

- Sarah McConnell: In 1957 in the neighborhood of Richmond, Virginia, Marietta McCarty first encountered what would become her beloved family home.
- Marietta M.: My first memories are living in apartments and I know that my parents were on the search for a house for us. We used to ride around on Sunday afternoons and look at the possibilities, and then we saw this three bedroom castle on a hill and it's a pine and oak covered sort of forested hideaway in Richmond. In the days we moved in the dogs and children freely roamed the streets and walked in and out of neighbor's houses and it was a most welcoming neighborhood.
- Marietta M.: My mother lived there until 2013, my father had died about 20 years before that but it was a house that four generations called home and loved dearly.
- Sarah McConnell: Following her mother's death, McCarty found herself bereaved in emptying a place that held not just decades of things, but memories and even secrets. From Virginia Humanities this is with good reason. I'm Sarah McConnell, today? Emptying a home. Later in the show the writer of a book on poetry in mourning eulogizes his own father.
- Sarah McConnell: But first, when you're grieving and faced with emptying the family home how do you decide what to do with the contents. Marietta McCarty teaches at Piedmont Community College. She's the author of *Leaving 1203: Emptying a Home, Filling the Heart*. Her book is a reflection on memory, family, grief and what she calls good living. Marietta, how daunted were you when you finally faced the prospect of trying to sort through the things in your mother's house and you'd childhood home?
- Marietta M.: I was the epitome of daunted. I was completely overwhelmed with the task before me, emotionally, physically, heart's broken and then I faced the physical responsibility with what to do with the things in that house.
- Sarah McConnell: You grew up in that house. It was also a wonderful childhood. You're one of those lucky people who had terrific parents.
- Marietta M.: That's right. And I realized more and more what terrific parents I had and I certainly realized it in the process of home emptying when I had so much time for reflection because of the things that I found, but I had parents who loved me and always treated me as a priority in their lives.
- Sarah McConnell: And your friends loved going there.
- Marietta M.: My friends loved going there. Sometimes I would come home at the end of the day and find some friends already there visiting with my parents and laughing and eating snacks, or down in the basement, or throwing a ball in the yard. So yes, it was a very ... The house itself has a cozy feel and I think that there was just so much joy. One of the most striking times for me in home emptying, Sarah, was when I came back to the house for the first time with nobody there

to greet me and went up the driveway. I just sat in the backyard and looked at the path, it's probably 10 steps from the gate to the back stoop, and I wondered how many feet had crossed that path over, and over and over.

Marietta M.: I come to this landing pad of a small back stoop to come in a kitchen door. As I said, I just sat for half a day and just spent some time in the backyard just looking at the back of the house, being on the patio that was built once we moved in and soaking up those years before I began my task.

Sarah McConnell: How hard is it to decide what to do with a houseful of memories and stuff?

Marietta M.: I don't know of anything that's more difficult. For me, I'm an immaterial girl of some repute, and things don't generally mean a lot to me. But what I found, once family and close friends had taken things they wanted from the house, was that I had a full house so what to do? I looked around and everything had value and it had value in a non-monetary way. I couldn't name the price for a thimble, or a bucket, or a rake because they were priceless.

Marietta M.: And paradoxically, I was struck powerfully at the beginning by two things. One is that I had never felt so desolate at the task in front of me, which is to empty 56 years of good living, that place where that had occurred, and yet, Sarah, the thing that also struck me simultaneously is probably two blocks from here someone else is doing the same thing. "Wait," I thought, "People have been doing this forever and I feel like I'm the only one that this has ever happened to and yet this is the universal experience right here saying farewell to a place that you loved and knowing it's for the last time.

Sarah McConnell: And saying farewell in a very different way to your parents.

Marietta M.: Yes, yes. I will say this, the whole three months I was emptying the house I felt that everybody that had lived there had my back in some way. They were kind of pulling me because they left all these things there after all, and the house filled for the three months that I took to empty it with friends, childhood friends, college friends, new friends from the neighborhood because I'd lived there for a year with my mother, and there was this sort of three month house party of good feeling in the house.

Marietta M.: I guess in a way it was like saying goodbye, but also hello to my parents in a new way because that old house had some secrets for me, and I learned more about the people who loved me first. I thought I knew best, but I learned so many things about my grandparents and my parents that I had not known before.

Sarah McConnell: Secrets in what way? Do you mean you came across letters you'd never read?

