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Jenkins, Ammie: Where The Cool Waters Run In Her Memory [1]

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Ammie Jenkins: Where The Cool Waters Run In Her Memory

by David Cecelski. "Listening to History [2]," *News & Observer*. Published 2/10/2008. Copyrighted.
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I visited Ammie Jenkins in Spring Lake, in Cumberland County, 50 miles south of Raleigh. She is one of the state's most dynamic advocates for black farming and landownership. As the founder and executive director of the Sandhills Family Heritage Association, Jenkins leads a grass-roots effort to celebrate and strengthen the heritage of black farming in Cumberland, Lee, Harnett, Richmond, Moore and Hoke counties.

Her passion for the land is personal. Her family lost its farm in 1954. Homeless at the age of 14, she went to work and helped raise six brothers and sisters. Later, she was High Point College's first black student. Before returning home, she had a successful career as a computer programmer and businesswoman.

We talked about her grandfather's farm and her love of the land.

In Ammie Jenkins's words:

> I was born not too far from here in Harnett County, in an area called Overhills. Growing up on the farm was a very happy time. I remember it as being hard work I'm not glamorizing it at all. We worked hard. But we also had those times of pla
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> We were back in the woods. We walked an old dirt road to go to school, and we'd stop along the way and pick huckleberries and plums. And one of my favorite things was to go out in the backyard and look at this great big old field out there.
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> Everybody gravitated towards my granddaddy's place, because he had this big farm. At the end of harvest time, everybody would come over there and take part in a celebration.
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> My granddaddy's name was Neil McRae Sr. He had a brother who played banjo, and some of the other relatives would bring guitars, washboards, gourds, spoons. I can even remember them playing hambone, stomping and clapping and sla
>
> See, we were right next door to the Rockefellers. It was a black neighborhood, but the Rockefellers' land was adjacent to ours. Of course, we were there way before the Rockefellers. Our land was part of 658 acres that my great-granddad ha
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> He and his sons had worked in tar and turpentine to pay for the land. They put up an old ox for collateral. My granddad was one of the youngest of those 20 children. He took care of my great-granddad until he died. Great-granddad lived to b
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> My granddaddy really had everything. He had lots of pears, sweet potatoes, any type of vegetable you could think of. We had a big garden, and we had something we called the New Ground. The New Ground is where he had the sweet pota
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> My granddaddy had a field of nothing but grapes. He was known for making grape wine. He made wine for the Rockefellers, as a matter of fact. Mama would say, 'Wash your feet, ' and we'd get out there in those barrels and we'd stomp the g
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> Of course, they may have sold wine. They may have made and sold liquor. But if you lived in my granddaddy's house, you were going to church. They used to take their wagon, and they'd help the women onto chairs on back and carry them
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> We also had a spring across the road from the house. I loved to hear the spring and the brook running. We used to go down there to get water from the spring. We carried water in jugs and old wooden buckets, because all the water that was
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> We also kept our butter and our milk in that stream. We would take them down there and put them in the spring where the cool water would run over them. That kept everything cold even during the summer.
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> I would love to take you to the homeplace. When my dad died, we lost most of that land. But we still have 10 acres of land there. The only way that I can get to it now is to call Fort Bragg. Fort Bragg has over 10,000 acres of land that used to
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> Mama never went back. But before Mama died, she was thinking about the homeplace. She said she'd just like to see it one more time before she left this Earth. We tried to arrange it, but she got too sick to go. She was hoping that we'd find
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> So my sister, my nephew and I went back to the old homeplace. I was scared to death because I thought about the last time that I went down that road, 23 years before, and the fear that we had. When we lost our land, it was like having our l
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> But then, all of a sudden we just started talking and we remembered all the wonderful things that happened there, all of the good things. That's all we talked about.
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> Standing there at the home site, I don't know, it was something that just flooded over me. All I found to take back to Mama was an old Ball jar, but once we left there, I couldn't forget about the place.

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