

### ***Part 3: The Reckoning***

SAM: Before we begin, a quick programming note - this will be our last episode of 2019, but Season Three of *Family Ghosts* is just getting started. We're taking a short break for the holidays, and we'll be back with a brand new story on January 8th. Stay tuned after the credits for a sneak preview of that episode, and thank you, as always, for tuning in.

*[Spoke audio logo]*

SAM: Previously, on *Family Ghosts*...

*[music bed]*

*NEWS: Now to a truly historic discovery in southern Alabama...*

*NEWS: The schooner Clotilda brought 110 africans to US shores in 1860.*

*NEWS: After the ship was brought ashore, the ship was burned, the evidence destroyed. Ever since people have tried to find it.*

*LORNA maybe some one day they conscience won't let them go to sleep and they'll up one morning and say, I'm gonna call the newspaper and tell them that we sorry for what happened to those Africans that came on the Clotilda. Maybe that would give some validation to them acknowleging what they had did.*

*VERA: This is--?*

*JOYCELYN: Mayor.*

*VERA: Mayor Street, AV?*

*JOYCELYN: Mayor Avenue.*

*JOYCELYN ...they still have this strong hold over the community, they still have the land...*

*JOYCELYN: I don't really use bad words, but I just said forget them. I just said forget them. [...] this history is so much more than them*

*JOYCELYN: I don't know how people feel about spirits or their ancestors, but I just feel like, you know, my grandmother, my great grandmother are pushing me to be the next in line.*

*[music bed fades]*

SAM: Hello, Ghost Family. Welcome to *Family Ghosts*.

*[music: FG Theme]*

SAM: At the end of last week's episode, Joycelyn Davis discovered she might finally get the opportunity to sit down with one of the descendants of Timothy Meaher. Joycelyn, remember, is the great-great-granddaughter of Charlie Lewis, who was enslaved and brought to the US on a ship called the Clotilda in 1860, as part of an illegal smuggling scheme orchestrated by Timothy Meaher - a wealthy businessman in antebellum Mobile, Alabama. The survivors of the Clotilda, and their descendants, have been waiting for the Meaher family to publicly acknowledge Timothy's crime for over a hundred years.

But as our producer Vera learned on her visit with Joycelyn last summer, they're not going to wait forever.

VERA: Towards the end of my trip to Mobile, Joycelyn told me there was a big event coming up in Africatown. August 2019 marks the four hundred year anniversary of the first ship of enslaved Africans to land in English-speaking North America, at Point Comfort, Virginia in 1619. The National Park Service is organizing a ceremony where bells will ring across the country for four minutes to commemorate 400 years since the beginning of slavery. Africatown is putting on its own ceremony joining together the first slave ship landing in US history - and the last - the Clotilda. 60 Minutes and several news crews will be there. And Joycelyn is going to be the MC. Joycelyn who once feared what would happen if people found out she was the descendant of slaves - who sometimes feels

physically sickened by the idea of a public reckoning with the Meaher family - Joycelyn's going to be the one to ring the historic Africatown freedom bell.

The bell's history goes all the way back to the Clotilda - I learned about it from Joe Womack, who gave me that tour of Africatown in the second episode of this series.

Joe says that when the Clotilda captives, mostly children, were on the ship, in terrifying and inhumane circumstances, the bell brought them together.

*JOE:[...] they noticed that when the bell rang fast, Clang, Clang, Clang, Clang, a storm was coming cause the seas would get rough. And when the bell didn't rang, everything was calm. So when the bell rang fast, they was young. They were scared. So they would huddle up and they got to be very close.*

According to Joe, when the captives were ordered off the boat into the swamp, they had a hunch the boat was going to be destroyed - so they asked Captain Foster if they could have the bell. Foster agreed, and they managed to hold onto the bell throughout their captivity and the Civil War. Finally, when they founded Africatown, they made the bell a centerpiece of the community.

*JOE: Now once they moved off the river up here, they built a church and they put that bell in that church. And then when they eventually to build a school, they brought it up here and they would ring it in the morning when time for schools, time to take in, they rang it in [the] evening when the school was time to take out.*

Joe says the bell remained at Mobile County Training School - until the 1980s, when the school system sent a maintenance crew to look at it.

