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Part 1

The storybook of human existence is based off of memory and oral history, which plays a major role in how we interpret the past. Through oral history, humans mesh certain memories to glorify the past, which gives our lives more meaning and purpose. Historian Jacquelyn Hall writes about this in an excerpt from *“You Must Remember This”: Autobiography as Social Crtique*, highlighting the fact that we suppress bad memories to glorify the past, which in turn redefines individual identity. In Lee Smith’s *Oral History*, Smith writes about a young woman’s desire to rediscover her past through the oral histories of her ancestors. Memory greatly influenced these stories, and in some cases it actually gave the narrator a new perspective on their past.

Granny Younger informs tells the story about the past of the young, restless farmer Almarine Cantrell, the patriarch of the Cantrell family. Granny discusses the early life of Almarine, and the encounter between him and his future wife “Red-Emmy”, who Granny argues put a “curse” on the entire family. Granny describes young Almarine as independent and innocent, but wise beyond his years, telling stories of him wondering off to play in the creeks of Black Rock mountain by himself (Smith, pg. 1). Granny sees Almarine as the humble hero of the family, and it is most evident in the retelling of Almarine’s encounter with Red-Emmy from Hoot Owl Holler in the following excerpt, “Now Almarine didn’t know none of that, about Red Emmy being a witch. All Almarine knowed was that he had follered a path and come upon a woman he had to have and there she was, standing well-nigh naked before him in the middle of the morning”. (Smith, pg. 39) Granny clearly had feelings of jealousy and envy towards Red-Emmy, comparing her to a witch that “fucked with the devil and not give a fig for a regular man” (Smith, pg. 38). This is a perfect example of the human errors involved in the retelling of history. Granny Younger’s perspective of Emmy is tainted because of her developed hatred and distrust of Red-Emmy and her family, blaming Emmy for Almarine’s weakening stature and poor facial complexion during their ruinous marriage and the death of her son’s first child. The young boy with beautiful blue eyes and blonde hair that Granny Younger admired so much was changing, and Granny refused to believe that Almarine’s character or physical stature was the problem. Granny Younger is not perfect, and neither was the retelling of her story.

Jacquelyn Hall would claim that Granny Younger’s account on Almarine and his marriage to Red-Emmy is a classic example of human error when recalling memory. Granny Younger’s strong emotional connection to Almarine made it difficult for her to face the reality of the past, and Red-Emmy and her family were the perfect scapegoat for the cause of Almarine’s troubled life. Granny will always remember Almarine as that beautiful boy with golden hair and light blue eyes and she simply refuses to picture any type of image that would depict him in a negative light; ultimately, convincing herself that her image of Almarine was ruined by the evil nature of a woman “inspired by the devil”. In *Oral* History, Lee Smith uses memory to convey how we redefine our past through storytelling, and how the power of memory can influence one’s beliefs in the present.