My Fun and Creative Life

By: Parlin Scott Gressitt

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Introduction ~~~

Introduction

Hi I'm Parlin, I'm 26 years old, and I have grown significantly in the five years since my first book was published. While my first memoir, *My Fun and Crazy Life*, documented my childhood and the medical hurdles I survived from birth to age 21, this sequel focuses on my transition into an amazing new school environment, my independent music, and a major adult update on my underlying conditions.

I have evolved deeply both personally and artistically, and this new memoir, *My Fun and Creative Life*, captures this next stage of my journey.

As an artist, I am constantly learning more about my creative side and discovering new ways to articulate my experiences. I have started intentionally weaving metaphors and imagery into my text to help bring the unique stories I want to share to life.

Family History

My family history is full of incredible stories that run deep on both sides. On my dad's side, Penelope Stout, the first pioneer woman of Monmouth County, is my 10th great-grandmother. This is so cool because on both sides of my family, I have ancestors who were the first women to own their own land. Centuries later, that same local history and strength follow my grandfather's line right down to me.

My grandfather Sumner's grandmother is Ella Gray Frake Clarke, and she saved everyone in the school she was the principal for—Lakewood's School No. 5. Because she was a stickler for safety, she made everyone do regular, disciplined fire drills. When an unexpected fire finally broke out on January 29th, 1945, her strict timing paid off perfectly: everyone got out safely before the wood-frame school building fully burned down within the span of 15 minutes. When they rebuilt the school, they named it after her, Ella G. Clarke Elementary School.

Through Grandpa Sumner's line, our family history is also related to Aaron Burr, the Allen House, and Hartshorne Woods, and even goes all the way back to the *Mayflower*.

On Grandma Anne's side of the family, her father's family were Albanian Jews who escaped to Italy from Albania. By the time my great-grandfather was born, our family was Italian, had an Italian last name, and did not mention being Jewish. It wasn't until I was a kid that we found out we were Jewish. My parents and I saw a geneticist when I was young, and when she shook my dad's hand, she said, "I didn't know you were Jewish."

He said, "We're not Jewish."

She looked at his other hand and said, "Yes you are, you have Ashkenazi thumbs, which is strictly a Jewish trait."

After the appointment, my dad called Aunt Lynn to say that she didn't have to convert to get married because we are Jewish (even though she had years ago). Then he called Grandma Anne.

She said, "We're not Jewish, your grandfather had shoemaker's thumbs."

My mom in the background then went, "Jewish shoemaker!" Because my great-grandfather had the same thumbs as my dad and was a shoemaker.

On my mom's side, we are related to Sir Francis Bacon as our ancestor is his half-brother, Sir Nicholas Bacon (through my maternal grandmother, Patricia, fondly known as Bubbles). On my mom's father's side, her family tree also leads back to another incredible trailblazer: my maternal great-great-grandmother, Ada Latta. Her family history runs incredibly deep, connecting us to the town of Gressitt, Virginia, and the historic colonial Gressitt House where Urbanna's harbormaster once lived. Grandfather Gressitt's family has a great story that I researched and wrote about for a history assignment. I want to share it directly here as Ada Latta's life was a grand adventure.



Parlin Gressitt Artifact Assignment

Ada Latta was the first born of her parents, Benjamin Franklin Latta and Martha Anne Mitchell on 11/01/1861 in Hickman County, Kentucky. Ada had six siblings. The third born, Ruth Latta is shown in the photo (my artifact) with Ada's first born, Maud, Ruth's niece. Maud Rutter married John Walter Gressitt and they had two children, Mary Lyell and Tillman Johnson Gressitt. TJG married Patricia Bacon and they had four children, Hunt, Scott, Kit-Bacon, and Lyell. Lyell is my mother. My great-great-grandmother, Ada Latta has a rich history as a groundbreaking pioneer woman who moved west to stake claims in Kansas, Oklahoma and Cuba.