*JOE: the school bell was cracking, not cracking, but you know that the rusty and everything else. So the maintenance crew said, we're going to take this with us and we going to sand blast it, paint it and bring it back. Well, they got the bell, never brought it back, never brought it back.*

Eventually, a couple of years ago, the alumni association president bought a new bell on the Internet for \$1,000 and some local brick masons mounted it.

*JOE: And we have a reestablish our bell now. Yeah. So, so we, we think the bell is probably somewhere in the courtyard of the Meaher family and it once a year they gather around it and eat dinner, you know?*

To be clear - Joe's kidding around here. But his joke shows how ever-present the Meahers are in the story of Africatown, even when it is not about them. Their shadow haunts this story of resilience and triumph.

As her preparations for the ceremony began, Joycelyn still hadn't heard back from Ben Raines about whether or not Robert Meaher would be willing to talk to her about their families shared history. And I wondered - with such a big media event happening in the heart of the community where they still own so much land, would the Meahers finally publicly acknowledge their role in the story?

I asked Joycelyn what she was picturing as the ideal outcome of the day, she mentioned that they would be leaving an empty seat in the front row for the Meahers.

*JOYCELYN: We are giving them an open invitation to come and celebrate with us. We have always been open to them, for them to come forward, but I just feel like the walls would shake if they walked in.*

SAM: From Spoke Media and WALT, you're listening to *Family Ghosts*. I'm Sam Dingman, and this week, it's the finale of our series on the Clotilda. This is part three: *The Reckoning*. We'll be right back.

***[AD BREAK 1]***

VERA: At the end of last week's show, Joycelyn and I sat down with Ben Raines, the journalist who found the Clotilda, and who's also friendly with Robert Meaher, Timothy Meaher's great-great-grandson. Ben told Joycelyn he'd ask Robert if he would be willing to meet with her - to finally break the Meaher family's silence about their role in the enslavement of Joycelyn's ancestors.

*BEN: I was just gonna call him up. [...] and see if we could facilitate a conversation. [...] I think he'd probably say yes.*

*JOYCELYN: That would be amazing.*

At that point, we had to wait awhile to see if we'd hear back from the Meahers. In the meantime, one of our own *Family Ghosts* producers, Soraya Shockley, told me a story about her own family that felt intertwined with this story. So I sat down with her to talk about this history, in the hopes that it might shed light on Joycelyn's plight in Africatown.

Soraya grew up in Oakland, but her father's family is originally from Tennessee, where they were enslaved for generations. They can trace their family history all the way back to 1833, to a woman named Dixie Shockley.

*SORAYA: She was the child of her, um, her master of her owner. Um, and so in Tennessee...they had relatively loose laws when it came to property and enslaved people could inherit property from their owner if they were related. Um, so she inherited land, uh, and her freedom when he died.*

That's Soraya. Last summer, she visited Nashville for a family reunion. One day, they had the option to visit the estate where their family was enslaved, about an hour and a half bus ride away. About forty of her relatives loaded up and headed over to the property, which was in McMinnville, a small town with just a few stoplights. Soraya didn't know exactly what to expect.

*SORAYA: We pulled up to this house, um, and it was quainter than I thought it would be. It was much smaller than I thought it would be.*

They were greeted by the Mayor of the town - a white man. He stepped inside the bus because it was raining hard outside. As he began to speak, Soraya noticed that he seemed nervous. Really nervous. It turned out that it was his family who had owned Soraya's family. He began to cry as he apologized to them. Soraya started to feel kind of trapped. She hadn't known this would happen.

*SORAYA: I was paying attention to him, but I was spending a lot of time looking out the window and just, um, you know, so we, we pulled onto the side of this road that wasn't well paved or anything. It was just, um, uh, it came off of like the main, the main drag and, uh, it was basically an empty field with this house, this brick house that again was smaller than it was smaller than I thought it would be. And, um, I just remember like looking at it a lot while he was talking.*

Up until this point, Soraya had always thought this would be an important moment: hearing an apology from this white family. But it turned out that it wasn't what she expected.