Marietta M.: Well surely I did that, but I did not know that my grandmother, as a single mother with two little girls during the Depression, making a living as a massage therapist had had time to write 30 short stories. And you know, somewhere in

the past I had heard, "Oh, your grandmother to write stories," but I had never seen them and there was one envelope in particular I just rubbed on and pretended that I was opening because it came from New York, from Broadway, and it was from an editor, G. Glenwood Clarke, and he had written notes in the margins and so my grandmother was very, very close to getting short stories published during the depression.

Marietta M.: And I'm imagining this woman with these two little girls and this responsibility, her younger sister helped take care of them during the day and coming home and tucking them in and then writing short stories. So this indomitable spirit during the Depression.

Sarah McConnell: Another thing that you decided to keep from that very full house was a leather satchel that your father had owned during World War II.

Marietta M.: Yes, it was the satchel that he carried as a Navy pilot, and I found that in the basement, which was sort of his lair, where he paid the bills and read. My father is the gentlest man perhaps I've ever met in my life and I can only imagine going through this bag was the way he taught me about the Second World War. He never did it through any conversation that we had. He would mention friends that he had been in the war with and he would talk about flight training Pensacola, but he never talked about actual war. What I did know is that he flew rescue planes in the Pacific Theater.

Marietta M.: In this bag, Sarah, and it took me about ... In the evenings I would treat myself. Towards the very end of leaving the house I would read through sections of the messenger bag and they began when he was a college boy at Washington and Lee with his dashing friends and all these happy photographs. He graduates from Washington and Lee in May of '42 and June 5th he receives his draft orders, and I just held those draft orders and imagined what that was like for a man who is an only child, responsible for his mother and my mother was his girlfriend in Richmond at the time, and he was off to flight school just three weeks after graduation.

Marietta M.: And so what I see are a lot of photographs of him working his way through Washington and Lee in the summers as a lifeguard, at the ocean at Virginia Beach, and how happy and this is in the early '40s when war has definitely broken out, and yet they're savoring every ounce of joy at the beach. And then the mood shifts abruptly into his military service and I see him in front of his plane with his crew and the names of the crew members on the back and their hometown.

Marietta M.: One thing my mother told me was that when the war was over, before my father looked for a job, they traveled the country to see the families of the people whose child had died under my father's command and that he couldn't look for a job until he went to see those families. There is something found and

more intimate than most anything when objects are left to speak for themselves.

Sarah McConnell: Something else that you found that I loved was a clipping by one of the great baseball players of your parent's time, Satchel Paige.

Marietta M.: He was probably the greatest baseball player of many eras. Satchel Paige I think played baseball into his 60s and he played an exhibition match in Richmond and we went to see him, and he was all arms and legs. And so the clipping was his tips for good living, "Don't eat fried foods, they angry up the blood. Don't look back, something might be gaining on you," and Satchel Paige has always given me great hope because my dream as a child was to play major league baseball, and it was left to my father to tell me one day in the basement that I would not be able to grow up and play second base for the Yankees. But if Satchel Paige was still playing 60 I thought I've got a long time I might make it.

Sarah McConnell: You were actually a wonderful tennis player. Had your father led you into tennis?

Marietta M.: Everybody led me into tennis because I was determined to play major league baseball, so my grandmother gave me a racquet, somebody else gave me balls. My father didn't play but he took me out on the courts and got perilously close to me, tossing me balls to hit and it did become the game for me. And yes, I played in college, I played nationally and I got to see places in the world I would never have seen and it was a great experience. And if you major in philosophy it's good to have a backup plan.

Sarah McConnell: And of course you were growing up and playing tennis in the same city where the great tennis player Arthur Ashe now has a statue?

Marietta M.: That's exactly right, on Monument Avenue and what's interesting about that, Sarah, is in 1963, and I found the clipping and I found the tennis racquet and the ball from this event, I played in the first integrated tennis match on the public courts of Richmond in 1963 and I remember how extraordinary that whole week was, but I didn't understand why. I knew that people were very nervous, the organizers of the tournament, and there was anxiety in carpools, grownups weren't talking very much and nobody was really ... it was just a strange thing.

