

Sundays with TJ

100 Years of Memories on Varner Road

A lot has changed over the 107 years Thomas James “T.J.” Kearney has been on this earth; and the almost 70 years he lived on Varner Road. One important thing remains the same – Sunday dinners. TJ, patriarch of the cotton sharecropping family of Gould, Arkansas is 107 years old, and still in rare form. Varner Road’s witty, wise story-teller extraordinaire still regales friends, family...and traveling salesmen, with the stories of his life.

Janis F. Kearney’s third memoir, *Sundays with TJ*, presents the 107-year old family patriarch from the viewpoint of a daughter still mesmerized by the stories she

grew up hearing. T.J., the last of the nine Kearney children born in southeast Arkansas; is now the oldest resident in Lincoln County, and yet enjoys pulling from his treasure trove of memories of the exciting, but challenging life he’s lived; including the 70 years of raising children on the eight mile gravel byway called Varner Road.

Introduced to great acclaim in her first memoir, *Cotton Field of Dreams*; Janis F. Kearney says TJ is much too large a personality to hold within four walls – or, inside any book not dedicated exclusively to him. “Imagine an amalgamation between Morgan Freeman, and James Stewart – but, pumped up with real-life experiences,” she writes. TJ still regales family and friends with stories and anecdotes of his amazing life – the Presidents he’s voted for – and the one he calls “friend”; the trains he hopped as a child, and the sights he witnessed around the country.

Sundays with TJ revisits old places, old times and people from the author’s past. Kearney threads memories through the prism of the one most important Kearney tradition – Sunday Dinners that began on Varner Road as far back as the author can recall.

It was not until 1982, when T.J. and the 18 Kearney children lost Ethel - TJ’s soul mate, and the children’s center stone for life - that the family truly discover each other, realizing the strength of family...and, how the weekly treks to Varner Road bring purpose and balance to all of their lives.

TJ lives now with fond memories and pride in a life well lived; in the successes of his children –all college graduates, except one – nine attorneys, aides to governors, and a president of the United States of America. As the Kearney children grow older, and their families expand; Sundays with TJ grow increasingly poignant, and increasingly important to keeping the patriarch’s rich legacy alive. The voices and memories in this book include TJ’s, the author’s, and the rest of the Kearney children.

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