season. There is something about the duality of nature in its most daring form coupled with the coziness of it - a fire in the fireplace, the snow falling, two fingers of Lagavulin.

One of our neighbors got into a financial trouble and needed to unload their Tahoe house quickly. We jumped at the chance to acquire another house down the street. This house was begging to be torn down so we did so, building a small A-Frame cabin on it for the use by extended family and friends. Ellen has exceptional taste and loved working with the architect and interior designer on the cabin, which she refers to as Mountain Chic style. She was very smart and added heating elements under the driveway, reducing the need for snow plowing in the winter. Our lakefront home remains the center of the action and in 2010 we repaved its driveway adding those same heating elements. We have a pier and dock so we often take drinks down there to watch the sunset. I suppose that we should have a boat but after owning one in Alaska, we didn't want

the hassle. The dock does make it convenient for friends with boats to visit, though. Sitting in the hot tub, another 2010 addition, with a glass of wine and watching the snow fall over the lake is one of my favorite past-times. Ellen and I also seem to spend a lot of summer Sunday mornings reading the paper on Adirondack chairs watching our kids and grandkids jump off the dock or try to catch crawdads.

As we've gotten older, we've indulged ourselves by having a local gal stock our home with food and beverages before we arrive. During the winter we also have a service shovel our decks and replenish our firewood. During the summer, the service cleans off our patio furniture and opens the umbrellas in preparation for our arrival.



Venice, Louisiana



Meemaw, late 1930s



Meemaw's Extended Family



**Robert and Ellen Anderson Young,
September 1972**



Anchorage, Alaska, January 1985



Prince William Sound, Alaska



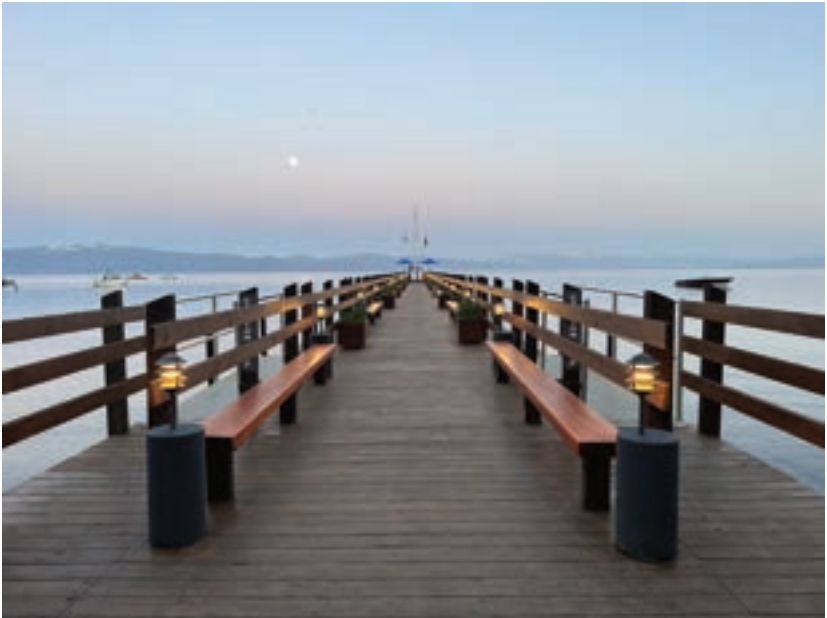
Lahaina, Maui, Hawaii



Kaanapali, February 1984



Squaw Valley, California



West Shore, Lake Tahoe



Anderson Cousins Visiting California



Leonard Martin's 75th Birthday, Dallas



Ellen, Wyatt and Hudson



Sully

Emptying the Nest

I made three separate and unsuccessful attempts to convince our kids to attend my alma mater though I'm honestly not sure why it was so important to me. Pride? An excuse to visit? The LSU campus has grown exponentially since my matriculation; the Italian-Renaissance-inspired architecture from the 1920s remains but is now supplemented with modern buildings, including a ridiculous recreation center with a lazy river pool spelling out LSU! The magnolia and oak trees have only grown larger. For the record, Ellen also tried to get our kids to attend her alma mater, the University of Alabama. She had no luck there either.