*SORAYA: I had this sort of overwhelming feeling of like, it didn't really matter what they thought or like what his family had been, you know, sharing around the campfire for a hundred years I didn't care about that because the people whose histories mattered to me and whose stories mattered to me and that sort of oral tradition that had been passed down, they were like all around me and so I, I just remember like sort of being like, glad I was there, but also, um, that was not the most important part of the trip for me.*

What sticks with Soraya from the day is actually a visit to her family's cemetery. The Mayor didn't come with this for this part.

*SORAYA: That was far more present, um and closer to, uh, I felt very emotional going to the, to the cemetery and like, and touching these gravestones that are, some of them were a hundred years old. And um I felt, I very much felt the spirit of the people who had worked that land, um, free some free, some not, um, and died there and probably knew nothing else. [...]*

I told Soraya about Joycelyn's struggle between wanting to reach out to the Meahers and feeling fed up and hurt by their silence - how she goes back and forth between wanting to say "forget them," and then talking to Darron and getting riled up again, deciding she really does want a confrontation - a reckoning.

Soraya said that Joycelyn might find that an apology doesn't heal the wound.

*SORAYA: I think what's so hard about having those conversations is like so often they are, no matter what happens, they're going to be unsatisfying. Because I think what I wanted to hear that he did say was, I'm, he said, I'm not sure, I don't think he said those exact words, but he said some version of basically like, sorry. Um, But what's unsatisfying about it It's like, it doesn't, it doesn't change anything.*

In fact, for Soraya, the moment with the Mayor was painful because it was so awkward.

*SORAYA: It's hard knowing that you're making someone uncomfortable, uncomfortable just by existing*

This reminded me of something Joycelyn said the last time we talked on the phone. She told me how frustrating it is to be treated by the Meahers as if she and her family were the ones to have done something wrong. There's an emotional cost to reaching out, and getting rejected.

I wondered whether Soraya's story might resonate with Joycelyn and maybe help her to clarify what she wanted to get from a meeting with the Meahers.

So when I went back to Mobile for the bell ringing ceremony, Soraya came with me. We met up with Joycelyn at Union Baptist Church, in the heart of Africatown where she has been worshipping since she was little. Her ancestors built the church after the Civil War, and she leads Bible studies on Sundays.

*VERA: So, this is Soraya*

*JOYCELYN: Yeah. I love your hair.*

*SORAYA: Thank you.*

Then, Soraya told Joycelyn the same story she told me. About McMinnville and the Mayor on the bus in the pouring rain.

[audio dips up from a fade]

[SorayaJoycelyn\\_ApologiesL/SorayaJoycelyn\\_ApologiesR:](#)

*SORAYA: And he got really emotional and was apologizing to us, and what I just remember feeling was like, "Okay."*

*JOYCELYN: Yeah! Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, that's how I think I'm going to... Yeah. I feel that. So, I'm just going to say, "Oh, okay." For some people, apologies helps them, but everyone is different. It's like, you hurt my feelings, you say, "Well, I'm sorry," but then, I still remember what you said. I remember what you did.*

Now this might be surprising, since up to now Joycelyn has spent a lot of time and energy thinking about the Meahers and trying to reach out to them. But she explained that she feels this history is so much bigger than just the one family. There were other families involved in owning the people who came over on the Clotilda, and there was Captain Foster and the whole crew of the ship who were also involved - not to mention the African traders who captured and sold her ancestors when the Clotilda arrived in Benin. Joycelyn wishes she could ask the Meahers about *all* the other people involved. She mostly wants information.

Even so, she does hold onto a vision of an ideal reconciliation in her mind. She told me about it first on the phone and then in person. This is what Joycelyn pictures...

She and the other descendants of the Clotilda sit under a tent in Plateau, the highland area above the swamp where Mobile County Training School and the Union Baptist church stand. It's a bright and sunny day, perfect for a ceremony. The Meaher family is present, and so are representatives from Benin.

