

# Roses IN December

By Ellen Brooks

If you are an “American Idol” or a country music fan, I’m sure you’ve heard the song “A Different World.” I am also sure, that if you’re anywhere near my age bracket, you can relate to parts or all of the song. I turned 70 in January and, believe me, Bucky was singing my song. It was indeed a different world.

When Michelle Pfeiffer was on the David Letterman show promoting her movie, “Hairspray,” David asked her questions about her, apparently, very happy childhood. When Michelle was asked about how she spent her summers growing up, she answered him, “I roamed the neighborhood.”

Sitting in my recliner that night, my mind made a quick dive back to the years of my wonderful youth. The mornings, the days, the evenings, the wonderful minutes, days, weeks, months and years that, as a child, I had spent “roaming the neighborhood.”

Our “neighborhood” in rural North Carolina consisted of many, many areas of farmland, most of which belonged to my aunts and uncles.

My grandfather, Bill Brooks, had accumulated hundreds of acres of land, reaching from near Stone Mountain State Park to the “top of the mountain” where I grew up. As each child married and settled down to raise a family, he gave them a farm. Daddy had somewhere in the bounds of 200 acres. His farm joined Aunt Flora and Uncle Charlie. Uncle Charlie joined Uncle Tarrie, Uncle Tarrie joined Uncle Mack, and Uncle Mack joined Sam McKnight whose son, Edwin, married my sister Mabel. Acres and acres of beautiful farm and woodland were filled with relatives and people we loved.

Did we ever spend our days “roaming the neighborhood?”

Fear of abduction, sexual predators or any type of people who would do us harm was totally not in our world. Even ticks and rabid animals did not give us reasons to be afraid. We were warned often to look out for copperheads

and rattlesnakes. Beyond that, the only fear I can recall is Daddy’s wrath should we disobey the rules.

Cousins, nieces and nephews played and worked together. Families joined together to “put up hay” in the summer. We all worked some on the farm, but I have no memories of being worked all that hard. My memories are of golden summer days being outside playing with other children, picking wild berries in season, eating everything we could get our hands on and worrying about absolutely nothing.

One of the funniest stories told about my easy going, laid back mother was a conversation she had with my Aunt Maggie one summer day. My brother Bobby was 5 or 6 years old at the time. Aunt Maggie had one son and was, even for those days, a very protective mother. Bobby was the last in a family of 10.

The children were getting ready to go play in the woods. Bobby was tagging along. “Are you going to let that little young’n go off with those older kids?” Aunt Maggie said to Mama. “They’ll let him get killed in the woods.”

Never missing a beat in what she was doing, Mama answered smiling, “Well, he couldn’t go at a better time.”

It’s a far cry from today when parents are afraid to let school children wait for the school bus unattended. Walking to school is a thing of the past. When I started school we walked a mile and a half to get there. No buses. My parents and my older siblings walked farther than that. There was almost no childhood obesity. Ours was a healthy lifestyle.

I’m thankful for all the wonderful memories I have of a “kinder, gentler” way of life. I don’t know who first said: “God gave us memories, that we might have roses in December.” I’m almost to the December of my life, and I’m thankful for every rose. 🌹

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