RJ was our wild child, the one who broke several bones downhill skiing, the one who snuck out at night without remorse, the one who nearly burned down our house playing with matches. In the end, he went to college at the University of Washington, where it seemed he spent more time bouldering on the nearby mountains than in class. He returned to Alaska after five years in Seattle, this time to Juneau, and teaches 7th grade PE during the school year. During the summer he works as a fishing guide. Ellen and I eagerly await our annual box of flash-frozen salmon from his catch.

Wyatt was our easy child, our middle child who fit the stereotype. He got along well with everyone, never caused any trouble, and was every teacher's favorite student. In fact, when Ellen or I run in to his former teachers around town, they always ask how he is! He was invited to every classmate's birthday party and many proms. The only thing bad thing I ever remember Wyatt doing happened when he was about five. He took off his shoe and threw it at me, smacking me right between the eyes. It was completely out of character for him and neither of us knew what to say. We were both stunned. I gave him a look and he fell right back in line, never to stray again. Wyatt seems to love California and never found a reason to leave the Bay. He played midfielder in Division 1 soccer at St. Mary's College of Moraga, where he is now the head women's soccer coach. Parenting Fail: we didn't realize Wyatt was especially good at soccer until his senior year of high school when college coaches started calling!

Our daughter Jennifer has always been the smartest person in the room. She was a nerd long before it was trendy. She taught herself to read at three, skipped two grades and earned an undergraduate degree in chemistry from UC Berkeley before her 18th birthday. After that she pursued a PhD in Biochemistry and Cell Biology at Dartmouth, where she coached its Division 1 Alpine ski team in her free time. With two friends from Cal, Jennifer founded a biotech company, participates in Ironman-length triathlons, and mentors inner city at-risk youth. Her husband Kevin grew up in a big Kennebunkport, Maine family and gave up his career as a jewelry designer to support hers. He is a stay-at-home dad to our two granddaughters, Ashley and Amelia, and they live in Acton, Massachusetts, outside of Boston.

It's hard to explain the pride I have in our three children, all so different. Their time living in Houston, Anchorage and Danville

was a gift which taught them inclusivity and adaptability though I suspect it may not be obvious to them.

So many of the truly lovely people we met in Danville grew up and stayed in the bubble that is Danville. It's not easy to make friends with people whose families have long histories, who have socialized for multiple generations, who vacation together, who give each other's kids all the advantages. There were many times that we felt on the outside of it all, only socializing when it was a school or sports function. To be honest, I didn't like a lot of them. This isn't to say that we didn't have good friends during this stage of our life. We simply found it easier to make friends in other places. We chose a Danville neighborhood walking distance from our kids' schools, and one with smaller houses and younger families. We consciously decided against the country club lifestyle and our kids, instead, spent part of their summers swimming at the local community pool with their classmates.

We easily maintained the friendships from our Alaska years, often meeting up on Maui or at Tahoe. Occasionally we played bridge locally. A few of them even worked at Chevron, too. These are our closest friends. They are unapologetically outlaws. They can grill up a steak or salmon to perfection and truly appreciate fresh produce, something we missed dearly during our Alaska years. They know that there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing choices. They refuse to give up their 4WD cars, which are generally trucks. And neither wildlife nor bugs scare them.

Some of our friends introduced us to volunteering at the Contra Costa and Solano County Food Bank; food insecurity is something I know well and Ellen and I have given our time and money generously over the years. While Wyatt was in college we volunteered picking pears in a multi-acre grove near his school. I was glad when

that was over; it was back-breaking, hard work, only made slightly better by the praise lavished upon us by the driver of the Food Bank truck who came at the end of the day to pick up the fruit.