*JD: It would be total silence- You can hear a pin drop if that happens. I can see the camera man and the reporters, all eyes on them and us. It would be an amazing thing,*

Delegates from Benin *did* come to Africatown last year. They took a tour of Mobile Bay on Ben Raines' boat, following the last known path of the Clotilda, and did a sort of blessing ceremony on the water. But, Joycelyn says, they never



apologized to the descendants. No one has done that. And Joycelyn feels like it would help the community so much to be able to move forward.

Which brings us back to Robert Meaher - the man Joycelyn hopes will turn out to be the “radical Meaher” - the one to finally break the silence. A few weeks after our conversation with Ben, Joycelyn met up with him again to do an interview for a separate project. At the end of the conversation, he told her he’d reached out to Robert Meaher.

*JOYCELYN: He was packing up, and he was like, "Yeah, I just want to let you know that Robert Meaher said he didn't want to speak,"*

Once again, the Meahers had rejected her request. And in the moment the main thing Joycelyn felt was fed up.

*JOYCELYN: I was like, "Well okay, if he doesn't want to, he doesn't have to. It's fine. [...]  
And it's okay, it's fine. Our whole thing about it is, if they talk today, they'll still be rich tomorrow. That's it. You will be still rich tomorrow. You will still have your land, you'll still have your name. Nothing is going to change if you talk. Nothing.*

For Joycelyn, the most important thing is preserving Africatown’s story and the legacy of her ancestors. The Meahers are just one small part of that.

*JOYCELYN They don't define, [...] -the beginning and the end of my family. They don't define our heritage and our rich history and they are part of it, but they don't, they don't define us.*

Recently, Joycelyn was driving and she saw a billboard for the 40th anniversary of the Porch Creek Indian pow-wow. And she got to thinking....

*JOYCELYN: That's legacy. They have a pow-wow every year and they dress in their traditional clothing and they have arts and crafts and they do different things. So, that's what I want right there, you know, that's that's that's my goal right there to keep that going. You have to keep this story going and you had to pass it down because if you don't, it's just gonna all fizzle away.*

The bell-ringing ceremony is an opportunity to do just that. There will be speeches from community leaders, libations to honor the ancestors, and the release of 110 butterflies representing 110 survivors of the Clotilda ship. Joycelyn hopes the event will shed light on Africatown and the history of slavery in Alabama, which people in Mobile don't like to talk about.

They're still going to leave that empty chair for the Meahers at the ceremony, whether or not they show up.

*JOYCELYN: In the South, there's a saying... that "one monkey doesn't stop the show." So, that one monkey doesn't stop the show.*

SAM: After the break - the show goes on. We'll be right back.

***[AD BREAK 2]***

VERA: Mobile County Training School is the oldest school in Africatown, founded in 1880 and built by the descendants of the Clotilda. The walls of the gymnasium are blue and white like the school's mascot, a whippet, which is sort of like the cousin of a greyhound dog. It is here that the bell-ringing ceremony will take place.

Around 1pm, people start arriving, some walking from their nearby houses, others coming by car.

[ambi of chattering in gym]

On their way in people in all white or African-inspired clothes hug and greet each other warmly-- fellow churchgoers, neighbors, friends and family. Many are alumni of the school, some of whom graduated all the way back in the 60s.

A local musician named Wayne Curtis plays a set of conga drums. A representative of the local Choctaw tribe smudges sage around the gymnasium.

[ambi of drumming underneath]

As people enter, Soraya and I ask them why they're here - like Reverend Chris Williams of nearby Yorktown Missionary Baptist Church.

*WILLIAMS: My name is Chris Williams, pastor of Yorktown Baptist Church and we're here to remember the slaves that were brought over 400 yrs ago and the last slave ship to come into America, which ended up here in Africatown. So that's why we're here. We're going to ring the bell so the world will know. It means that the story that's been told for 100 years has a whole lot of legitimacy is true and that the people that live here should tell the story and is going to tell the story and is telling the story. [...] we're glad that it ended but it should never be forgotten."*

And we also talk to community members and direct descendants of the Clotilda survivors.

*POPS: 400 years is a whole lot of time... we're all tied to the first Africans, so I'm really here to celebrate them"*

*PATRICIA: I think we deserve some recognition for what happened a long time ago, because it did happen.*

When the ceremony begins, we head inside.

