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## A Grandfather's Gift

By Janis Greene

Too many times when people reminisce about family and growing up, it is often heard "I need to write that down before I forget it." Whether happy times, hard times, sad times, fun times, or even non-eventful, "just-everyday-life" times — there are always heartfelt moments in looking back and remembering. One Olive Branch resident put his words into action by putting them down in writing.

James Smith is a man who loves to

"I just hope they will have as much fun reading it someday as I did writing it."

—James Smith

tell stories, especially of how things were when he grew up. Back in 1999, he began jotting a memory or thought down occasionally as kind of a journal of sorts. He didn't write every day, just when the notion took him. Tales of family, farming, church, and growing up in rural South Mississippi started to collect in his computer.

Then in May of 2002, his writing started to take a turn in a new direction. That is when his first grandchild, Jack, was born. Smith decided he wanted to leave something for his grandchildren — a humble and honest picture of three generations of their family; detailing what times were like when he grew up, what folks wore, what they did in their spare time or for entertainment, life on the homefront during World War II, and other things like that.

Smith's wife of 44 years and childhood sweetheart, Ruthie, had encouraged him time and time again to write a book from his journals. His lack of any



James Smith spends the afternoon with the best gifts he ever received, his grandsons, pictured from left to right; Sam, Shane, Ben and Jack.

formal journalism training made him hesitate.

Knowing it would be years before the grandchildren really even cared about hearing of such things, written word would probably be the best way to preserve these stories. He realized there were books about famous people and events, but nothing about any of his family. The desire to let his grandchild and future grandchildren know of their heritage had evolved into his writing a book.

During this process, the Smiths, who own an electronics business in Brookhaven, realized that even seeing their grandson every 2-3 months wasn't enough. Their two children had both married and moved to Shelby County,

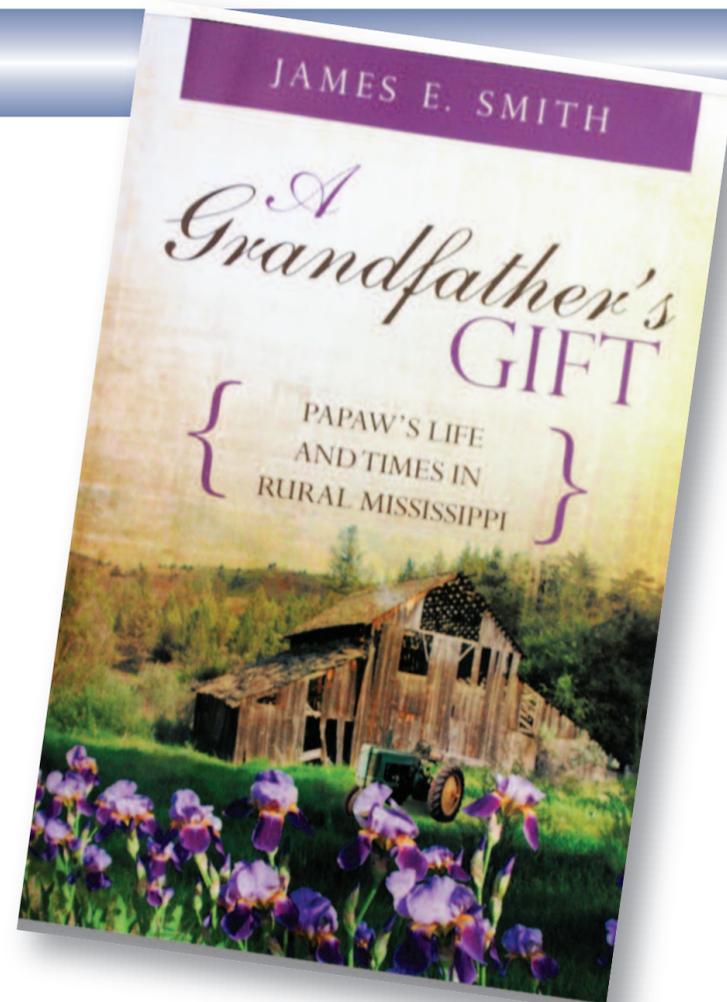
Tennessee. James and Ruthie wanted to be close to their children and see their grandchild and future grandchildren



James and Ruthie Smith

grow up. In 2003, they then made their biggest and best decision by moving to Olive Branch to be closer to family while still running their business in Brookhaven in absentia. Their employees were well qualified to handle the day to day work operation and they were not too far away that they couldn't get back if needed.

Now semi-retired, the Smiths, members of Northcentral Electric Power Association, are happy to watch their four grandboys growing up and be an active part in their lives. Jim and wife Ashley now have three boys; Jack is now 7, Sam, 4, and Ben, 2.



Kim and husband Seth are parents of 1-year-old Shane.

After Shane's birth, James Smith got serious about finishing his book. He finalized it by dividing each topic into one of 32 chapters to cover a range of subjects such as his parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, summer jobs in the country, hauling hay, clothes they wore, serving his country, meeting and marrying Ruthie, and higher education, to name a few. Each is simply written, just as he would tell it to someone, and several pages long. Family photos appear throughout the book.

Smith said, "If they don't want to read about picking wild plums and berries, they can skip that chapter and read about something that interests them, like picking cotton."

Ruthie adds, "Parts of it will make you laugh, and parts will bring a tear to your eye. I'm so proud of James for writing this."

Holding his appropriately named book "A Grandfather's Gift - Papaw's Life and Times in Rural Mississippi,"

Smith said "I just hope they will have as much fun reading it someday as I did writing it." All stories are told just as he remembers them with real folks named. "This is a good, clean book. I wouldn't do anything that would hurt anyone or cause problems or that I didn't want my grandchildren to read since it's for them."

Already making notes of stories not included in the first book or remembered later, Smith said there may be a second book down the road if he comes up with enough material. One thing's for sure, it, too, will be a grandfather's special gift to his very special grandchildren.

James Smith's book, *A Grandfather's Gift*, can be ordered on his Web site, [www.agrandfathersgiftonline.com](http://www.agrandfathersgiftonline.com), or by emailing him at [jamesob@centurytel.net](mailto:jamesob@centurytel.net). He can also be reached at 662-890-4551 (home), 662-404-1292 (cell) or 662-890-7266 (fax).

## 2009 Northcentral Scholarship Recipients

Santricia Dowdy of Byhalia High School, Karley Fox of Lewisburg High School, Desmond Guy of DeSoto Central High School, Patrick Sandidge of Center Hill High School, and Marriah William-Hillard of Olive Branch High School were each presented the Northcentral Electric Power Association scholarship for academic achievement and leadership. The graduating high school seniors of 2009 received a scholarship in the amount of \$1,000 to the college of their choice.



Desmond Guy is the son of Carolyn Smith of Southaven.



Santricia Dowdy will go to the University of Mississippi and major in pre-pharmacy. She is the daughter of Annie and Michael Dowdy of Byhalia.



Marriah William-Hillard plans to attend Northwest Mississippi Community College in Southaven and major in nursing. She is the daughter of Mary Hilliard of Olive Branch.



Karley Fox plans to attend Delta State University and major in nursing. She is the daughter of David and Lisa Fox of Olive Branch.



Patrick Sandidge will major in Wildlife Biology at Mississippi State University this fall. He is the son of Steven Sandidge and the grandson of Kay Dewberry of Olive Branch.