Occasionally I enjoy the mindless work of sorting crayons at The Crayon Initiative, a local nonprofit that recycles previously used crayons and melts them into whole, new crayons for distribution in the pediatric units at Bay Area hospitals. Many different kinds of people volunteer there and I enjoy the random conversations we have.

In these last several years we have transitioned our giving to monetary. Ellen like to joke that her favorite place to shop is at a fundraising auction; I wholeheartedly support that.

Second Act Surprises

Somewhere in my fourth decade I learned to cook! I'd certainly had plenty of chances but had little time to do so until our kids were nearly grown. Ellen has been more than happy for me to take initiative in this area of our life.

Food and entertaining is a big part of Louisiana culture and both my mother and Meemaw were respectable cooks, Meemaw more so than my mother. Although there wasn't always food on the table as I grew up, what we had was good, at least in my imagination. The Gulf of Mexico provided inexpensive and sometime free seafood when we lived in Venice. Red rice and beans were staples of my childhood diet in Houma as was gumbo and cornbread. Texas gave my young family and culinarily ambitious wife access to some of the best beef for grilling and the tastiest Mexican food I can remember. And the things they do with crawfish in Houston is the stuff of my dreams! Anchorage had salmon, halibut and crab. Hawaii has more varieties of fish and my two favorite desserts - fresh pineapple and shave ice. California has, hands down, the best produce in all of the world; I am partial to Watsonville artichokes and strawberries. When people would visit us in Alaska and ask what to bring we'd

always request seasonal produce then send them out to dinner while we selfishly gorged ourselves on it.

To everyone's surprise I've turned out to be a fairly decent cook. My specialty is salmon; I give it a good soak in an Asian marinade made up of Dijon mustard, soy sauce, olive oil, and garlic all mixed together. My second favorite way to make salmon is gravlax-style, which is fresh salmon cured with a combination of salt, sugar and dill. People are disappointed if they come for a social visit and salmon isn't served.

Although I dislike the taste of pumpkin and don't consider myself creative, I get a kick out of carving a few elaborate pumpkins each year for our Halloween porch.

Ellen and I have never been big travelers, instead preferring to spend our downtime on Maui, up at Tahoe or visiting our adult children and grandchildren. I'd guess we easily spend half of the year on Maui or up at the lake. These are comfortable places to be and to entertain as all the activities are outdoors. I've never been to Disneyland nor do I care to. Ellen and I did take the kids to Yosemite once and it was pretty but frankly I found it disappointing when compared to the grandeur of Alaska. Speaking of Alaska, we've only been back to Anchorage twice since moving and those visits were for a wedding and a retirement party.

Along our way Ellen and I made some risky investments in a remote mining venture and in a luxury fly-in fishing lodge which did not pay off. The fishing lodge did well financially but our partner took all the cash out of the business and disappeared. In hindsight, we should have hired an investment advisor much earlier. If you are not currently engaged with one and have assets of more than \$100,000, find yourself a fiduciary wealth manager right now! Also, go with a private advisor or firm. The ones at Charles Schwab, Fidelity, Morgan Stanley, or Wells Fargo sell their own products.

One of our real estate investments hit it big, enabling us to buy additional commercial real estate on Maui which we have been able to rent out with a high ROI. This income made it possible for me to retire at age 60, which was key as I could be by Ellen's side when she courageously and successfully fought breast cancer in 2017. Ellen decided to get her cancer treatment at the Tahoe Forest Cancer Center, part of the University of California at Davis network. She received outstanding, compassionate care there in a small, beautiful setting amidst the pine trees. We will be forever grateful to the special staff there and will be leaving a good part of our estate to the center.

