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Sallie Ann Jarmon-Johnson

When death sweeps across the lives of a family and takes one of its most beloved members, it leaves a gaping whole. All that is left for the family members are the memories of that person and the legacy of love and hope that is left upon their lives.

Pearl J. Williams, 62, would say that memories of her mother Sallie Ann Jarmon-Johnson remind her of a time when people were much happier, life was much harder, but people found peace in their lives.

“She was very humorous,” said Williams. “She would discuss with me things that happened before I was born.”

Johnson was born in 1905, she passed away at age 98, in 2004. But according to Williams those 98 years were not in vain. Johnson was a great advocate for the church, she worked in recruiting new members for the church and she raised funds to build a new church building.

“I think that if she was here now, healthy, she would think of some way to promote the church numerically and financially, and she would be doing a lot of cooking,” said Williams.

During her healthy days Johnson would cook. Williams remembers the days of her childhood, when the teachers would commute. They would live with students and their families during the week and go home on the weekends, but when they returned on Sunday evening there was a huge dinner awaiting their arrival.

“She was a great cook!” said Williams. “She was always cooking for somebody.”

Williams said that her mother must have enjoyed cooking and loved children, because she had nine children, one died at birth making Williams the seventh of eight children. Johnson loved children and not just her own, she dedicated herself to educating all children. She taught at Jarmon School, founded by her grandfather.

“This was during the time when you only needed a high school diploma to teach school,” said Williams. “She was very good in algebra and math. I can remember being in high school and asking her questions and she could always answer them.”

Aside from her keen math skills, she also taught her children moral values.

“At one point our pastor couldn’t read, but he could preach,” said Williams. “They taught us according to what they knew. She would say to us if someone hits you in the right cheek you’re supposed to turn the left one. As a child that didn’t make much sense, but as I got older and studied the Bible I understood,” said Williams

It is to those teachings Williams credits the influence in raising her children.

“I have raised four children and they all turned out really well,” said Williams “I would credit about 70 percent of that to my mother’s influence over me.”

Along with her four children she has raised two grandchildren. One is a soon to be college graduate and the other is about to graduate high school. Williams said that most of Johnson’s great-grandchildren turned out well and she is sure that it is due to that influence.

“They found her fascinating,” said Williams. “For her small stature she had a lot of wisdom.”

Johnson was a frail looking 5 feet 2, but don't be fooled by her size. She was a very powerful and strong woman, according to Williams. She also talked about how strong her mothers hands were.

"She believed in it takes a village to raise a child," said Williams. "When I was growing up you respected all adults and any adult could discipline you. Now you're afraid to say anything to these kids."

Johnson was very aggressive yet subtle in accomplishing her goals, but she was diligent in her work for the church. She worked on raising money to build a new church building after that building was built the church later added a fellowship hall, but it was all due to the perseverance of this one aggressive woman.

"The church was on the verge of collapsing," said Williams. "She encountered some hecklers there were those who said 'we don't need a new building.'"

Johnson was not listening. If she were here today Williams suspects that her fight to "do the Lord's work" would not be over, Williams says that even though her mother could not completely heal the church, she would have tried.

"When I was a child you couldn't get into a church on Sunday morning," said Williams. "It is not like that today. Nowadays there is not that much importance put into attending church."

Williams discussed that the church of today is more talk than outreach. She says that she has noticed that they bring young people in and organized things like choirs and dance teams, but there is no substance behind it.

“Anything built on a false foundation will not stand,” said Williams. “Jesus didn’t force the word on people. He gave everyone a chance to accept it and he helped them along the way.”

Johnson was the same way. Along with being a school teacher she was a Sunday school teacher, passing along the word of God and training children in his service. Williams recalls her church when her mother was alive and healthy she said that there seems to have been a switch in the mood of the church.

“Our church was spiritually alive, but now they want to emulate the white churches and be more reserved,” said Williams

Johnson pioneered on until her health began to fail at age 86. She didn’t cook anymore, and she began to lose her memory.

“Some doctors said that it was Alzheimer disease. She began to forget things,” said Williams. “For fear that she might forget and leave a pot on the stove she moved in with my sister Opal.”

During this time Williams frequently visited her mother. When she would go over there her mother would stand at the base of the stairs and talk to her for a little while.

“It is strange now when I go over there,” said Williams. “Sometimes I still expect her to come down the stairs.”

In 1976, Williams and her siblings lost their father, but not even his death truly prepared them for the passing of their mother.

“I could not fathom not having a father,” said Williams. “But I miss my mother 100 percent.”