After Ada's father died and she and her siblings inherited some money, she was able to stake a Kansas homestead claim in June of 1886 at only twenty four years old. Her younger sister Martha followed suit two months later, and the two became some of the first women to stake a land claim as single women. Having sold their claims later that year, when the largest of the Oklahoma land rushes happened on 09/16/1893, Ada Latta was one of the nearly 100,000 pioneers who rushed the land that day and filed a land claim with the Enid, OK territory land office, staking claim to land that had previously belonged to Native American Indian tribes. Single women pioneers were a minority group, much like the Europeans who came to America for various reasons, one being that, "Persecuted minorities were in search of a new start in life" (Strayer and Nelson, 551). Two months later on 10/04/1893, Ada married "the boy next door" John Albert Rutter, who had claimed the neighboring property to Ada. Four years after they married and joined forces, Ada and John, had their first of four children, Maud Hortense Rutter, who was born on 11/23/1897 in Waukomis, Oklahoma. Over the next six years they had three more children.

On 02/03/1905, they left the craziness of the Wild West and headed to Cuba having heard that farming tobacco and coffee were profitable there. They went as a way to have a new life and be in a safer land. Ada Latta and family farmed tobacco and coffee in western Cuba until a hurricane destroyed their farm in October of 1910. At that point, Ada's mental health was declining due to the stress of a pioneering lifestyle and in April of 1912, Ada sailed with husband John without children from Havana, Cuba to New Orleans. She ended up in an Oklahoma asylum, Fort Supply. John and the three youngest kids moved to Tampa while Maud stayed in a convent school in Havana, Cuba. In 1913 after her father died, fifteen year old Maud left school in Havana and sailed to Florida. She took her three siblings to find their Aunt Ruth (Latta) and Uncle Tillman Johnson who took them in. Maud later named her only son Tillman Johnson after her uncle who took in Maud and her siblings.

Museums should include artifacts from everyday people because everyone has a story and these stories can connect us all together. Talking about your family history is fascinating, but being able to see artifacts that have been passed down is even better. If more regular people had the opportunity to share artifacts and stories from their family history at museums, then we could all discover the things we have in common as well as learn to appreciate our differences. Objects that belong to everyday people can tell hundreds of stories. You could have had relatives who were pirates, or pioneers, or president, or vice president. The possibilities are endless and the more we share our stories, the more we grow together.

Jacobsen Syndrome

I have Jacobsen Syndrome, which is also called JS or 11q. It is the underlying genetic condition that connects all of my other medical conditions together. I have been going to the 11q conference since 2022, and it happens every other year. The conference is for families with kids/adults with 11q to meet and learn more about 11q. I have learned a lot at the conference from other people with JS, their families, and doctors who study JS, especially from Dr. Paul Grossfeld who is the main researcher in the world for JS. Dr. Paul is also a pediatric cardiologist who specializes in HLHS as that is the most common heart condition within JS. (You can have JS and not have a heart condition or have a heart condition that's not HLHS, and you can have HLHS and not have JS). Dr. Paul is very helpful to all of the people with 11q who go to the conferences and helps us all out in any way he can. For the first two conferences I went to, it took me some time to find my footing even within this small community since I'm in the 3% of people with JS and all my friends are in the 97%. I also learned about my JS when I was 18, and all of my friends (older, my age, and younger) learned when they were babies. This year however, I feel completely connected to everyone because as we are all getting older, I am seeing all the unique strengths my friends have and how much they are thriving, and I am learning more about myself because of the JS.

I got to be on the 11q Adult Panel at all of the conferences I've been to. At my first conference, the questions were not too difficult and I was able to answer them from my memory of how I wanted to answer them. At the conference two years ago, I was not prepared enough and the questions were hard because a lot of them said the same thing

in different ways. So I repeated myself a lot and passed on some questions because I didn't know how to answer them. At this year's conference, I prepared ahead of time with my parents' help and printed out my answers like my friends do, answering from the notes I printed out to help me answer the questions. I am going to prepare the way I did this year for every conference from now on.

At the conference this year, I learned that if you have JS, you actually have Paris-Trousseau Syndrome. I always knew that I had traces of this syndrome, but I didn't realize I fully had it until this year's conference. Learning about this was so helpful because it finally explains exactly why I bruise easily, why my blood platelets are low, and why I had such bad nosebleeds last year.

