

A Mississippi Family Reunion

By our office manager, Carol Neuzil

My dad was from the deep south, Mize, Mississippi to be specific. That's not all that far from Mount Olive or Hot Coffee, Mississippi. Some of my family and I traveled down to Mount Olive for an Easter family reunion, arriving at the Jackson airport near dusk, about 80 miles north of our destination. After renting a car, we exited the airport and laughed at a sign that read "Welcome to Mississippi. Yes, we can read and some of us can even write."

Cousins Trisher and Gerry met us with open arms and hugs in Mount Olive and brought us around back where hot oil was waiting to fry up some cornmeal catfish to go along with home-grown beans and corn fritters. What a feast! Dishes done, we went to "sit a spell" when mom informed us that the annual family reunion was scheduled for the next day, not Easter Sunday. Cousins would be coming from all around the country, bringing food and desserts and wouldn't it be a great idea, mom said, if I made some homemade bread.

"Bread??!!" I said, "for tomorrow?!!"

"Yes," she responded, "Trish bought all the stuff."

"Now?!!" It was nearly 10:00 pm, but I'm not one to argue, especially with my mom. So 5 pounds of flour, yeast, potato water and 2 hours later, I put the bread in the oven. Forty minutes later I took out the prettiest brown bricks you have ever seen. Unfortunately, they were more suited for mortar instead of butter – it was the worst bread I have ever made! And it was almost 1:00 a.m.! I would have been upset, but I was way too tired.

What a reunion day it turned out to be! By 6 a.m., it was raining cats and dogs and the field we had reserved in Mize was becoming a pond. By 8 a.m., the phone was ringing off the hook, and by 10:30 a.m., the whole event was moved to the Hot Coffee, Mississippi Community Center. The place was buzzing. Cars were parked bumper-to-bumper unloading kids, food, and who knows what! They had 10 long tables along one side of the gigantic room covered with chicken, dumplings, beans, salads – you name it! The opposite side had 20 long tables already filling up with families.

Before we began our feast, all 75 of us gathered in a giant circle and held hands while my cousin Gerry led us in a prayer of thanks. And then the chaos began! We dug in and ate until we couldn't eat anymore. After that, children ran all over in the blueberry grove out back, there was a dessert bake-off contest (yum!), and men hid 150 eggs for an unbelievable Easter egg hunt.

When most of the festivities were over, we all gathered around one of my cousins who told tales of our family stories about Grandpa Nobe, Aunt Hattie Mae, Uncle Bilbo and Aunt Zoo, just to name a few. Most of us had never met these people but they will be remembered.

We ate, we laughed, and we remembered what it was like to be part of....a down home country family.