Marietta M.: I was usually seeded first, meaning expected to win the tournament, and in this one, the year of the end tournament, there was somebody else that was expected to win, seeded first, and when I got to the court that day with my mother there was no place to park for a mile. So I said, "All these people, they're not possibly here for my match?" And she said, "Oh, yes they are sweetie. They're here for the match," and I looked at the stands where my father and it was completely divided by color and people sitting all over the grounds divided by color.

Marietta M.: It was the best match I ever played. I lost 6-4, 7-5 to Bonnie Logan. Bonnie Logan went onto the big time. She went on to Wimbledon, she went on to the US Open and the French, and she was the real star and the bravest girl in town on that particular day. That was August 16th of '63, so it's two weeks later Dr. King gives his I Have a Dream speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

Marietta M.: And what interested me is that the Richmond clipping I found, the Richmond Times Dispatch in covering the match the headline is, "Top seed wins despite heroic upset attempt from McCarty," and I thought, "That's not at all what I think happened there." This long, long article that describes the match in such great detail, no explanation for the size of the crowd is ever given. So that another sort of ... this house, this 1203 had these secrets in it for me and so it was another way of looking at my unwitting participation in the Civil Rights Movement.

Sarah McConnell: What advice do you have as you sort of stumbled your way through, very beautifully, in emptying your own parent's home? What advice do you have for others on how to even begin?

Marietta M.: I think that I had on some level dreaded this job for the better part of my adult life because only one thing would have brought me to this place. I would say cut yourself a break and realize that it's not only a physical job, it is a very emotional job and if you're lucky it will also be a spiritual job. What I would suggest in terms of advice is to take your time. And so if there are things that you can't look at at the time, take them with you. And the other is to do one thing at a time.

Marietta M.: I would do, for example, just a couple of closets one day or the pantry, three days, so that you feel a sense of accomplishment that you've done this or done that, and I would say also in terms of advice, to go into it with the possibility that you may come out, as I did, loving more, more grateful, more glad to be on the planet, more sturdy in your roots and just more aware of what really constitutes good living.

Sarah McConnell: Did you come away thinking, "Where do we get all the stuff we have?"

Marietta M.: I came away understand how all the things came to be in that house. That's what I understood for the first time. I understood firsthand about the deprivation about the Depression during these three months of home emptying. The fact that purchasing a cut glass bowl filled them with pleasure I understand now in a way that I didn't then. When you've been through the Depression and the Second World War who am I to say, as I'm unfortunately going to admit I did say, "Would you like to clear some of this out right now?"

Marietta M.: So I'm not going to lay, I think Sarah, on those four generations of why was all this still here when they were coming from a different place. It's easy for us now

to be aware in terms of environmental reasons and all sort of things of why not so much stuff, but to them it wasn't stuff.

Sarah McConnell: Tell me about the day when you finally realized you were done.

Marietta M.: I'll never forget it, August 8th and I spent some time sitting on the patio and just realizing that three months had passed and how much I'd learned about what good living entails, how important relationship is, how lucky we are to be alive, how grateful I should be for the rest of my life. And so I end the book with the story of leaving.

Marietta M.: I deadheaded plants, filled bird feeders and bird baths, swept the patio, grabbed Billy's, the dog's leash from the stoop railing, packed a few last things in the car, recognizing the opening notes of a hymn ringing out from the nearby carollin. I snapped out of my dawdling ways. That one song, of all songs, soaring over 1203 at this moment and for the first time in my memory, How Sweet the Sound.

Marietta M.: Gumption time. I patted the kitchen counter, closed the door behind me, latched the back gate and lifted Billy into the car. Strains of an old tune saluted our departure, those splendid church bells peeling Amazing Grace. On the drive back to Charlottesville I reached for the windshield wipers, laughing through my tears at the sunny day. These tears, triggered by beauty, dropped light beads from my eyes.

Marietta M.: I've had a lot of breaks in my life but none compares to this opportunity to stop, to turn and to look back at all the lives intertwined at 1203, to appreciate them together and alone in their fullness. Everyone did their best. As the chronicler of this time I conclude that all is well. Everyone is young and healthy. The world is as ever full our promise, our lives wrapped up in so many other lives then and now still rich in love. Good rises, stretches, expands and grace will lead us home.

Sarah McConnell: Well Marietta, I am charmed by your book called Leaving 1203, the number of your house, your beloved house. Thank you for sharing with me on With Good Reason.

Marietta M.: Sarah, thanks for having me.

