

Sara Anderson

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Journalism

The Accidental, Atypical Preacher's Wife

Sandra Lyn Bankston is a 71 year-old woman with blondish hair, dark brown eyes and some pretty intense knee problems. My Mom knows her as her Mom. Most of her friends know her as Sandy. I know her best as Nana. She's the Nana who takes me to 309 every single time she visits Georgetown, the Nana who secretly sends me \$20 when she thinks I am broke. *And I typically am.* She is one of the best people I know, and she is the atypical preacher's wife.

When asked if she would be the subject of this profile Nana laughed and said "What? Why would you want to interview me?"

I quickly responded, "Um, because you're my Nana and I want to know more about you!"

She insisted there wasn't much to know, but she agreed to do it anyway.

We began the process with a tour of her house. She and my Papa, a retired preacher, live in Pearland, *which is about 15 minutes south of downtown Houston*, in a quaint, one-story 3-3 house with 2 offices and what she calls the "TV room." I can think of far too many instances of sitting in the recliners with Nana watching SVU reruns or gawking at how good looking the Astros are.

She formally introduced me to the dogs, even though I already knew them. The two beagles, Jesse and Wally, are named after Walter White and Jesse Pinkman, of *Breaking Bad*. To this day, I can't believe that my preacher grandpa and his wife loved a show about meth dealers.

At the beginning of the tour, she told me "this is the first house we have ever bought ourselves. We have always lived in parsonages provided by the church." Sandy told me how exciting it was for them to be able to design every and all aspect of the house and choose their own furniture.

The tour continued as we went to, as she put it, "the Reverend's office," as well as "the room that never gets used" as she gestured to the dining room. In her bedroom, there are some weirdly striped chairs and furniture that was given to them from their last parsonage after Jim retired, a king sized bed, and THREE dog beds.

"Three dog beds, Nana?" I asked.

"Um yes, Jesse and Wally need options for sleeping," she laughed.

She sounded very serious and told me "Jesse starts on bed one by the window while Wally starts on bed two at the end of the bed. Bed three is next to the dresser. If Wally moves from bed two, Jesse quickly takes his spot leaving Wally to find a second sleeping place."

The next stop on the tour was her office, her happy place. *I have vivid memories of trying to do homework there and when I would get too distracted she would whack me to get me to focus.* In her office she has her collection of cameras and her favorite photos she has taken of all the grandkids.

The house tour was done, so she took me back to her office, where she sat at her huge desk, with her extra-large computer because, as she described it, she's "super blind." *As if I didn't already know that, Nana. She was really getting into this idea that she was supposed to be*

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showing me her world as if I didn't already live within it. We sat down at each of our respective seats and began the interview.

"I was an accident," she told me as she laughed.

This is how she starts? "What? What do you mean?"

"My mom was 42 years old and my dad was 55, and my closest sibling in age is 13 years older than me." She explained that it was definitely weird being so much younger than her siblings. Her relationship with her parents was also estranged seeing as they were both in their 50s as soon as she was old enough to truly know them.

When she was 12, she spent her time taking care of her father, who died of lung cancer later that year. She told me that he died because of smoking those "roll your own cigarettes." She emphasized that "those had no filters like the cigarettes do now, so it hit faster." After mother and father there were two sisters and one brother. The first sibling is Willie May. "She was 24 years older than me when I was born." Sandy was never incredibly close to Willie May, seeing as she was far older and had already been married for 8 years when Sandy was born.

The next sibling was Billy Wayne. He was 14 years older than Nana. She said he was "one of those tragic stories where they were either drug addicts or alcoholics but would absolutely do anything for anyone." From the tone of voice she had when telling me, it is obvious that she misses him a lot. Both Willie May and Billy Wayne died before I was old enough to know them. However, the last sibling, who is 13 years older than Nana, is Annie Charlyne. I know her as my Aunt Charlyne. She is the only one of Nana's siblings that I know and is still alive. She began telling me about Charlyne as "the over-achiever of the family." She explained that their family had no money, but if Charlyne wanted something, she would find a way to make money and get it. Sandy has always been the closest with Charlyne. They were the closest in age and after Charlyne's first husband Robert died, they became far closer. Sandy added that "my mother thought we should all have 2 names; Willie May, Billy Wayne, Annie Charlyne and Sandra Lyn," she squeaked out as she laughed.

She did not get along well with her mother.

"She was very religious and wanted me to be just like her," she told me when we got into this subject.

I quickly responded with "and so you decided to marry a preacher?"

She burst out laughing. It was clear that those dots never quite connected. "I guess I never thought about it like that," she said, still giggling.

Throughout her whole life she did not have a good relationship with her mother. Sandy is what I would describe as slightly rebellious, but in a limited way. Her mother forced her into a religious life that she was not interested in. She told me "I was forced to go to church two, if not three, times a week and I hated it." She expressed that "all that holy roller, praying out loud stuff felt fake and forced," and she was not a fan.

After her dad died when she was 12, it was just her and her mom in the house, seeing as all her siblings were married and gone. Her mom participated fully in every and all church service and strongly perceived that Sandy was going to hell because she did not buy into the whole religion and the church service. When she was 13 they began going to a very evangelistic

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church with an altar call at the end of every service. She laughed and told me “I tried to go to the bathroom every time that happened to avoid going.”

She grew up when The Beatles were starting to become popular in the United States around 1963-64. She was 14 when her older brother, Billy Wayne gave her her first record player and vinyl of The Beatles and she was obsessed.

