



Cressie Frazier Gill – Flower of the Family

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Cressie Frazier Gill will be 96 on the 25th of August ... she was born in 1917 – the same year the U.S. entered WWI after news that Germany offered to help Mexico reclaim Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Born only 54 years after Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and 51 years before Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, the year also saw the start of two and a half years of women protesting at the White House that resulted in the 19th Amendment allowing the right women to vote in 1919 – white women anyway. It was a very rough time.

Cressie described her growing up in a lively voice. “I grew up about seven miles from Woodville, Texas, in the Dies Community. I lived with my Papa, the late Rev. Maud Frazier, and Mama, Ola Frazier. There were nine of us, four boys and five girls. I was one of the three older children; we had to really work hard. The younger children went on to college.

“Pappa was pastor of Pine Grove and two other churches at the same time.

“Our house had a long front porch with a big hallway from the front to the back and a chimney in the big room. Papa, Mama, and all of us sat in the big room to stay warm in the winter. As a child, I rocked babies for mama and helped clean the house. There was not much time to play. We did not have toys. We made balls with pine cones and bats with a limb from the tree.”

Her eyes flashed quickly. “I didn’t go to school until I was six years old. The school was in the church, the Pine Grove Baptist Church and School. All the grades were taught at the same time by Mr. Alex Barlow. He taught me in the first through the seventh grades.

What comes to Cressie’s mind when she thinks back?

“Work sir, hard work!” Cressie said directly, glancing to her son Howard. “I had to quit school and help mama and papa with the farm. We worked in the fields chopping grass and picking cotton, peas, beans, and stuff. We had good times and bad times, but there were more good times.”

Howard, her son, added, “We always liked momma’s cooking.” He has a tender heart for her about those years in the field, watching her leave with his sister Ollie to go cook, and then return, to help in the field. Corn, potatoes, watermelons, turnip greens, mustard greens, collard greens, cabbage greens, okra, peanuts, and thousands of pounds of cotton were the many crops.

“We were always glad to see Uncle Henry and Aunt Vicy come to visit, because we got a chance to play.”

“I met Hiawatha in Billums Creek, which is the Dies Community today. At the age 17, he and I got married and moved up on the road where the family house stands today.” The road is now named Hiawatha Gill Road (or CR 2525).

“The church school is off CR 1632. We had eight children, seven sons and one daughter. In the photo (L-R) are Matthew Gill, Cressie Frazier Gill, Howard Gill, Arthur Gill, Ollie Gill Johnson, and Jonathan Gill. Hiawatha Gill Jr. is not pictured.



At Christmas time, they feared Santa Clause, because he was the one who would come and take someone to the North Pole if they were not good. “They kept us brainwashed,” Howard said. “I knew I was not good.”

“One Christmas eve,” Howard said, “I stomped the floor really hard, and everyone ran out of the house, mom and dad too!” They laugh about it today, but back then, no one wanted to be taken from their home, not even by Santa.

“I am scared to death of snakes!” Cressie recalled. “One time I kept my grandchild while my daughter Ollie worked. I was chopping cotton and I put the baby on a quilt at the end of the row. I looked up and saw the baby looking real hard; it would not look at me when I called for him. Then I yelled, ‘Lord have mercy, that baby see a snake!’ I ran, grabbed the baby and did not stop until we were both in the house.”

Cressie raised her children to love the Lord and to fear the switch. Howard and Matthew remember well. She or their father would whip them for doing something wrong or for failing to do right. After a hearty laugh, that makes one smile with her, Cressie said, “I’d say to them boys, ‘I am going to get you for what you did today and yesterday too.’” She giggled again, looking up to Howard who, today, is over twice her size, as she nudged him with the back of her hand.

Family – it meant everything to Cressie.

“Mr. Fain had a big store in Doucette,” Cressie said. “Every year he would give me a box of apples, a box of oranges, a stalk of bananas, and a big stick of peppermint.” Matthew motioned with his hands that the peppermint was about two inches thick and about a foot long.

“Every year we would kill about seven hogs,” Cressie said of their family, “and give everybody in the community a mess of meat.” Then in a sorrowful tone, “People don’t look out for one another today like they use to.”

Howard said, “Momma taught us to watch the company we kept. Not to let the left hand know what the right hand was doing – that is, to be wise. And she taught us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. That came from the Good Book.”

Her only daughter Ollie waxed poetic, saying, “Our mother means comfort ... home ... courage ... faith to us. She taught us to love the Lord. Even when we slept on seeded cotton filled sacks on the floor. She’s has never stopped trying to do right and prays for us each day and night.” She still tries to read her bible every day.

Truly, Cressie’s favorite song, “Give Me My Flowers,” by the Rev. James Cleveland, rings true to her family, as she has become their “flower” and the “kind word” in their lives:

Give me my flowers,
While I yet live,
So that I can see the beauty
That they bring.

... ..

Speak kind words to me,
While I can hear them,
So that I can hear the beauty
That they bring.