[ambi of drumming + commotion before ceremony starts]

Joycelyn stands at the front of the room behind a podium wearing a white pants suit, pearl necklace, and silver-studded high heeled shoes. Facing a crowd of several hundred people, she looks both nervous and poised.

*JOYCELYN: Good afternoon. Can I have everyone's attention, please? We're about to start the program.*

Several news teams film the event as well as a film crew shooting a documentary. Finally, the hub-hub calms down and Joycelyn begins.

*JOYCELYN: And again, good afternoon. I'd like to welcome everyone to Africatown. A little small community that has a big and rich history. Today is a great day. I am excited and I am so happy to see so many faces here today and I'm also happy to see those who wore white. This is a great day. A day of healing. Also, the opportunity to share forgiveness to all God's children, from all walks of life. We are here to highlight the fact of England's involvement in the inhumane act that began in this country, in the landing in Virginia at the Point Comfort and Jamestown. And the closing in Africatown with the last known slave ship Clotilda, brought my ancestor. A place where they made a home, in spite of the way that they arrived here. Our community respects and recognizes all color, religion, and gender. This community was taught one powerful lesson and that's to love all God's children. Jamestown is the beginning and Africatown is the last known ending. Today let's start a new beginning.*

As she moves back to her seat, the cameras of a documentary film crew closely shadow her face. People snap photos and stream her image onto Facebook Live.

As the ceremony goes on, the speakers engage the audience in different ways. A participant named Theodore Lush asks the audience to call forward the spirit of their ancestors.

*LUSH: I hearby call the ancestors to be with us... we pour libations for our mothers and fathers who lie in the valley of the dead. I'm going to ask that you call out your ancestors names, let them know that you are here. Calling, calling, call out their names, Call out their names...*

Close to 2pm, the crowd moves outside for the bell-ringing. Women in African print shirts and headwraps, men in dashikis and people in white stand around the bell in the school's courtyard. They wave handbells in the air and look out at the bright blue sky.

At 1:59pm, Joycelyn climbs to the top of a platform in her heels and begins to ring it.

[bell] [Ceremony3 2:15 bell ringing starts]

For four minutes, Joycelyn stands in the middle of the courtyard at Mobile County Training School, in the center of Africatown, ringing the bell. She's surrounded by hundreds of well-wishers while around the country bells ring to commemorate the legacy of slavery nationwide. The sun gleams on her pearl necklace and earrings, her silver pumps sparkle, and she is beaming.

*[bell ends, silence, someone shouts--"Holler, that's when you shout," people whoop and shout, then silence again]*

There is a moment of stillness before the drumming begins again.

*Ceremony3*

*[6:38 moment of stillness, then African drumming starts, ambi of ppl greeting each other and heading back inside]*

The crowd head back inside, where the mayor of Mobile, Sandy Stimpson, gives a short speech.

*Mayor Stimpson: Good afternoon.*

*Audience: Good afternoon.*

Mayor Stimpson is known to be friends with the Meaher family. Many in the crowd are surprised he showed up to the bell-ringing ceremony at all.

As Mayor Stimpson begins to speak, some of the descendants in the crowd glance at each other. I notice Joycelyn hold her program in front of her mouth and whisper something to Darron, but I can't make out what she's saying.

*STIMPSON: You know, many nations and many cultures came together breathing life and creating the soul of our city, but in this history lies a truth we must never ignore, and that is the stain of slavery and the lingering negative impact on the soul of our city. For*

*many, there has not been proper acknowledgement for the sins of our forefathers regarding slavery and thus the soul of our city has not been completely healed.*

*Audience: Amen.*

*STIMPSON: As the mayor the city of Mobile, I can assure you that all the resources that are at my disposal, whether it be collaboration, whether it be financial, you have my pledge to work with those to fulfill the mission of telling this story and assuring a brighter future. So today, as a city and as a community, we come together, no longer to hide our history. [...] Now, I want to ask you to join me just in a short prayer, please.*

The crowd bows their heads.