I also have hearing loss that I wear hearing aids to help with. I can hear without them but they help amplify sound, like high and low frequencies that I can't hear, they're also Bluetooth and have a charger that plugs into the wall. They also don't have the white noise on because that's for people with constant tinnitus (ringing in the ear), I have that, but mine is sporadic.

Along with my HLHS and other medical conditions, I also have Fontan Associated Liver Disease (FALD), which is a liver disease that anyone who had the Fontan procedure can develop. (Fontan is the third of the three open-heart surgeries I got for HLHS). At the moment, my liver is mostly okay, but I do have liver fibrosis and an enlarged spleen due to the disease.

While my cardiologist mentioned what could happen in general if it gets worse in the future, the first thing is managing it with new medications. Beyond that, a Fontan redo surgery can be done to help reduce strain on the liver. After that, in the absolute worst-

case scenario if liver failure happens, the last option would be a heart and liver transplant. Although no one knows if those possibilities will happen or if those steps will ever be necessary, instead of worrying about the what-ifs that might and might never happen, I prefer to focus on the present and how well I'm doing right now as best I can and keep moving forward with my life and my creativity.

Arcadia

I never thought of the idea of transferring until 2023, during my senior year at Brookdale Community College. When I started thinking about it, I knew I wanted to find a school that had a musical theater program and a music program. I searched for these things and found Rider University, Arcadia University, and Montclair State University. I looked up the information for applications and pre-screening for these schools and worked hard on preparing for the acting pre-screens. I submitted my applications and sent in the acting pre-screen videos first. Then, in November 2023, I went to visit each school in person. Ultimately, I finished Brookdale in 2024 and got an associate degree in Music and an associate degree in Theater.

The first school I visited was Rider. When I was there, my dad talked to me about how when someone goes to check out colleges, they get this feeling that this is where they belong. He asked me if I felt that about Rider and I said no, as it was the first school we visited and I wanted to see what the other schools were like first. The next school we visited was Arcadia. During the open house there, I got that feeling,

I said to Dad, "Dad, I am having that feeling. This is where I belong."

We still visited Montclair the next day, as the open house was the next day and we were planning on it. Montclair was way too big and overwhelming for me, so I emailed them saying that I didn't want to go there. Then I waited to find out about Rider and Arcadia, and decided that if I got into Arcadia, I'm going even if I don't get into the Musical Theater concentration. If I got into Rider—whether I got into musical theater or not—and

didn't get into Arcadia, I would go to Rider. If I got into both, I would choose Arcadia. I got into both, but just into the BA Theater program, and I went to Arcadia.

Which was such an amazing decision, and I wish I could have gone there for four years. I loved it there so much! I made lots of friends and some of them I'm still very close with, including my best and closest friends from there, Raffi and Teddy, who are twin brothers, and the three of us know each other more than we know ourselves. I did have some hard times there, but I also had some amazing times.

I loved seeing Raffi and Teddy almost every day in the commuter lounge. That was our hangout spot since they were commuters, and it was a nice place to hang out. I also loved spending time with other theater students, whether that be in a class, working backstage or on stage, hanging out eating lunch, or hanging out at a cast party. All the acting classes were very fun, and some of them were pretty special at times.

A fun moment at a cast party during our Fall 2024 semester became an inside joke which is still said and done today. Will, Aidan, and I were hanging out and Aidan said that he could go from nonchalant to freaky in three seconds. Then it became a thing with us to see who could go from nonchalant to freaky the best and fastest. I could do it the best and will still do it any time someone counts me down.

The next semester, the three of us were in Acting II together. In this class, we learned about the twelve theater archetypes: Hero, Explorer, Ruler, Rebel, Sage, Caregiver, Everyman, Magician, Artist, Lover, Fool, and Innocent. Each of the theater archetypes and or combinations or archetypes make up every character in any art form. Will turned going nonchalant to freaky into going nonchalant to various combinations of the archetypes, to freaky, and sometimes then back to nonchalant in three to five seconds.

