GRIEVING FOR MOSSVILLE

Some of my very earliest childhood memories are of Mossville. My roots are there. I lived in Mossville for a few years as a child and attended school at Stringer. My paternal Great-grandfather Jackson pastored the Church of God. My grandparents, Oscar Jackson and Mae Welborn, were graduates of the Mossville school in the very early years of the last century; my parents attended school there. My people owned modest homesteads, small farms, raising crops and cattle. At the intersection of Highway 15 and the Mossville Road, Mr. Tracy Moss had his store and gas station. Across the highway, to the East, in a gorgeous old home barely visible through all the trees, resided Mrs. Clara Neely, who once taught at the school. On the other corner, there was a grove of pecan trees. As a four-year-old, I picked up pecans like they were bright Easter eggs, treasures among the leaves and grass, making an apron of my dress skirt, filling it up. The pecan grove has slowly disappeared during the past decades, time taking its toll on the old trees.

I can still recall when Mossville Road leading to the little town was a gravel road, bumpy and dusty. You knew you’d arrived in the little village when you passed Mr. E. L. Bishop’s place, and crossed the railroad tracks. At one time, Mossville had its own post office, now a private residence. There were several stores just past there on the left. During an election during the mid-1950s, I held my Papaw Jackson’s hand while he stood in line to vote in one of those old stores. Eventually deserted and dilapidated, those were torn down in the seventies. The Jones Grocery Store in the curve to the left, endured.

Across the road from the Jones Grocery was the cotton gin. I was allowed to ride in the cotton wagon when my grandfather drove his tractor to the gin. The gin disappeared as did the growing of cotton.

As the road turned to the left, onto what I liked to think of as “Main Street,” the Baptist church stood in all its glory. Mary Alice and Lloyd Boone had built a fine brick home across the road. Mrs. Marie Bufkin lived just past the church, and not much further on was the shell of the Mossville School building, long-closed and overgrown with weeds. The Church of God was then on your left, where my family attended. I never missed Bible School in the summer, and Mrs. Daisy Riley reigned supreme. Danny Bufkin got a paddling from Mrs. Daisy for putting a dirt dauber down the back of Gayle Ishee’s dress on a bright sunny day while we were outside with cookies and Kool-aid. Danny protested, claiming he didn’t think they could sting, but Gayle’s back and shoulders told another version.

Just past the church, a county road splits off to the left. Mrs. Eva Anderson lived just to the North of the church, raising abundant vegetable gardens and caring for her invalid son, sweet Uncle Roy. Not too far from there, you’d cross the railroad tracks again, rumbling over an old wooden bridge.

Not many people enjoyed air conditioning in the early fifties and sixties, and the quiet summer days were filled with the calls of the birds, the buzz of the insects and an occasional barking dog. Time moved slower then. You could hear a car coming from a mile away. Peas and beans were shelled on front porches. Quilting racks were lowered from the ceilings in the afternoons, and the ladies would visit while needles flashed, stitching up and down. No radios, no televisions, just conversations. No cell phones. I still have some of those quilts.

I am grieving for Mossville today, but not just because of my long-lost childhood. Mother Nature unleashed her fury, horrifying us with the loss of property and precious souls. We thought we were having a bad spring, considering the coronavirus. Just when you think things can’t get any worse …

Nothing is as unbreakable as God’s love for us, and the nature He gave us, His human creations. Mossville will recover, rebuild, be a strong community again. It will take time and superhuman effort, but the people of Mossville have always been hard workers, displaying endurance and strength, and a genuine love for their neighbors.

A mile or so beyond the Church of God you will find Memory Gardens. My dad and grandfather laid the bricks at the entrance, and now, most of my family is buried there. I can walk from headstone to headstone and recognize almost every name.

My heart aches for those who have lost loved ones. There are no words that I can say that will make that less painful. I think about those who have lost homes and material possessions. To literally have nothing but the clothes on your back … I know that feeling personally.

Isn’t it predictable that the most beautiful weather follows such a storm? Hope springs eternal, and I know that the people of Mossville are busy today, already rebuilding. Chainsaws are clearing limbs; debris is being hauled away.

The little town may be unrecognizable at this particular moment, but it’s heart is still beating strong. Now, let us all lift up prayers for our neighbors and friends, and roll up our sleeves. There is much to be done, but Mossville will rise again.