



Ruby D. Miles with Josh Wilson

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By Josh Wilson

My grandmother, Ruby D. Miles, has lived all 88 years of her life in Mills County, apart from the seven and a half months she lived in Odessa.

She was born in Pleasant Grove in 1922. She grew up during major historical events like The Great Depression and World War II. She said, "During The Depression, neighbors would come and steal your meat from your house. We came in one night and the lamp was hot as fire, which meant someone had been in our house." It was a difficult time for everybody, and everyone did what they had to in order to get by.

The typical school for her growing up consisted of one or two teachers for every student in grades 1-12. Because of the large student-teacher ratio, teachers often double promoted students, which meant that a student who was doing very well had the opportunity to skip a grade, such as my grandmother, who was double promoted from 2nd to 4th grade.

The limits on transportation at the time caused for more surrounding schools in the area. At the time, there were many communities with schools in Mills County, such as North Bennet, South Bennet, Mt. Olive, Pleasant Grove, Caradan, Priddy, Mullin, Star, and Kelly. Most children had to walk as much as five miles to the nearest school. Schools at the time often didn't start until October or after the cotton and corn crop were harvested.

Substantial farming was the majority of the people's means of survival. Most all food that the families ate, they raised. Gardens were of the utmost importance, and many families did not eat if they did not have their own garden or livestock. The same principle went along with water. All the water that a family used either came from the drawn water from the well or from large rain containers set next to the house to catch rainfall.

Going to church on Sundays was as important, if not more, for the families as anything else going on. She said "We were going to church on Sunday; we never discussed it. We went to church regardless of what the weather was like." In order for them to go to church, they had to walk a half mile to her grandfather's shed, which is where they kept their Model T car.

The average house was built similar to a barn - just good enough to keep out the weather, which was still not always effective.

"The inside, I would say, of half the houses, only had the heavy paper on the inside, but it didn't keep out the cold," my grandmother said. During the winter months, most families would wake up to find that the water stored inside the house had completely frozen. Many families were unable to afford or build themselves nice houses. They were just fortunate to have a place to sleep.

Not very many people had jobs when she was growing up. People's jobs were their farms, and substantial farming was their way of life. Occasionally, all men would have to help and pitch in on working on and building roads. Every male would have to set aside a few days to work on the roads. The only businesses early on were cotton gins, a general store, grocery stores, and stores that would buy your home-raised chickens and turkeys. The only consistent purchases a family had to make were sugar and flour. Everything else the families raised or made themselves.

Since early on in my grandmother's life, Mills County has seen significant growth in industrialization and agriculture. Goldthwaite is now commonly known as the Meat Goat Capital of America. Also, because of the growth in accessible transportation, we have seen the disappearance of communities such as Pleasant Grove, and the modernization of towns like Goldthwaite.

Life was much simpler for my grandmother growing up, but the development of modern technology and industrialization has also changed Mills County and offered better and more job opportunities. Our backbone is still agriculture, but we now are more productive and efficient.