This weekend was a real eye-opener for me as I was reminded on several occasions how time was passing by so quickly.

My family and I traveled to south Mississippi this past Saturday for the annual Jackson family reunion. I always look forward to the reunion because it allows me time to show off my own family and mingle with my Paw Paw's side of the bunch.

However, this year was a little different for me because I was reminded of how much older I am getting.

We loaded up the kids and headed down the interstate Saturday morning, ready to see old faces and dive into some great old-fashioned food.

I remembered the route like it was yesterday. We took the Crystal Springs exit off the interstate, headed into Georgetown where the old train engine still sits by the tracks and made a quick pass through Wanilla where Mrs. Wilson's house still stood. The elderly lady who hemmed my pants for me every school season died several years ago, but her home could still be spotted from the highway.

The paper mill still sent that awful smell through the air, but I knew within seconds we would enter Monticello.

I knew I sounded like an old-timer when we first made our way into the city limits, but I couldn't help myself.

"Ever since they put that darn new highway in, I can't tell where I am going," I said, gripping the steering wheel. "Why can't they just leave things alone?"

I finally managed to snake my way around the new concrete passageway to find Nobles Road, where my grandparents lived all my childhood.

The heavy forest that ran along the country road was now completely cleared. The busy hum of the new highway could now be seen in the clear distance.

The brick house of my grandparents was still there. But the red barn that served as storage and a hiding spot for curious kids was gone.

Continuing down the road, I told my husband Jason who lived in every house. It was good to see those same names on a few of the mailboxes.

But it tugged at my heart to pass our own mailbox on the way back. The word "Jackson" was painted over. Now it said "Thames."

The people in that house had no idea which room had been mine. They didn't know about the flag pole that Paw Paw painted every year in the front yard. They were clueless about my faithful dog Roho who was buried under the magnolia tree in the yard.

My tire swing was gone. The old bell that I loved to ring had been removed. Paw Paw's garden

patch was covered with grass.
It was as if we were never there.
Heading through town, I shoved my arms out the window, busy telling Jason what place was what. We stopped at Ward's and had lunch. Their burgers were still just as delicious.
Our old church still stood proudly on the corner. Paw Paw's old high school had been converted to a visitor's center. The Sonic still had teenagers under its covered parking.
But the Piggly Wiggly had been demolished. The old gas station that I bought ice cream at stood vacant. The old furniture factory was abandoned.
I thought about what else was gone as we made our way to the cemetery.
Looking at the dates of my relatives' tombstones, it really hit me how time marches on. I was only 13 years old when my Paw Paw died. Now, I was hovering over his grave with my own two children.
It bothered me to think about all the things that had changed over the years as we made our way to the reunion in Laurel. Places change, people leave us. But we still push on, hanging on to those memories.
It continued to press at my brain until I sat down in the rocking chair at my great aunt's house. Talking about the good old days with my second cousin, I remembered how we would travel to this same house many years ago for the reunion. During my childhood, Paw Paw would always bring us there for the Jackson family reunion.
The highway seemed more lonely now as the interstate could be seen in the distance. A few renovations were made to the house, but you could still see traces of the past. A few places at the dinner table were now empty, however.
But it brought a smile to my house to see my son James playing in the same spot in the yard that I played in when I was a kid. It was funny to see Elsie eating under the carport just as I did when I was little.
Taking a sip of coffee that morning on the front porch, I grinned at James as he ran through the same yard I had found happiness in during the reunions of long ago.
Places may change. People may come and go.
But the good things seem to carry on.