

Grace H. Moody

A Legacy of Faith and Perseverance

Perfect Timing – Another Outstanding Black Woman of Yalobusha

On September 18-19 we honored Mrs. Emma Spencer Gooch and the members of the Yalobusha Voter's League at the Bozarts Gallery with an exhibit of items from her collection archived at the University of Mississippi. Water Valley proclaimed September 19 Emma Spencer Gooch Day with a key focus on voting in the upcoming midterm elections.

I had just returned home from four action-packed days in the city, my hometown, when the article below about Grace Hawkins Moody arrived from her daughter, Joyce Moody Weeks, for this column. How appropriate. The timing is perfect. Joyce graduated from Water Valley High, earned a degree in banking and finance from the University of Mississippi and now lives in Alabama.

Her mother, Grace Hawkins Moody, was a most

admired role model to many younger girls like me who grew up in Water Valley and in the Christian Episcopal Church. As you read, you will see that Grace was true to her name.

I was totally struck by her awesome beauty, her gifts and her grace. In my mind she was like a beauty queen, a perfect mother, a nurturing sibling and devoted wife. My cousin – and her husband – James Moody married up! Like Emma Spencer Gooch, Grace Hawkins Moody is truly another outstanding black woman of Yalobusha County who set high standards for all who knew or observed her.

(Note: If you have not submitted an article about a Yalobusha woman who impacted your life or the lives of others in a positive way, it is not too late – call me!)

About The Author

Dottie Chapman Reed is a Water Valley native and a 1970 graduate of Davidson High School. A 1974 graduate of the University of Mississippi, she is the author of *Outstanding Black Women of Yalobusha County: Their Stories and Their Contributions to a Mississippi Community*, a book that grew out of her award-winning *North Mississippi Herald* column published from 2018 through 2020. Her research documenting the lives of Black Women and families in Yalobusha County led to collaborations with the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the creation of archival collections and oral history projects preserving this important local history. She lives in the Atlanta area and continues to research, write and advocate for the preservation of Yalobusha County's African American heritage.



If anyone would like to share their pictures or videos taken at the Emma Spencer Gooch exhibit on Sept. 19 at Bozarts Gallery, please send to chapmanreed@att.net or text or call 678-525-5408.



Grace Moody is pictured tending the vegetable garden at her home in Possum Hollow, behind Red Cotton's Florist. Growing and preserving

food were skills she learned early in life and continued to use while raising her family. Moody died Nov. 30, 2023.

A Daughter Remembers

By Joyce Moody Weeks

When I remember my mom, Grace Evelyn Hawkins Moody, I think first of her faith, then her perseverance and remarkable ability to care for others. She worked hard throughout her life and filled our home, our church, and our family with creativity, generosity, and love.

My mom was born on August 2, 1940, in Water Valley, Mississippi, in Yalobusha County. She was the third of fourteen children born to Leslie and Flora Hawkins. As the oldest girl, she helped her mother care for the younger children so often that her brother Curtis sometimes called her "Mom."

Faith was the foundation of our family, and church was a central part of our lives. My mom sang in the choir at Oak Grove CME Church. Because the church had no musician, she found a piano teacher for me and arranged for me to take lessons. After I learned a few hymns, I began playing for the Sunday School, church and eventually for the choir. She also served in leadership roles for Easter plays, Christmas plays, and choir-day programs. She even taught Sunday school for a little while. I first learned about Jesus by participating in those church plays, before I began reading the Bible for myself.

Living life on a farm meant there was always hard work to do, just as it was for many Black families in Yalobusha County at that time. Grace helped tend the cows, horses, pigs, and chickens. She gathered eggs, tended the garden, cooked, preserved food, and chopped and picked cotton.

She attended Davidson School and graduated in the Class of 1960. Like many children who lived in the country, she walked along a dirt road to reach the gravel road where she caught the bus. When rain left water standing in the road, she removed her socks and shoes and carried them until she reached the bus. At school, she sang in the glee club. She wanted to participate in more activities, but limited money and transportation meant that was not always possible.

After high school, my mom married James E. Moody and did domestic work until she was hired by Big Yank Corporation. Big Yank Corporation was a clothing factory that primarily made jeans. Many townspeople worked there until the factory closed. One benefit of working there was the opportunity to buy jeans at a discount. My parents had two children: my brother Ronald and me.

Working at Big Yank Corporation also meant she could purchase fabric at a discount. She used that opportunity with characteristic resourcefulness. She sewed outfits for me and clothes for herself, and once



Grace Moody is pictured at the Moody residence on Daniel Drive.

she even made suits for my brother and my uncle Curtis. She chose not to sew for customers because she did not want money or dissatisfaction to create conflict. Her sewing remained a gift she shared with the family. She wanted me to look neat and clean, and she taught me that neither of those things required a lot of money. Growing up, I wore hand-made clothes, but today they would be called custom clothing.

When Big Yank Corporation closed, my mom was one of many employees who suddenly found themselves without work. Even in that uncertain season, she did not lose hope. She went on to work in two different industries before eventually retiring. Starting over in her fifties was not easy, especially adjusting to shift work for the first time. Working nights and sleeping during the day challenged her, but she met each change with courage, determination, and the steady perseverance that defined her life. The same steadiness she brought to caring for her family, church, and garden also carried her through this unexpected change late in her working life.

The thing that I admired most about my mom was her ability to take a little and make it go a long way. She was frugal yet creative. My parents didn't make a lot of money, but I can truly say I don't ever remember being hungry. We had a garden up on a hill when we lived in North End in a duplex. This allowed us to have cabbage, tomatoes, onions, greens, beans and other vegetables. She would can the vegetables in jars for the winter.

My mom was also skilled in baking, decorating, and gardening. One of the things she baked was homemade biscuits. She would rise early in the



Grace Moody (top picture) enjoyed a California beach during a family vacation. She made the trip with her husband, James Moody.



James and Grace Moody pictured with their children, Ronald Moody and Joyce Moody Weeks.



Grace Moody is pictured during her working years."

morning and make them for us and later for her grandchildren. Her German chocolate cakes were a big hit and so was her caramel cake. When she knew her nephew was coming home, she would make sure to have a Carmel Cake ready for Solomon.

Gardening was one of her passions. She filled our yard with colorful flowers and carefully tended shrubs, creating a welcoming landscape for everyone to enjoy. She loved getting up early in the morning to weed, water, and care for each plant. She gave the garden the same patience and attention she gave to the people she loved. Mom also enjoyed doing home improvement projects with my dad.

When I think of my mom, I remember a woman who trusted the Lord, used what she had responsibly, and never allowed what she lacked to keep her from caring for her family and serving others. Her life taught me that faith, resourcefulness, and perseverance can turn even modest means into a rich legacy.

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