

Reading Comprehension

Social life in my extended family, like that of most people of **modest means** who grew up in the country, revolved around meals, conversations, and storytelling. They couldn't afford vacations, rarely if ever went to the movies, and didn't have television until the mid- to late 1950s. They went out a few times a year to the county fair, the watermelon festival, the occasional square dance or gospel singing. The men hunted and fished and raised vegetables and watermelon on **small plots** out in the country that they'd kept when they moved to town to work.

Though they never had extra money, they never felt poor as long as they had a neat house, clean clothes, and enough food to feed anyone who came in the front door. They worked to live, not the other way around.

My favourite childhood meals were at Buddy and Ollie's, eating around a big table in their small kitchen. A typical weekend lunch, which we called dinner (the evening meal was supper), included ham or a roast, corn bread, spinach or collard greens, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, peas, green beans or lima beans, fruit pie, and endless quantities of iced tea we drank in **large goblet**-like glasses. I felt more grown up drinking out of those big glasses. On special days we had homemade ice cream to go with the pie. When I was there early enough, I got to help prepare the meal, shelling the beans or turning the crank on the ice-cream maker. Before, during, and after dinner there was constant talk: town gossip, family goings-on, and stories, lots of them. All my kinfolks could tell a story, making simple events, encounters, and mishaps involving ordinary people come alive with drama and laughter.

Buddy was the best storyteller. Like both of his sisters, he was very **bright**. I often wondered what he and they would have made of their lives if they had been born into my generation or my daughter's. But there were lots of people like them back then. The guy pumping our gas might have had an IQ as high as the guy taking your tonsils out. There are still people like the Grishams in America, many of them new immigrants, which is why I tried as President to open the doors of college to all comers.

Though he had a very limited education, Buddy had a fine mind and a Ph.D. in human nature, born of a lifetime of keen observation and **dealing with his own demons** and those of his family. Early in his marriage he had a drinking problem. One day he came home and told his wife he knew his drinking was

hurting her and their family and he was never going to drink again. And he never did, for more than fifty years.

Well into his eighties, Buddy could tell amazing stories highlighting the personalities of dog he'd had five or six decades earlier. He remembered their names, their looks, their peculiar habits, how he came by them, the precise way they retrieved shot birds. Lots of people would come by their house and sit on the porch for a visit. After they left he'd have a story about them or their kids-sometimes funny, sometimes sad, usually **sympathetic**, always understanding.

I learned a lot from the stories my uncle, aunts, and grandparents told me: that no one is perfect but most people are good; that people can't be judged only by their worse or weakest moments; that harsh judgments can make hypocrites of us all; that a lot of life is just showing up and hanging on; that laughter is often the best, and sometimes the only, response to pain. Perhaps most important, I learned that everyone has a story—of dreams and nightmares, hope and heartache, love and loss, courage and fear, sacrifice and selfishness. All my life I've been interested in other's people's stories. I've wanted to know them, understand them, feel them. When I grew up and got into politics, I always felt the main point of my work was to give people a chance to have better stories.

from 'My Life' by Bill Clinton

Assignment:

Use context clues to determine the meaning of the following words/phrases.

- 1. modest means (line 1) _____
- b. small plots (line 5) _____
- c. large goblet (line 13) _____
- d. bright (line 19) _____
- e. dealing with his own demons (line 25) _____
- f. sympathetic (line 33) _____

2. What was the main focus of country life during the writer's growing up?

3. In about thirty words write about the activities at a typical weekend lunch.