Sarah McConnell: Marietta McCarty teaches at Piedmont Community College. Her book is Leaving 1203: Emptying A Home, Filling the Heart. Coming up next a son eulogizes a father.

Sarah McConnell: When I knew we'd be doing a show on grief I remembered a memorial service I attended in 2016. It was for a beloved faculty member of the University of Virginia, Ruhi Ramazani. What stayed with me most was the eulogy by his son, Jahan, and I invited Jahan here to share with listeners. Jahan Ramazani is the

Edger F. Shannon Professor of English at the University of Virginia and the author of, among other books, one called Poetry of Mourning.

Sarah McConnell: Jahan, I was there when you read the eulogy to our father. How did you come to be the one? Had he asked you?

Jahan Ramazani: He clearly wanted me to do it and it was a tough thing to do.

Sarah McConnell: It was beautiful. I knew your father, but there was so much in your eulogy that I did not know about him.

Jahan Ramazani: Well, that's great to hear. I was trying to be true to him as a person, but also to my somewhat complicated feelings about him.

Sarah McConnell: Would you read that eulogy for us now?

Jahan Ramazani: Sure. Dear Dad, we are gathering to remember you today, close friends of yours readily agreed to speak. All of us kids and grandkids are attending and, of course, mom who gave you more love and care and support than anyone. I miss you so much. The whole family misses you. We didn't know so many people would miss you. I'm sorry that all our love couldn't protect you from that last terrible fall, cancer, heart failure, stroke, you survived it all living much longer than you expected. Who knew your own stairs could take you?

Jahan Ramazani: I'm sorry your goldfish swim around lost and aimless because you're not there to feed them. I miss you voice, Baba, the reassurance of the silly mock-formal Persian that we put on at the start of our daily call, I miss you touch, Baba, those hands that were hard when we were kids but became soft and gentle with age. That stubble on your face too, once razor short but later smooth as a toothbrush. I miss your smile, Baba, that too-potent cologne that lingered on us for days after our family dinners.

Jahan Ramazani: We miss eating with you Baba, kebob, badam [foreign language 00:21:35], tah-dig, all the foods you loved. I miss seeing you Baba. That head you were please, still had more hair than mine, that head of yours even with the fog of insomnia and stroke your intellect and wit pierced through. In your last hours you predicted in your hospital bed, "Trump will be our next president." We thought maybe you were out of it but, as usual, you understand politics with more acuity than any of us. That head of yours on that last day when it was cradled in a brace, bones broken all down your neck and spine, you kept asking in Persian for your parched mouth to be swabbed with water, you said, "Bob," "You have to say swabbed, not Bob, Baba, or the nurse won't know what you're saying after mom and I leave for the night."

Jahan Ramazani: An hour later, showing you could still learn despite the body's wreckage, you said to me a twinkle of price, "Swab." Baba, put the slippers you left to wear at our house up on the sideboard with the obituary and pictures. Maybe one of

your beloved grandchildren will walk in them some day, but for now they sit like two empty black canoes that have crossed a river.

Jahan Ramazani: Baba, even if I can't speak with you again I will be thank you the rest of my life for the values you've left me, the family, the world. Baba, I'm glad we said it often in your later years, but I want to say it just once more, Baba, Baba, I love you.

Sarah McConnell: Ah. Your family is from Iran. What is Persian tradition of eulogizing and commemorating the passing of a family member?

Jahan Ramazani: There's an extraordinarily rich tradition. In the old days people would even hire mourners along the side to make sure that there was a great deal of commotion to the dying, to the passing of the loved one. But the key markers are the mourning goes on for 40 days and then is commemorated every day.

Sarah McConnell: You've written a book about the Poetry of Mourning, about how poets write about death?

Jahan Ramazani: Yes. It seemed to me a fascinating area to explore. As mourning rituals became hollowed out in much of Western society, it seemed to me fascinating that it's in poetry that you find some of the most complex, some of the richest, some of the most complicated and vexed expressions of grieving. From the famous Sylvia Platt who, because of an extremely vexed and ambivalent relationship with her father kind of yells out in a famous poem, "Daddy, Daddy, you bastard. I'm through," at the end of the poem, to Robert Lowell who was one of her teachers mocking his father saying, "Anchors aweigh, daddy boomed in his bathtub." Up through contemporary poets, much more recent poets such as Seamus Heaney who mourned those who died in the troubles in Northern Ireland.