Aidan was amazing at it and we couldn't believe how well he did it. That class was also very fun because everyone in the class got close with each other. Learning about the archetypes inspired me, and I wrote a song about them.

When I was in Script Analysis in the spring of 2025, my professor wasn't just a great professor; he also let us talk about personal things in class. For example, in February, which is Heart Health Month, I mentioned in class that it was Heart Health Month, and he said that if I wanted to, I could share a PowerPoint about my heart condition. So, at the next class, I shared a PowerPoint about Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) and Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS).

Raffi, Teddy, and I have gotten so close that Teddy is my younger brother and Raffi is my queerplatonic partner. A QPP is when two queer people act like a couple but are not dating, they are platonic partners. When we would hang out in the commuter lounge, Raffi and I would play video games and games like "Guess the Song" and "Guess the Movie from the Song." I was always impressing Raffi with my music knowledge, but if we did a rock music guessing game, Raffi dominated. We played a ton of *Date Everything!* and *JumpStart World 2nd Grade: Quest for the Color Meister* for hours. When we aren’t around each other, we will text and talk for hours, and we still see and chat with each other whenever we can. Raffi, Teddy, and I all graduated from Arcadia this May 2026. Raffi also helped me with one of my acting finals and did a great job. Raffi and I were involved in Arcadia Christian Fellowship (ACF). We really enjoyed connecting with other faithful students during weekly meetings and small groups.

One of my biggest accomplishments and hardest writing challenges was my senior thesis, an original play I wrote and directed a staged reading of called *Friendship Goes*

Beyond Life. It was challenging because I was drawing heavily from my own life; the play is directly about me and one of my closest, best friends who is also my Anam Cara, which is Irish for "Soul Friend." I first started writing the script during my playwriting class in the Fall of 2025, and then used the following semester in the Spring of 2026 to develop it into my thesis. My playwriting professor helped me write new drafts to make the show slightly less realistic. Even with those adjustments, the final show remains deeply realistic, making it the most vulnerable piece of writing I have ever shared.

The end of February 2026 during the spring semester was hard because I got kicked out of a club, became ex-friends with someone, and my oldest dog, Cody, died, all within a week of each other. Dealing with all of that at once was very difficult, but Raffi and Teddy helped me through it, and things turned around for the rest of the semester.

The other hard time was during thesis day. That day and night, all the seniors who aren't theater majors presented their theses, and that night, the theater majors each had a table in the Little Theater to tell people what our theses were about. The hardest part was that the night before, my mom called to tell me that our close friend Gregg Jones had died. He was only a few years older than my mom, and it was hard to hear that news right then. Despite the heavy news, I still made it through and truly enjoyed thesis night.

I had a lot of fun spending time with the other theater majors and minors during senior week. We all went to Noah's house one day, Will's house another day, and Klaudia's house another. We also have a group chat that we still use sometimes. Graduation was nice, too, as all of us theater majors got to sit together. Somehow, my parents ended up sitting next to my ex-friend's family at graduation, but it was fine. I

earned a BA in Theater and a minor in Music, Arcadia class of 2026! I can't wait to visit Arcadia to see a play when I can. Go Knights!!!

As I continue to grow and learn, I returned to Brookdale to work on a Creative Writing Associate's degree, and it's felt so great to be back. I knew I missed Brookdale when I was at Arcadia, and I miss Arcadia now that I'm back at Brookdale. But I didn't realize how much I missed Brookdale until I was back. A lot of my friends from when I went to Brookdale the first time for 6 years have graduated. Some friends, however, have not, and I have also made lots of new friends. Mikayla and Cosmo, who are two of my closest friends whom I met when I was going to Brookdale the first time, are still there, and I'm so happy we get to be in school together again. I'm also excited as I'm only taking one class at a time to save money and only have to focus on one class each semester. I will be going for two more years and will get to graduate with them.