When Ellen and I go to Tahoe we buy a Dutch apple pie at Ikeda's Market in Lincoln on the drive north, sometimes two. No matter what the season, my arrival at the lake is incomplete if I am not submerged in the water within a few minutes of pulling into the garage. In the summer it's refreshing. In the winter it's bone chilling and not even the dog will go in with me! My family thinks I'm crazy and they're probably right. I hope I do not have a heart attack and die during one of these plunges because it would be miserable for Ellen to have to sort that out. Unless road conditions prevents us from driving, we go to Squaw Valley's Christmas Eve Torchlight Parade down the face of KT. We open presents on Christmas Eve and ski on Christmas morning. That afternoon we have our annual gingerbread house decorating contest and snack on leftovers from our big Christmas Eve dinner. On New Year's Eve we host a neighborhood Poker Night. We go to the Lake Tahoe Concours d'Elegance to see the wooden boats every August, which I greatly enjoy. We also attend the Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, which I do not greatly enjoy but go because it makes Ellen happy.

Would my second act include an encore career? I gave thought to it after I left the oil business. Should Ellen and I buy a bike rental

shop on Maui? Go back to school and become a gemologist? Jump on the bandwagon of people opening boba shops? Lots of people teach high school for second careers. Would I enjoy and be good at that? I never did come up with something I felt passionate about so the idea of an encore career stayed just that - an idea.

While some people find retirement a big adjustment, it's not been for me. I never did learn to play golf but I do stay active walking the dog. I enjoy reading, too, especially books about other people. We have an extensive lending library up at Tahoe. Tuesdays with Morrie is toward the top of my favorites list. I also liked Shoe Dog on Nike's Phil Knight, JD Vance's Hillbilly Elegy (I could relate!) and Walter Isaacson's Einstein. There's something about losing one's self in a book, going on a mental and emotional trip someplace else, unplugging from one's own reality, that I relish. I went to a book festival once, The Sun Valley Writer's Conference, and once was enough. My family does tease me about one thing: I use postcards as bookmarks. If you have sent us a postcard while on vacation then there is a good chance I have used it as at least once!

Influences

My work with Shell and then Chevron took me to visit oil fields all over the world; I've been to Thailand, Argentina, Australia, and West Africa to name a few. I've tried foods most people would avoid like the plague and flown on planes in weather conditions where commercial flights have been grounded. During my travels I've met many different kinds of people with differing opinions and agendas and like to think that it has guided me toward being open-minded and a good listener, at least in business. Ellen and our kids can validate or contradict that statement!

My best friend since age 23 has been my brother-in-law Steven. He went to law school after a few years at Shell, preferring the challenge of negotiating foreign oil and gas rights rather than engineering. The specialized law firm he built serving energy companies is the largest of its kind worldwide. He met the love of his life, Valerie, during his early years practicing law and together they have six children, two of whom now run the firm. Two of those children are from Val's first marriage but you'd never know it; they are one big mostly happy clan. Steven has been my cheerleader during the

best of times and the worst of times, and his sense of humor and quick comebacks have made for many a legendary family tale. He is also the best negotiator I have ever met and can argue both sides equally well, which has been very helpful in a blended family. He and Val serve on several non-profit boards, including the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, and we attend as many fundraisers as we can with them. Everyone should be so lucky to have a Steven in their life. I can only hope that I have given him half as much as he has given me.

KellyAnn and John Anderson, my in-laws, were some of the kindest people I've ever met. Their love story goes back to their middle school years in Lubbock, Texas, and remained strong until their deaths within two months of each other during their 80th year. After John stopped seeing patients at the MD Anderson Cancer Center (no relation), where he worked as a radiation oncologist, he continued his research work, remaining optimistic that the day would come where cancer would no longer be a death sentence. His work ethic was unrivaled and I can only imagine that his bedside manner was just as strong. Although their political views were extremely conservative, KellyAnn and John listened carefully to those with other points of view. They welcomed me into their family with open arms, never criticized my moderately liberal leanings, at least to my face, and were hands-on, generous grandparents to all of their grandchildren, related by blood or not.