She told me it was a Sunday night and The Beatles were supposed to play on the Ed Sullivan show that night. “I begged my mother to let me stay home from church to watch them,” she said as if she was begging me right then. She followed up with “my mother said if I went to church that night and participated that she would have me home in time to watch them.” And that she did.

The excitement in her voice was the same as I could imagine it was that same night she watched them on live TV. She told me “as soon as they came on the TV, I burst into tears because I was so happy. I loved them so much.” She quickly told me that her mother promptly responded with “if they can make you cry through the TV, then they can control your mind. The devil is in the music and is controlling your mind.” She told me how The Beatles were kind of a turning point in her life and convinced her mother that she was going to hell.

The story of how she and Jim came to be, happened when she was in 5th grade and he was in 6th grade. They both got invited to a party in junior high in which the game of choice was spin the bottle. Back in their day, if the bottle pointed at them, they were supposed to go walk down the street and end the walk with a kiss. *I knew they had met when they were young, but I had no idea it was during a SPIN THE BOTTLE GAME.* She explained that they ended up being paired up but “I couldn’t kiss him because we were laughing too much!” She went on to tell me that when she was in 8th grade and Jim was in 9th grade, there was a dance for the high school Jim was attending. They had not really been in touch since those junior high years. She was asked by a guy named Bruce and she promptly said yes. “I remember everything about that dance. I had a red satin-y dress and got my hair done, which I NEVER did,” emphasizing the never. That night Jim saw her and asked her to dance. He asked who she came with and she said Bruce. Jim promptly responded “I’m gonna tell Bruce that he doesn’t need to take you home cause I’m going to.” Sandy said it almost led to a fight. They have been together ever since.

“When did you find out that Papa wanted to be a preacher?”

“He told me when I was 16 that’s what he wanted to do,” she told me.

“You knew he wanted to be a preacher and you stayed with him after all that with you mom?”

“I was in love with him and at that point I did not care,” she told me.

They stayed together all through school and they got married after she finished school at Tyler Junior College while Jim was at Southwestern. *Go SU!* Once they were married, they moved into the second floor of a house owned by one of Jim’s professors. At Southwestern, she was the only girl in her organic chemistry class. In fact, on the first day her professor looked up and exclaimed “oh my goodness, men. We have a girl in the class!” *Yes it was that crazy in 1969 at SU.* In 1970, she discovered she was pregnant with her first daughter, a few weeks before their graduation. They graduated and moved to Dallas where Jim began seminary to become a

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preacher and Lara was born a few months later. When she gave birth to Lara, she continued the family tradition and named her Lara Lyn. After the birth, Sandy's mother slowly spoke to her and said "Well Sandra, I didn't know you knew how to curse that much."

After Jim finished seminary, he got his first assignment in Athens, Texas, near where they both grew up. That is where they found out she was pregnant with Anna! *Anna is my momma.*

Sandy has never been the typical preacher's wife. She does not care what people think about her and she is extremely protective of those she loves. A typical preacher's wife does not really have a life outside her husband, and is happily participating with everything church related. "The only thing I ever liked about church was the music. I only ever went and participated because I loved Jim," she said.

Instead, she focused her life on being a teacher and creating a good and close relationship with her daughters, since she did not have that with her own mother. She collected her hobbies of pottery collection and photography. *She has even been published in magazines and newspapers on more than one occasion.*

As the atypical preacher's wife, she was very political and loud about her opinions. She spoke out against what she felt was important and always protected Jim from people who hated what a fantastic person he is. "I don't think of myself as religious, even though I am married to Jim the preacher. I am spiritual and that is how I would define myself," she told me with force. She does not care if people don't think she is the correct version of the preacher wife. She has her own life and she made it clear to Jim.

Her personality exemplifies who she is. Her relationship with her mother has caused her to grow and create a close, loving relationship with her own daughters. Everything she has gone through in her life has shaped her into who she is today: A blondish, super-blind, spiritual, dog-loving, mom, nana, and atypical preacher's wife.

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Author's Note:

After the revisions from class and a follow-up interview with Nana I think I finally got the hang of what I was trying to write. I did my best to take myself out of it and show you Sandy rather than tell about how I feel about her. As my Nana, I have such love for her, she is probably one of my favorite relatives. We have such a close relationship and I am very comfortable talking to her, and being able to almost honor her through this profile feels right. At the end of the interviews, I asked her who her favorite grandchild was. She said it was me, to no surprise, and her reasoning was the same as mine, we have such a close relationship and I care about her.

I learned a lot about her through this interview that I had no idea about. I am hoping that through this profile I have shown what a strong and wonderful person she is while also explaining how independent and loyal she is. In naming her own kids she continued the two name tradition and my mom carried it down to me. Her kids are Lara Lyn and Anna Grace and I am Sara Grace. Her pursuit to achieve that close relationship with her daughters has been achieved and she definitely passed that to her daughters, seeing as I have a close relationship with my mom.

I could not decide what to make the title between *The Accidental Preacher's Wife* or *The Atypical Preacher's Wife*, so I went with both, which would y'all have chosen or do you like it as is? I definitely lucked out in the grandmother department. I hope that through this article I have honored her and shown y'all what an atypical preacher's wife she is, in the best way. When revising this article for the collection, I reread it and honestly was proud of my work. My Nana was able to read it once it was graded and she said she felt heard and as an old person, you don't usually get the option to talk about this kind of stuff and she loved it. That is what I wanted out of this and to know how much it means to her is what makes me the most happy. I hope this article shows her how amazing she is, and y'all enjoyed reading it.

I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.

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