I was in first grade when my grandparents took me to see their old home places in the country. I can remember the temperatures were starting to cool down because we had all the windows down in the old station wagon that afternoon.

With my head hanging out the window, I listened to Maw Maw and Paw Paw share stories about the backroads we were traveling on that day.

The house that my Maw Maw grew up in had been torn down years ago so all that was left was a barren field. But there were still traces of flowering plants and wild ferns lined along the path that led to their house.

The Jackson homeplace was a little more exciting. The family's old land was nestled close to the border of Lawrence and Lincoln counties near the small community of Lucien.

There was a wooden building in the middle of a pasture, topped with a rusty tin roof. The walls were caving in on the old structure, and the roof was starting to bear down its weight on the remaining walls that were already halfway rotted.

But it was clear that it was once a home. It had been renovated and housed by generations of Jacksons through the years. Now it was just an abandoned shell of a former life.

How did they do it back then, I asked myself.

The four room shack somehow housed 12 people. There were my great grandparents Howard and Della Jackson, nine kids and a cousin they took in for good measure.

The Jackson family were a tough bunch. They had to be for the times they lived in.

They were a family of sharecroppers. The older kids carried their load on the farm. The younger kids were even put to work picking crops as soon as they could walk.

They lived off the land. Their meals consisted of whatever they could put together. Their clothes were tattered and worn except for their one "Sunday best" outfit that they wore to church.

All the children had only one pair of shoes, usually bought in the winter time. In the summer, all the kids ran on their bare feet.

They woke up when the sun came up. And they all went to bed when the sun went down.

The icy wind blew up through the holes of their floors. And the sun beat down on the hot tin roof during the summer.

When they got sick, they tended to themselves. There were no doctor's clinics around.

Agreements were made with a handshake. Arguments may have been settled with a fist. And a man's word was as good as a written contract.

When the Great Depression hit, things didn't change that much for the Jackson clan.

"We were already poor," Paw Paw would say with a laugh. "The Depression didn't matter much

for us.”
Pieces of scrap wood and a rusty can provided entertainment for the kids. With no television or radios around, a porch filled with fiddles and banjos might provide the entertainment for the evening. There were no fancy dresses or social engagements.
As an adult with a family of my own now, it amazes me how they were able to pull it off during those days.
When I start to complain or worry, it begins to seem silly when I look at how they pulled it off. They didn’t have a fancy house stocked with new furniture or a “color scheme.” Their closets weren’t lined with designer clothes or mountains of shoes. Their children’s rooms weren’t filled with toys, books and video games. They didn’t take expensive vacations. They didn’t throw big birthday parties that were equal to a week’s paycheck.
They didn’t overdo it.
But they did have a roof over their head, clothes on their back and food on the table.
Times were tough, but they all loved each other and took care of each other. Family was all that mattered.
When Maw Maw and Paw Paw would share stories of their childhood with me, I can remember that they never complained about it.
They would give me the details of working in fields, slim food pickings or other hardships. But I think it was mostly done to show me how blessed I was as a child to have what I had.
They were a rare breed, and I don’t think they make people like them anymore.
I only pray that my own house will hold the love and memories that theirs did in a time when it may have been hard to smile through it.
If a little shack can hold such love and family pride, then there’s hope for every home in our community.