

Dark Quiet Cycle Of Winter Is Part Of Regeneration

(As you read this column, please imagine yourself in the depths of a Mississippi winter for that is where it was written. However, by the time it dripped out of the column pipeline, winter had all but disappeared with daffodils popping up all over town. But in the spirit of the still blowing ice and snow in New York, please consider the column at least partly fresh and current.)



Dixie Scovel, a former New York newspaper reporter and editor, moved to Mississippi and Water Valley almost two years ago. Her column about the experience appears on the first and third weeks of the month.

February has always brought a bit of a blue mood. The colors and chill of winter become tiresome, the promise of red tulips remains underground in the black earth, the mail no longer delivers birthday cards and Christmas notes but rather big, gaudy flyers urging me to scratch for the hidden numbers that will win me wealth or at least a new Hyundai.

Little daughters grew quiet and slow moving in Northern winters while I grew weary struggling to buckle up snow pants and button-down ear flaps, always bending to wipe a child's ever-dripping nose. At some point, I grew restless and considered dyeing my hair red and running away with the milkman.

Thoughtful writers, though, tell us we humans, like the earth itself, need the dark quiet of winter. Some write that expression is the need of the soul, but it must sleep first, it must mull things over deep within us, away from our ever-chirping minds. Perhaps that is so.

The sleeping and mulling of the earth, however, are readily seen, clear in their seasonal intent.

The feeling of winter had boldly invaded Willie Pullen's watermelon fields. During my first walk with Willie across the field, the sun was hot, the scalloped leaves beginning to spread, the vines showing yellow flowers and here and there the first nubs of fruit.

But now, after days of thick and heavy rain, the dark skies looked somber and the wide fields solitary. A lone rabbit rustled the thicket under the tall pines, a single deer crossed our path, his coat blending with the brown winter brush. Ditches and pools of water ran up and down the very field that last summer brought 1,800 watermelon to the town's carnival and Larson's grocery store.

"It will be seven years before we plant this one

again." Willie has been explaining the cycles of resting, planting grass, grazing some cows as he rotates seven fields, each having its turn to grow Water Valley's famous watermelon.

Meanwhile, he has planted a long row of turnips now showing red with fresh green tops. I have been slow to learn the cooking habits of the South, but Willie pulled me a few, trimmed them up and offered a little cooking advice. "Cut them into chunks, not small dice."

We then climbed into Willie's truck, he spun some mud and we drove over for a look at this year's ground scheduled for planting. "It's an old Harmon field. Mac and Bunk grew watermelon here, so we know it will produce."

Come April this field will be plowed, rows of red and yellow meat watermelon and cantaloupe seed will be planted. And eagle eyes will be on the lookout for the invasive morning glory as the cycle begins again. Now, though, it is winter, the time to sleep and mull things over.

The walk through the mud, the quiet of the resting fields, Willie's stories of what delights and sustains him, including his four-year-old grandson wanting in his truck to find a few peanuts, each have a tonic effect on a winter day.

Maybe it is true. Only after a time of rest do we again trudge forward, ever experiencing the world anew, only then will life again emerge with the grace of red tulips in May and the fat watermelon in the heat of August.

Outstanding Black Women of Yalobusha County: The Project Continues Joyce Judson: Forever Giving of Her Talents and Gifts

Yet again, I am amazed at the strength and accomplishments of the outstanding black women of Yalobusha County, Mississippi. It would be easy to say that Water Valley and its residents are not much different from other small towns in Mississippi or in the south. But now more than ever I am convinced that Water Valley is in a special and highly visible position with opportunities to foster transformative actions that could have far reaching impact beyond our imagination.

I have always hoped that the town's proximity to the University of Mississippi, the state's flagship school, would result in projects that benefit the growth and progress of Water Valley and the surrounding communities. Think about it – the town is only 18 miles from Ole Miss, where renowned author William Faulkner lived and died, famous novelist and Ole Miss law school graduate John Grisham resided and penned his first novels and my cousin, Ray Hawkins, is the chief of the University Campus Police.

Yet, the university still has a statue of the Confederacy at its entrance. I shudder as I think about it, while I write this from home in Stone Mountain, Georgia right under the mountain – which has its own confederate iconography.

Students en route to the university regularly travel on Highway 7 or Main Street Water Valley, passing through on their way to the campus. But rising housing prices around Ole Miss have led more individuals affiliated with the college to consider living in Water Valley. Could the addition of these new residents have cultural, economic and political influence on the area?

To be sure, I am looking at this from afar. I would love to hear other perspectives and am pleased that this project has garnered the interest of the university across four academic departments and the Center for Southern Culture. I am eager to tell you more about it, and I will as things develop.