Sarah McConnell: They always say when you lose your parents you feel your own mortality. In the years since you've lost your father, that was the fall of 2016, in the years since you lost him have you had glimpses of your own mortality?

Jahan Ramazani: Sure. It feels almost as if that mediating, almost protective figure between myself and death is gone and now I'm much closer to death. It's almost as if there's a kind of nakedness in facing it.

Sarah McConnell: It's interesting that we can know that it's coming and we can know that our own mortality is coming, but we can't truly understand or experience it until we pass through it.

Jahan Ramazani: That's really true and yet, again, going back to the poetry. If you think of someone like Keats thinking on peaceful death, up to very recent poets as well. Poetry is a very rich place for mourning and reflecting on one's own mortality. Finally the writing of poetry can be seen as a way to attempt to grapple with annihilation.

- Sarah McConnell: But there's also a longing for rituals that we can plug into so that we can do justice to the person who has died. I think it's easy to feel at loose ends when you have the creativity to do anything and think, "I can think of nothing."
- Jahan Ramazani: Absolutely. And I think then you just need to ... I found myself when my father died sifting through old photographs, sifting through old emails, it's one of the hardest things, I think, for me and maybe for others as well in the loss of say a parent or a loved one, is to get the picture whole, to put all those disparate pieces together again. I think it's a really important part of the grieving process.
- Sarah McConnell: Jahan Ramazani, thank you for sharing your time with me.
- Jahan Ramazani: Thank you Sarah.
- Sarah McConnell: Jahan Ramazani is the Edgar F. Shannon Professor of English at the University of Virginia. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.
- Sarah McConnell: Welcome back to With Good Reason from Virginia Humanities. I'm Sarah McConnell. In sports a playbook is a set of plays that a team has practiced and is prepared to call on during a game. Athletics is a lot of about preparation, but as basketball coach Brian Henderson learned, there's some things in life we can never be prepared for. Henderson is Athletic Director at Patrick Henry Community College and the author of, *There's No Playbook for Death: Recovering From a Loss*. In it he grapples with the tragic deaths of both a player and a fellow coach and offers guidance for others who are experiencing grief and loss.
- Sarah McConnell: Brian, tell me how you first came to recruit Ruth for your basketball team? You weren't there for her in the beginning?
- Brian Henderson: No, just as any coach does we go looking for players. I was there looking for one player in particular that had reached out to me. I wanted to see what she was about, I wanted to see if she could play. Fortunate for me I also got the chance to meet Ruth and when I met her, standing near six feet tall, a young lady who had a lot of raw ability, I knew that she was someone I wanted on the court for me, not knowing that she would grow as close to me as she did.
- Sarah McConnell: What did you need to persuade her of in terms of where her strengths were as a basketball player?
- Brian Henderson: Just believing in me. The personality that she had was so close it was very rugged, so she would not listen to me at all at first because we didn't have that relationship. Until we built a relationship off the court, that's when we started to see everything on the court start to thrive.
- Sarah McConnell: Was there a moment when you realized your relationship with her had turned?

Brian Henderson: Yes, when she came to church with me in Danville, Virginia where I'm originally from. She came to church and not only did she come to church, she held my daughter the whole service and my daughter was barely able to ... she was eight or nine months at the time. She embraced her like it was her little sister and I felt like that was a good turn for us. We came and we had dinner after my family's house and you see start to gain more confidence on the court, you could see her build better relationships with professors in the classroom and work harder in her class. It just all turned around.

Sarah McConnell: It seems like when you were happiest, when your relationship was at its peak, you got terrible news. Would you tell me about that day?

Brian Henderson: I received a phone call from a random number, it happened to be the police department. You know, I'm thinking, "Was it a traffic issue, violation issue? Or did somebody steal something from a store?" But as they asked me, "Did I know Ruth Omolola, I am Coach Henderson, correct?" And said, "Yes, I am." He went on to say, "There's been an incident that occurred," and he told me that she was in a bike accident so I'm thinking, "Okay, is she going to be okay?" And, of course, he went on to say, "It's pretty serious. Apparently Ruth is unconscious and she's currently in a helicopter heading to the hospital."

Brian Henderson: I remember my wife just grabbing my arm because I was shaking, but I knew at the same time I had to channel my emotions to contact the parents, talk to them, so I called her father and in my mind the whole time I'm trying to hold on to hope, but I'm also knowing that's a chance that I'm not sending his daughter back home the same way that I came and got her. He immediately got on the road with his wife and they immediately came down.