*STIMPSON: Heavenly Father, gracious and merciful Father, as we come to You, we praise You, Lord. We praise You that we can gather here today to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the [inaudible 00:54:21] on our nation in this community. Lord, we not just praise You for that, we also come to confess, Lord, that we have fallen short of who You want us to be. Father, we have sinned against our fellow man by saying things we shouldn't say, thinking things we shouldn't think, doing things we shouldn't do, and not doing things we should have done. Lord, let that all come to a stop right now. Let us come together, Almighty God. Let us surrender our spirit, and our souls, and our bodies, our mind, our emotion, and our will so Lord that we can hear Your voice. Lord, let Your Holy Spirit flow across this community and across this nation, uniting our hearts in one as we seek Your face to guide us and guard us. In the Mighty name of Your son, Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

These remarks and the prayer for unity are the closest thing that Joycelyn and the residents of Africatown hear to an apology for the wrongs of the past.

The chair left out for the Meahers sits empty throughout the afternoon and the family is not mentioned in any of the speeches.

SAM: Family Ghosts will continue in a moment.

**[AD BREAK 3]**

By the end of the bell ringing ceremony, Joycelyn's white pants suit is ruffled and sweaty. She's exhausted--she's been up since 6am talking to news crews and preparing-- but she is happy.

*JOYCELYN: That was awesome. [...] it was awesome just to see all the people around. You know, I just wanted to stop for a minute just to look like, oh my goodness, look at all these people. But as they say in the South, they showed up and showed out, so-*

*VERA: You looked happy to be up there.*

*JOYCELYN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was. I was, and I had my heels on. I was like, "Lord, don't let me fall. Ancestors please don't let me fall."*

Joycelyn represented her family's history for the world and she feels good about that. It is work that she wasn't always able to do. A lot has changed since she was the shy little girl who didn't want anyone to know it was her relative's picture in the Alabama history book.

*VERA: Do you think that as a young person you would imagine yourself doing what you did today?*

*JOYCELYN: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.*

Joycelyn's experience at the ceremony doesn't resolve everything she's been going through. She still has questions about her history and that of the Meahers. And when she drives by Chippewa Lakes signs, it still makes her uncomfortable.

*JOYCELYN: [...] to see their signs and stuff, it still does a little like, Mm, right here. And in my community, they still have this land.*

As for Darron Patterson - he won't take no for an answer from the Meahers. He's still trying to set up his meeting with Augustine. On the day of the ceremony, Darron told me he approached Mayor Stimpson and asked him to help

*Darron: "I told him quit bullshitting, we need you, I'm tired of this dog and pony show, me and the Mayor have a relationship, every time I see him its always lah-dah-lah, this time I said quit bull shitting you can make something happen on your watch that hasn't been done before.*

It doesn't seem clear that Darron's meeting with Augustine would offer definitive resolution to the community. At this point, people are doing whatever they can to find peace with the situation. All the bell-ringing and sage smudging in the world won't undo the terrible acts of Timothy Meaher, or the continuing impact of enslavement, city neglect and abuse in Africatown.

But as the community gathered around the bell, there was hope for a new chapter in Africatown's history.

Vernetta Henson is another Clotilda descendant. On the day of the bell-ringing, she wore red robes embroidered with gold medallions and a matching golden cap and weaved regally through the crowd on her daughter's arm, greeting friends and acquaintances. During the ceremony, she spoke to the importance of this day.

*VERNETTA: This is truly a humbling experience to be able to be here and stand and know what we have gone through. We don't call it oppression because oppression would mean that we have been held down. We have risen. God has given us the opportunity to rise again and with the help of our Native Americans, our ancestors, we thank you for allowing this experience to take place.*

After the bell-ringing, Vernetta said that it felt to her like the beginning of a new period of history.

*VERNETTA: "We've gone through our era of segregation, we've gone through our era of integration, and now we're back to an era of completeness..."*

It reminds me of something Soraya said when I told her about the backstory of the bell. She told me it sounded to her like a parable for the whole community's history. How the bell represents Africatown's legacy and the strength of their story.