The focus remains on the women we have learned about to date and on women such as Joyce Hall Burgess Judson, a well-known resident of Water Valley. Annette Hervey Westmoreland, who was featured in the November 29 column and Joyce's daughter, Greta, have submitted the following:

Joyce was born in Yalobusha County to Johnny (Jack) and Clara Chapman Hall. She is the twin sister of John C. Hall, and she has four sisters (three deceased) and four brothers. On her first day of school her mother passed away. Joyce was six years old. She was raised by her grandparents, Leland and Alma Hall. Neither could read or write, but

somehow her grandfather was able to teach her the alphabet but not necessarily in the right order. Her teacher was then able to help her straighten out the letters. Her grandfather also introduced her to saving before we knew anything about a 401K plan.

He told her when she worked always to put aside money for a rainy day, even if it was one cent, and, he instructed her, do not go back and get it. Her grandparents taught her well.

Joyce graduated from Davidson High School with highest honors in 1967. She was the Salutatorian and Star Student of her high school class and received the Leadership Award. She earned a bachelor of science



By Dottie Chapman Reed

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She has launched a project to compile and share info about women in the county who have made an impact on the African American community. Her column appears bi-monthly, with occasional exceptions.

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director. Joyce often bakes for the congregation and the community at large and shares her gifts with the elderly, sick and shut-ins.

She uses her gifts to glorify God by showing love to others. Joyce has opened her doors over and over again to her friends and family when they come

ing willingness to share her talents and gifts with others. She has helped many realize their dreams.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. – 1 Corinthians 13:13

Recently, I spent some time with Joyce while in town to meet with the folks at Ole Miss and was able to get specific examples of how she uses her gifts and talents:

- Joyce conducted classes in Oxford, Tupelo and Grenada to help applicants pass the U S Postal exam. She has trained at least a 100 people over the last three years. Joyce still offers assistance to those seeking postal employment.

- At least 14 or more individuals have secured postal jobs after her classes and additional tutoring in locations from Southaven to Raymond. Her former husband, Norwood Burgess, also worked at a post office and her daughter, Greta is the postmaster in Terry.

- Joyce's Tax Services offers free tax services to students and to those who cannot afford to pay. And she gives out care packages to some of her clients. She showed me a photo of the hams she is giving away this tax season.

- Not long-ago Joyce hosted senior citizen movie night for ladies in her home. They came in wheelchairs and on canes and had the time of their lives. The evening even helped one attendee decide to go ahead with the knee surgery that she so feared at age 85. A younger attendee decided to return to a craft that she had abandoned.

- Joyce's daughter, Tamara, and her son, Melvin, are Ole Miss graduates. Daughter, Greta got her degree from Delta State.

- Melvin owns his own investment business under the Primerica umbrella, where he is a regional vice president.

Some would describe Joyce as a workaholic and perhaps the smartest person they have ever met. Servanthood is the word that comes to mind when I try to characterize my cousin, Joyce. My late Uncle George and Aunt Bertha Chapman were her maternal grandparents. I think that some of her brains were supposed to be mine!

If Joyce or another outstanding black woman of Yalobusha County has influenced your life in a positive way, why not share it here.



Joyce Judson is well known in Water Valley.

degree in home economics in 1974 from the University of Mississippi. This was no easy task for a wife and mother of two children under the age of four. She had to drive from Water Valley to Oxford every semester for class, but she kept the faith and believed in her dream.

In 1982 Joyce earned a master's degree from Ole Miss in science education. She taught 5th and 6th grade science at Davidson Elementary for 14 years until she was told to take a test for the postal service.

Scoring 99.3 out of 100 possible points, Joyce was hired at the Grenada post office as a distribution clerk but quickly began her rise in the service. She was promoted to postmaster of the Taylor post office after only three years with the agency. Aside from her daily duties she also worked as a trainer and was instrumental in helping many individuals get jobs at the post office. Both of her daughters are long term postal workers; one of whom is also currently a postmaster.

Along with her professional career work, Joyce is a member of Bayson Chapel Baptist Church, where she teaches Sunday School and is a member of the Mothers Board. In the past she has served in various other capacities such as youth

back to Water Valley for funerals and special occasions. She loves entertaining and making visitors feel welcome in her home.

Joyce also loves doing crafts for herself and others. And we love working with her when she puts on those great feasts for the church and other local groups. She works with a special team of young women, passing on skills and techniques that she has acquired in cooking, catering, decorating and event planning.

Joyce is much more than a role model for only young women. She mentors and encourages young men, too, letting all young people know they can do anything that they put their minds to with God on their side. She is often helping her children and her five grands to succeed, giving them sound advice on handling finances and resolving personal issues.

In addition to teaching and her later postal work, Joyce started a tax preparation business while still in high school, and she has been serving the community for more than 52 years as a tax preparer. Her daughter Tamara works with her in the tax business.

Simply put, her children, grandchildren and the entire community love Joyce Judson because of her humility and her never-end-

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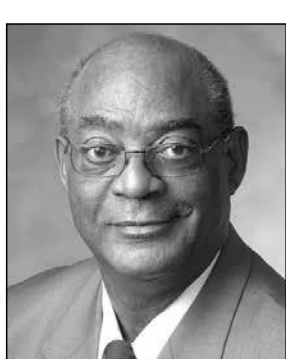
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