Sarah McConnell: He also did something else on the phone. He prayed.

Brian Henderson: He said a quick prayer. He said a quick prayer and there was a lot of praying, we all prayed together plenty of times, all the way until the end. Those prayers gave us I feel like three more days to try to prepare for the inevitable but, as I named my book, I mean there's no playbook for death. I felt like I let the family down. I didn't send her back the same way that I came to get her. I didn't do everything that I promised for her. I promised that I was going to give her an education, I was going to give her an opportunity to play ball and I was going to give her an opportunity to move on.

Brian Henderson: Well, that moving on episode, it got cut short. No way for me to save her. I tried to ask myself, "Could I provide the student athletes more for them to do?" But it was not like she was doing something bad that this happened. This was a freak accident of riding a bicycle, something that we all have done as kids but it hit me even harder because I couldn't express my emotions, I had to hold everything in. How could I express my emotions and expect her teammates to be strong when they see how weak I really am right now? How can I talk to somebody

about moving forward, it's going to be okay, yet I'm depressed and anxiety is at an all time high.

Brian Henderson: I had to keep all of these feelings dormant. I kept my office door open, there was all we had at that time, maybe 140 student athletes I'd probably say 60 of them were female, so of course the majority of the females would always stop at my office every day, whether it was a hug and a cry, whether it was sitting on a couch just to sit there, sometimes not even talking, whether it's sitting on a couch and talking. But then also faculty members who were coming to check on me as we were in the hospital for those three days until they decided that it was time because she was brain dead, there were so many faculty members and professors that came to the hospital to sit with us and it was tough.

Sarah McConnell: Just as you were trying to recover from the loss of Ruth, two years later your former mentor and good friend and colleague, a coach at your school, died suddenly. That also affected you a lot.

Brian Henderson: You know, I wrote this part one to this book just as an outlet for myself. She hit me hard, so I had to find an outlet. Two years later I find that I've got a part two to this book because now I've got to deal with death all over again.

Sarah McConnell: What was his name?

Brian Henderson: His name was Coach Kenneth Wade.

Sarah McConnell: You got a call in the middle of the night and you thought, "This can't be good. It's him calling," because it was his number.

Brian Henderson: Yeah, first thing I said was, "What's up Kenneth? What did these boys do tonight?" And that's how we always start a conversation, I mean, if it's a 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, what did the kids do? What we got to take care of or what?

Brian Henderson: Well, then I heard his voice, and everyone calls me BH, he said, "BH it's not Kenneth. It's me, his sister." I immediately I just felt this lump in my throat this emptiness in my stomach because I know that this statement was not going to be something that I was ready for, and she said, "We lost him. He got in a car wreck, he lost control of the truck and we lost him. He didn't make it." How do you prepare for that? I mean, people say if you see it coming it's easier, but to get a phone call in the middle of the night for someone that was 40-years-old that you just talked to the day before and laughed and joked, it just is heartbreaking. You start to remember what was the last times you'd saw him, and we had just recently took a staff trip just to bond and get ready for the year.

Brian Henderson: All I could think about was him zip lining across, even though he was scared, or him in a raft with me, and just laughing and having a good time and all I could was remember seeing us those laughs or smiles, but then you got to think about what's next. Who else is hurt by it?