Being back at Brookdale is also giving me the chance to finally be back in Haunted Theater, the best haunted house in the state! This is also the first time I am officially a scare actor! I got to scare behind the scenes and fill in for actors when I was in tech, but I'm so excited to finally be a scare actor! I have learned a lot from Arcadia in and out of the classroom, which I think is what helped me get to this point. I am also using nonchalant to freaky a lot, which I think really helps; I feel so much more expressive and in my body this year compared to three years ago when I first auditioned and was an understudy. At auditions this year, I felt so much more free and comfortable, and it must have paid off 'cause yay, I'm a scare actor with Mikayla, Cosmo, Sabrina, Louis, and everyone else involved this year!

I love Mikayla and Cosmo so much and missed them dearly when I was at Arcadia. They aren't just two of my best friends; they are my younger siblings, as that's how much I love them and how much they love me. They are an adorable couple, and I am so happy that they have each other and will be together forever. I can't imagine my life without them, just like how I can't imagine my life without Raffi and Teddy, and another best friend, Eli.

I have known Eli for a few years now, and I first met him at Project REAL. When I was first introduced to him, I was told he is an animator and I said, "You're an animator, that's great! Do you want a job?" I said that because I had been looking for an animator for “The Mouse Masters” the TV show I have been writing for years and am still in the middle of writing. He said “sure,” and that's how our friendship started. I still have things to do on my end like record my voice for my characters, get more cast members (again), get my friends who are the other characters to record their voices and send them to me, and then send all the voices to Eli. I have no idea when that will happen, but Eli doesn't care; he's cool with working on the show whenever I'm ready. Eli and I can talk for hours about anything animated, musical, or entertaining with each other. He is such a great friend and we have gotten so close that I call him my older brother and he calls me his younger sister, as we are 6 months and 5 days apart.

Eli, Mikayla, Cosmo, Raffi, and Teddy have supported me through so much and continue to be there whenever I need someone to talk to and just be around. I'm also there for all of them when they need anything. I love them all so much and really can't imagine my life without them.

Imaginative Melodies

Music has always been a huge part of my life and creativity. Whether I'm listening to Gospel, Folk, Jazz, or Musical Theater, music is where I find the most joy, strength, and a connection to the Earth and everything around me like nature, peace, and love. As my background blends stage acting, vocal performance, and writing, my creative half a heart belongs to all these art worlds. In fact, I have an artistic statement that is focused on theater, but it perfectly explains how my love of theater grew from my love of music and creative life.

Artistic Statement

I love music and rhyming so much, it is the best and gives every song and story a fun magic touch. I love rhymes because I am a huge Dr. Seuss fan thanks to my mom who loves him a whole lot. It is very fun and I feel like it helps move along the plot.

My mom loves Dr. Seuss so much that she painted our house as a tribute to him. It fills me up with delight all the way to my brim. “Seussical” is my favorite Dr. Seuss show and is how I know that theater is the thing which will help my creativity grow.

Music has always had a big impact on me and my half a heart. With my parents being professional Jazz musicians, mom is a vocalist and dad is a guitarist, music surrounds me and is such a great kind of art.

I want to use my art to show the world that everything can make music and anything can remind you of a song. I enjoy writing songs about nature and animals, and about life and afterlife. I love singing and playing the piano and I love writing music about how we all belong.

It is my way of helping people get an escape from reality for a little while. I also love writing stories that are mostly fictional about fairies and fantastical lands. I strive to cheer people up with my stories by writing about things that make people smile.

Everyday I try to find anything musical related in every conversation. I get this from my dad, but he tries to find jokes in every discussion whilst I try to find things that make me think of a song or songs, it is a fun little fascination.

I believe that the world is a stage and that life is a song, I also believe that we should all sing along. Like they say in my favorite song, “Sing, sing a song, make it simple to last your whole life long, don't worry that it's not good enough for anyone else to hear, just sing, sing a song.”

Music From Whimsical Poems & Stories

Aside from writing stories, monologues, and plays, I love music and sharing my original albums with the world.

My very first album, *The Seasons We Know*, was released in 2018. This album has 18 tracks and includes songs like “Moonlight Party,” “My Life Is Free,” and the title track, “The Seasons We Know.” Since then, I have put out various albums which each have their own unique themes.