*SORAYA: You know, it is something that they, uh, that they took with them, that was then broken and taken from them. And now they are slowly trying to put it back together. It's taken time, it's taken work, but they're doing it.*

As of this recording, the Meahers haven't broken their silence. It's not just them - many white people in Mobile would prefer to let sleeping dogs lie. But the descendants and residents of Africatown live with this story every day. They hope their community can rebuild in the wake of so many generations of city neglect and abuse by corporations polluting their land. It would be cliché to say the community is coming together, but there are so many individuals working hard to ensure Africatown continues to be what it has been: a story of strength and resilience, as Joycelyn says a tiny town in Alabama with a big history. A history we can no longer ignore.

When the Clotilda was first discovered Joycelyn wasn't sure how she felt about representing this history. She was nervous about people in Mobile seeing her as "Ms. Africatown." People stopped her in the grocery store and in the hallways of the school where she works to ask her about the story and sometimes it made her worry. She didn't want to attract too much attention. Sometimes it made her sick to stomach with fear or disgust toward the Meahers.

But standing in front of hundreds of people at the ceremony, Joycelyn felt grounded by her ancestors and by their mission for her.

*JOYCELYN: They are the strength that we need, yeah. [...] That one time, those few times that I was shamed, now it's like I'm all over now, everybody knows. You know, it's out. [...] You know what they say, what would I tell my 21-year-old self now? I would say you don't need to be afraid. You don't need to be afraid or ashamed. Because today, you know, the ancestors talked again.*

[bells rings]

[silence]

SAM: *Family Ghosts* is hosted and produced by me, Sam Dingman, with Vera Carothers, Soraya Shockley, Sally Helm, Odelia Rubin, Jenna Hannum, and Janielle Kastner, and this episode was reported by Vera, with additional reporting from Soraya. Our story editor is Micaela Blei. Our production assistant is Julia Press. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett, and featured original music by Ashley Phillips. Our theme music is by Luis Guera. Fact checking by Greta Rainbow. Executive producers for Season Three are myself, along with Keith Reynolds and Alia Tavakolian at Spoke Media. Special thanks this week to Kirya Traber, Carson McCain, and to the Kindred Spirits - our supporters on Patreon who help make our work possible. In addition to ad-free episodes and exclusive bonus content, Kindred Spirits actually already heard this episode - they get to listen to everything we make before anyone else. And this week, they're getting a special bonus interview with our producer Soraya Shockley, where she tells the full story of her family's visit to Tennessee. If you have the means, please consider becoming a member of the Kindred Spirits for just five dollars a month at [patreon dot com slash family ghosts](https://patreon.com/slashfamilyghosts). We are proud creative partners of Spoke Media - find more great podcasts at [spokemedia.io](https://spokemedia.io). Season Three continues next week - we'll talk to you then, and thank you for listening to *Family Ghosts*, where every house is haunted.

Next time, on *Family Ghosts*...

*DAVID: There was some cues there that I think she was trying to make sure I knew this was going to be a very nontraditional way of therapy.*

A few years ago, David had a death in the family, and he was distraught. He couldn't sleep, he wasn't eating, and he was smoking way too much weed. He was desperate to find someone to talk to who might understand what he was going through - which is how he ended up in the living room of a quaint suburban house, doing group therapy with an eccentric facilitator.

*DAVID: She had blown out red hair, kind of like an amethyst-y necklace was in like sort of gauzy diaphanous clothes*

At first, the meeting was going well - but then, things started to go off the rails.

*DAVID: One of them starts talking about, well, you know, I mean, th-- the visitations are the thing that really keep me going. And I'm like, what? What, what are the visitations? And then she's like, Oh yeah, you know, talkin about how she comes through your washer and dryer. And then they started talking and she's like, well yeah, you know when that washer and dryer, the night she left, you know the washer and dryer in the basement turning on and off by themselves numerous times. That's still how she says hello is through the.... And then another woman's like, yeah, well for me it's the lights when the lights go on and off in the, in the hallway.*

That night, David went home and tried to go to sleep.

*DAVID: And I laid down in bed to go to sleep and I was probably in bed for like 10 minutes when all of a sudden the white noise machine by her bed just went [white noise] and came on and I sat up in bed and I said out loud, I said, Charlie?*

In episode four of our third season, David searches for meaning in the aftermath of a loss that no one else seems to understand. That's coming January 8th, right here on *Family Ghosts*.