- Sarah McConnell: You write that you held it together through this period, but afterward there were times when you privately just broke down.
- Brian Henderson: I had anxiety, I was depressed, but I opened a door and no one would know it because I'm smiling, I'm making sure I'm smiling as someone else is coming to me that you can see is depressed and just need that shoulder, but when that door shuts again and I sit there and I try to do some work, it's all over again. I could not sit in my office.
- Brian Henderson: There was a point of time in October that I did all the work mobily. I was on the move. I was not in the office. If I came into the doors of Stone Hall I immediately had this sick feeling in my stomach because right down the hall if I yelled his name he was no longer going to answer. It was tough. I didn't go back in the gym.
- Brian Henderson: For a long time I didn't workout, but I still had a job to do and there was three little ones that I had to figure out a way to get back to the father that they knew, not coming home drained because my energy was just zapped from just mentally being exhausted, not wanting to play with my kids when I got home just because I just didn't want to. I just wanted to lay down or find something to do to take my mind off of these feelings. I think talking about it has helped close the wounds because I'm able to actually express and talk about it without feeling sad, but talking about it, understanding that we had some great times and those are the memories that I'm definitely going to hold onto.
- Sarah McConnell: And as you write it's not just about the coaching, it's about life.
- Brian Henderson: One of the hashtags that I used is that itsbiggerthanball. We can recruit a kid, we can play a kid on that court, that kid can help us win plenty of games, win championships, but then what? Are we done with that kid? Is our relationship over? No, everything that we do for these individuals daily as coaches, as administrators, as professors, as teachers, as friends, as colleagues it's bigger than that ball. If we're doing it just for the ball we're not doing our jobs. It's bigger than ball.
- Sarah McConnell: Brian Henderson is Athletic Director at Patrick Henry Community College and the author of, *There's No Playbook For Death: Recovering From a Loss*. Coming up next, the story of a foster care system told from the inside out.
- Sarah McConnell: The addiction crisis is raging on across America, and in many places taking a toll on children. Regions that once had a few dozen children in foster care now have 500. Wendy Welch is a Professor at the University of Virginia's College at Wise. She's the author of *Fall or Fly: The Strangely Hopeful Story of Foster Care and Adoption in Appalachia* It's based on interviews with more than 60 social workers, parents and children who've gone through the foster care system in her region of coal country.

Sarah McConnell: Help me understand the big picture. What's broken about the foster care system in Appalachia?

Wendy Welch: The system that we're working under now there's no capacity to take care of 500 children in my district, so three counties, 500 kids, every single one of which has living parents. They're incapacitated or incarcerated because of opioids, or other substances. So 500 kids who need a place to go. This is the first damage of opioids and substances in wrecking the foster care system.

Wendy Welch: The system was set up to take care of people who were orphans. Now children are bouncing. There's a law that says, "You have 24 months from the time a child enters foster care to either involuntarily or voluntarily terminate the rights of the parent or return that child to their parents." They either get adopted or they get returned or they get placed in permanent foster custody.

Wendy Welch: The problem with this law, and it's a federal law, is that the parent will get clean, the child will go back, the parent will blow it, does the clock start over or have they used up six of their 24 months, right? That's what's causing a lot of the bouncing through the system is this inability to determine when to say no.

Sarah McConnell: I've heard you say that it's a truism that if you take a child from a biological home you're opening a wound that cannot heal?

Wendy Welch: Yes, but sometimes you have to do that. We go back to parents don't stop loving, but they stop being able to take care of, bio-parents are addicted. So you have an eight-year-old who is old enough to boil water, knows how to slide a pizza into and out of an oven without getting burned. Her mama is out of it three days a week, but this child knows how to write a check. There's a story in my book of a girl named Amy who was doing that. She was the adult in charge of her mom. She was paying the rent, she was buying the food, she was cooking the meals. She knew how to do that.

Wendy Welch: If Amy had been four instead of eight, Amy would have gone into foster care because if you can't keep your child physically safe, that's become the standard. It used to be a higher standard. If you were in a house that didn't have running water. If you were in a house that one of my friends calls, "Nasty." If you were in difficult circumstances, if you appeared at school with bruises on you, you got whipped out of your house. You don't now.

Wendy Welch: Nowadays a lot of the reasons that children enter foster care is it's not safe for them to stay in their home with the parent because the parent is incapacitated and the child's going to get hurt. They're going to get burned, they're going to get abused by another person who's visiting home, or they're going to go walk out one evening in search of something and somebody's going to pick them up. It's literally a safety thing.

Sarah McConnell: And you're right that the social workers tell you it's so different now than it was in the '80s or '90s in how children are identified and brought into the system.

Wendy Welch: Mm-hmm (affirmative). In the '80s and '90s you had teachers as the primary first responder. They saw bruises, they saw neglect, they saw long-term lice. It's not a shame to have lice, it's a shame to have lice or more than three weeks. They saw children whose needs were not being met, who came to school with thin shoes in winter, this kind of things.

Wendy Welch: Nowadays social workers are being asked to ride along as police go on drug raids and they are literally removing kids from homes when the parents are being arrested. So it's 3:00 in the morning, there's a siren blaring, the parent appears in the paper in the busted column in the next week, and it's much more traumatic than a teacher keeping you inside during recess and saying, "So tell me about what you eat on the weekends?" That's a gentle question.

