

Documenting the Delta's Jewels

Inspired by the memories of her grandmother, photographer and author Alysia Burton Steele spent countless hours interviewing and photographing church elders who grew up in the Mississippi Delta during the Jim Crow era. The result is an oral history filled with stories of courage, perseverance and love. Steele hopes the stories these women share, soon to be released as the book *Delta Jewels*, will start a larger discussion on race relations in the South.



MRS. LILLIAN MATTHEWS, 87, of Indianola, Miss., is still married to her true love, the Rev. David Matthews. "We've been married 62 years, 62 sweet years. My husband is so gentle. They call us the lovebirds."

MRS. FLORIDA SMITH, 88, of Charleston, Miss., encourages young women, in particular, to think before they act. "Just because a person or job looks good, ain't mean it's good for ya," she said.



MRS. DELORIS GRESHAM, 64, of Drew, Miss., said her father was shot in the head because he filled a man's car up with gas, per the man's request. After he filled up the tank, the man said he only asked for \$2's worth. The man left that store and came back with a gun and shot her father. He was acquitted in her father's death.



MRS. TENNIE SELF, 89 of Clarksdale, Miss., was assertive, especially during the civil rights movement. When denied the option of buying a Cadillac in 1949, she drove almost two hours to Memphis, bought the car she wanted and then every day would drive past the local dealership that refused to sell her a car, honked the horn and waved.



MRS. ANNYCE CAMPBELL, 90, was married for 69 years when her husband passed away. When asked what she loved about him, she gently touched the picture frame with his photo, rubbed her finger over his face and quietly said, "Everything."



MRS. VELMA MOORE, 78, of Benoit, Miss., loved her husband. They were married for 49 years when he passed away. She said, "I'm still Mrs. Moore. I be Mrs. Moore until I'm dead and gone." She has 15 children, 145 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren, 26 great-great-grandchildren and 14 great-great-great-grandchildren.

A small Baptist church surrounded by a cotton field on Route 278 East heading toward Clarksdale, Miss.