In 2021, I released *Things I Love*, which has 15 songs and features “Shining Stars,” a song that my dad wrote the basslines for. It also features “Friends,” which was the first song I ever wrote; I originally composed it when I was 7 years old, and I made some changes for this album so it would have a better flow. Of course, it also includes the title track, “Things I Love.”

That was followed by my 2023 5-song EP, *Feeling Free in This Community*, where I share my song “Invisible Disabilities,” which is about my medical conditions, a spooky song called “Witch's Treat,” and my song “Feeling Free In This Community,” which is about celebrating the LGBTQIA+ community.

I also love writing about the natural world, which inspired my 2024 5-song EP, *Flowers & Nature*, featuring tracks like “Kindness For Everyone,” “Justice & Equality,” and “Feathers.”

As my musical writing continued, I released three albums in 2025.

These include my 12-song album *Feeling Colorful*, featuring the title track “Feeling Colorful,” “Light Bender” (which is one of my many songs based off of an original poem), and “Theater Archetypes.”

Next was my 12-song album *Lost Angels*, based on a play of the same name by my friend and the owner of Actors Playground Ralph. Featuring the title track “Lost Angels,” “Morgan’s Song (Acceptance For Everyone),” and “Calvin's Song (Light At The End Of The Tunnel).”

Finally, I released my 7-song album *Fantastical Fairycore Folktales*, which includes “Magical Woodland Fun,” the title track, “Fantastical Fairycore Folktales,” and “Fairy Garden Tales.”

My latest album is called *Stream of Dreams*, which features “Wildflower Meadow,” “Flowers & Friendship Forever” (these songs are connected in a special way), and my song “Requiem For Amber” from my play that was my senior thesis, *Friendship Goes Beyond Life*.

Project REAL

I have been going to Project REAL (Real Empowerment On All Levels) since 2018 and I love it there so much! I first went when I was 16 and they used to have a teen day, but I didn't go much back then because I wasn't super open about myself and expressive. Since 2018 when I went again, all that changed.

Finding a community that embraces people for who they are and how they identify is an amazing thing. Project REAL has become a place that feels like another home where I can let off steam or just enjoy my time whilst surrounded by people. I have made lots of great friends at REAL including Eli and some friends I know from Brookdale like my friend Charlotte. Charlotte is the reason I survived the pandemic. She has always been there for me when I need a friend and has helped me through times when I was super depressed. She is also one of the few people who can instantly make me laugh without even saying a word, although it has gotten easier at times for other people to get me to laugh too.

I love going to REAL because it is wonderful to see my friends and hang out whether that means playing Jackbox, watching a movie or TV, or just chatting. It is a perfect place to go when you want to be around people and need a break from other things going on or just want to get out of the house. The staff members are so nice and helpful. I have become close friends with Albert and Arthur who are two of the staff members. They both have helped me through tough times and continue to help when I need someone to talk to. If I am having a bad day or just need to rant, I can talk to them. Walking into REAL always reminds me that I'm never alone, and I am so grateful to have found this community.

Epilogue

If I had to sum up who I am today, I am a 26 year old girl who is defined by creativity and connection. I am a proud asexual lesbian, a daughter of two amazing jazz musicians, a homeschooled and unschooled kid who grew up to earn degrees from both Brookdale and Arcadia University, and I'm currently working on a third degree from Brookdale. I am an actor who hones my craft at Actors Playground, and a dedicated volunteer usher and greeter at the Algonquin Arts Theatre. I am also a student of poetry, theater, and song.

My life is very unique as it holds a blend of art in many art forms and a deep medical history. I have done a lot in my life so far, and I am ready to go on more adventures with friends and family. I've still had and will continue to have my ups and downs, but with good friends who are like family and my family by my side, I'm ready to grow, learn, and keep on creating. I want to write more stories, songs, poems, monologues, plays, and all of the above. I am going to continue to let my freak flag wave and fly, and keep on creating whimsical, fantastical, magical things.