As I mentioned earlier in this book, I've got a core group of friends from my LSU days. While we don't see each other often, when we do get together it's like no time has passed at all. This group includes Leonard Martin, Dave and Birdy Edwards, Lewis and Karen Pickett, Eddie Peterson, and Harold Putnam. Tragically, Stuart Cartwright and his wife Judy were hit by a drunk driver in 2012. Judy was one of the very first people I met at LSU and I was devastated to hear that she and Stuart did not survive the ambulance

ride from the accident scene to the hospital. Their holiday parties were legendary. Since the accident Ellen and I have given generously to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the huge impact our fur babies had on us. It's impossible to adequately describe the love we've had for our four dogs – Tiger, Bear, Hudson, and Sully – as well as the love they've given back to us. They have been our constant companions and sources of entertainment. These animals have an uncanny sixth sense; they know when you need some affection and when to stay out of the way. Burying these animals is the only time I've ever freely cried. Aside from the unconditional love we've given and received from them, there are so many other things to be learned from dogs! My favorite lesson is that of being present. Of course that will always be a work in progress for me but I've gotten much better about it as I've aged. Today our dogs' legacies live on because we've bred two. Wyatt received the pick of the litter from one.

After our kids grew up Ellen and I researched raising a guide dog for the blind. After debating this for years, we came to the conclusion that we'd never be able to part with a dog we'd had in our home, no matter how noble the cause.

Strong women are a common thread in my life: Meemaw, my mother, Carol, Ellen, Jennifer. Every day I wake up grateful that Ellen gave our marriage a second chance. I genuinely believe that she is my person and I think she feels the same way about me. One of the reasons Ellen and I wanted a large family was because our natal families only had two children each. We are each close to our siblings. Carol has a strong personality. Heavily flavored is how I describe her. Carol converted to Catholicism and attends mass at St. Martin the Archangel at least once a week. She has trust and abandonment issues and I probably would, too, if not for the

Andersons. Both Carol and I were late bloomers and have had our challenges fitting in. I've often suspected that she decided not to partner or have children as a result of our childhood. Since we were children, we have counted on each other to serve it up straight and to protect each other. It hasn't always been easy and we have had more fights than I can count, sometimes going more than a year without speaking, but it is part of who we are. I will always have my big sister's back.

These people have very much influenced who I am, how I think and how I act. While our family has many traditions which I've shared in the previous pages, I find comfort in consistency, in old habits. Here are a few examples:

- I do the New York Times crossword on Sundays.
- I like one cup of dark roast black coffee first thing in the morning, never more or later in the day.
- Each night, before I go to sleep, I read for 15 minutes and check the weather for the next day.
- I've worn Adidas Stan Smith tennis shoes for so long that they've come back in style.
- I only buy American cars.
- I refuse to wear sunscreen. This irked John to no end!
- I prefer that my trousers have pleats and cuffs though they are no longer in style.
- I shave every day regardless of my plans and I only use mint flavored toothpaste.
- I often wear a hat because every year there is less and less hair on my head.
- I will not wear pink or purple.
- I take off my shoes in every house I enter and insist people do the same in our homes.
- I write all of my appointments on a paper calendar.

- I check the mailbox every day even though it's almost always empty.
- I do not check my email every day nor do I pay bills online.
- And I do not text except with my grandchildren, who prefer to communicate that way.

While I am nowhere near perfect nor do I aspire to be, I have made peace with my past and am comfortable in my own skin, now leathery and sun-spotted.

Final Thoughts

My 80th year approaches as this book is being written. I can hardly believe it. Sometimes I have dreams that I'm a young boy back in the Louisiana bayou, running around barefoot and watching the commercial fishing boats come and go. I can't shake the feeling that I'm still that boy but then I look in the mirror and am met with a big surprise!

My regrets are few. I experienced a great love. I had children. I have grandchildren. I gave back to the community. I provided for my family. My good fortunes are many.



Robert L Young is a husband, father of three, and former energy industry executive. He and his wife of more than 50 years, Ellen Anderson Young, split their time between Danville, California, Tahoe City, California, and Maui, Hawaii.



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