

# My Southern Living Story

This story is excerpted from *The Dean's Underwear: Living My American Dream*. Published 2020 by Outskirts Press, Denver.

In 2016, *Southern Living* magazine solicited stories from readers in preparation for their fiftieth anniversary. My own story, published in the fiftieth anniversary edition, was transformational, about bringing a Southern boy home:

Having spent most of my childhood and teenage years in northern New England, my life changed dramatically when I married into a family with Southern roots. Although Nancy Lee had been born and raised in New Hampshire, her mother was from Asheville, North Carolina but had met her Yankee husband in college.

After we married, we relocated to the coast of Maine. Each spring, around Easter time, we would travel to Durham for a visit with Nancy's aunt and uncle, two of the nicest Southerners one could meet. What a treat it was for us to leave snow and ice behind and be transported to a place where azaleas, redbud trees, and dogwoods bloomed; where birds chirped; and where we feasted on fried chicken, black-eyed peas, green beans, Brunswick stew, and barbecue. The most delightful Southern accents you

## DON GNECCO

could hear were like an opiate, ensuring that we would come back again and again! I remember wishing many times that we could somehow bottle this stuff and transport it back with us.

On one of the trips, I picked up a magazine on the coffee table....*Southern Living*. As I flipped through it, my eye was drawn to the beautiful trees, flowers, expansive gardens, and beautiful homes. Who knew that there was an entire magazine devoted to this place I had come to love? I pulled one of the subscription cards, delighted with the prospect that a piece of the South might come to our home each month.

Over the next thirty years, I talked of moving to the South and told Nancy Lee that when we retired, I wanted to live somewhere along the Blue Ridge.

Tired of shoveling snow, I began to apply for positions in the South. During my interview with the delightful folks at Piedmont College in beautiful northeast Georgia, I was asked why I was interested in relocating from New England. (Read: Why does a Yankee boy like you want to move to the South?) I quickly offered that I'd actually been born in the South (my daddy was in the air force and had been stationed briefly in Biloxi), but the interview team appeared unimpressed. However, I quickly followed with "Well, this probably sounds strange, but we've been subscribing to *Southern Living* for more than thirty years!"

## THE DEAN'S UNDERWEAR

I got my dream. We are blessed to live in a charming village with wonderful friends and neighbors...and a stunning view of the Blue Ridge Mountains from our home. Thanks in large part to *Southern Living*.