Wendy Welch: Being wakened in the middle of the night by a siren and someone saying, "Come with me honey, it's okay, I'm a social worker. Here's your coat." That's a whole different way of entering foster care, and it's terrifying for the kids.

Sarah McConnell: People told you that some foster parents with too many teenagers is a bad sign.

Wendy Welch: Social workers will tell you when you see teenagers piling up in a home that's not a group home, that's a pattern that usually means one thing over another. There are exceptions, but that's usually a pattern that means that these people are interested in older children how are capable of work either inside the home or outside the home. At the ranch the mother had six foster children, which is just below the limit where you have to get a group home license. They were sharing one boy room, one girl room and then her daughter had her own room, her bio-daughter.

Wendy Welch: That's not the worst thing anyone's ever heard, but the optics are bad. So the social worker showed up to take a kid to an appointment and the kid was starving, asking them if they could get to Hardee's. And it turned out that he didn't like what they had for dinner at the house very often, it was usually canned green beans and canned potatoes and then some form of meat thrown into the mix, and the girls living in the house were doing the canning.

Wendy Welch: On the one hand you've got, okay, this awesome place where people are being taught work skills that are important. On the other hand, all six of those kids, the three girls and the three boys, were paying rent to their foster mom. They had jobs in fast food and they had one car that they shared, some worked nights, some worked days, and they were in some cases missing school in order to make their shifts.

Wendy Welch: He went in and he investigated the house and he basically came out and said to me, "Wendy, I know what the people who read this book are going to say. Why

didn't that social worker get those kids out of that house? That's a bad house. They're not being invested in, it's not okay for them." He said, "I'll tell you why. Because they were clean, they were dry, they were warm, nobody else was sleeping in their beds but them, where did you think I was going to take six teenagers and put them in a safer place than the one that they were in? No, their emotional needs are not getting met, but that's the best we're going to do right now."

Sarah McConnell: Are you saying the parents were doing this for money, for the monthly check?

Wendy Welch: He was talking about that. That's not always the case. I asked almost everyone I interviewed that question, and I got between 30% and 70% of foster parents were in it for the check. There are people who genuinely want to do this, feel called to do this and can't afford to do it unless they get a check, and that's different than being in it to get the check. They spend the check on the child, they may spend part of the check on the rent for their house, and they may actually have entered this contractual obligation because they realized this is the only way they're going to pay their rent, but they are emotionally supporting the child and that makes all the difference.

Wendy Welch: If you're paying attention to that child's emotional needs as well as their physical needs, you are an awesome foster home.

Sarah McConnell: You've also said that we're losing an entire generation and maybe two of people with parenting skills in some of these regions, that the opioid crisis has wiped out an entire generation and is about to wipe out another. How so?

Wendy Welch: Oxycontin hit in the late '80s. People who did not know that they were at risk for addiction were taking their prescriptions when they hurt their backs in the coal mine, or they hurt their backs driving a school bus, and they fell into this addiction lifestyle. And their kids grow up through foster care. They come out of foster care probably not having seen a good parenting example following their parents, or they have but it's been disjointed, right?

Wendy Welch: They're probably dealing with some trauma from what happened to them unless they just lucked out. What are they going to do with their kids, right? They raise babies who go into the foster care system when they're two or three-years-old.

Sarah McConnell: Because they themselves become addicted?

Wendy Welch: They either become addicted or they simply don't have the skills. We've lost the generation that was raised by their grandparents and we are now losing their kids. The solutions that I saw working were when social workers had an appropriate caseload. In some of the places they were up to 37 kids, that's too many. Take them down to 15. They were awesome by and large, those social workers, and so were the foster parents. They were awesome. But they're not

saints, they're people doing their job, doing the best they can and their eyes in the best instances were on the kids.

Sarah McConnell: This is so important. Wendy Welch, thank you for telling us about this and with good reason.

Wendy Welch: I hope some of you will become foster parents.

Sarah McConnell: Wendy Welch is a Professor at the University of Virginia's College at Wise. She's the author of *Fall or Fly: The Strangely Hopeful Story of Foster Care and Adoption in Appalachia*. Major support support for *With Good Reason* is provided by the law firm of McGuireWoods and by the University of Virginia Health System, connecting doctors and patients through telemedicine to deliver high quality care throughout Virginia, the US and the world, uvahealth.com.

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