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3 local brothers reminisce of life in Jocassee Valley

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By Carlos Galarza (Contact / Staff Bio)
March 13, 2009 - 10:17 p.m. EST

Thanks to a popular segment on CNN Headline News, many Americans caught a glimpse into "A Lost World" — the underwater remains of what once was a carefree [retreat](#) for many in a place called Jocassee Valley.

CNN's "News to Me," hosted by Eric Lanford, presented footage of a [hotel](#) buried 300 feet below Lake Jocassee that was videotaped by diver Bill Routh. During the segment aired three weeks ago, Lanford also interviewed Debbie Fletcher, a part-time visitor of the valley who wrote "Jocassee Remembered," a photo-filled journey to a way of life secluded by mountains and rivers.

Watching the segment, mesmerized by images that brought back vivid memories were three local brothers who used to spend summers playing, fishing, swimming and making mischief with many of the colorful characters that lived and worked in the valley.

Wayne McCall's eyes light like a kid who's been caught with his hand in the cookie jar as he reminisces about a way of life in the 1960s that few remember. The first-term member of the Oconee County Council still is able to share those moments with his younger brothers, Harry and Keller. They wink, laugh and shake their heads as they tell stories not quite captured in Fletcher's book.

They talk about pushing their bicycles up a steep winding hill, reaching the top and come dashing down like daredevils. Sometimes, they'd have to dodge and pass a car along the way.

"We'd go so fast it would pull tears away from your eyes," Harry McCall would say, squinting his eyes with a big smile on his face.

The brothers would come to the valley in the summer when school was out where they lived near Charleston. Their father drove them to Jocassee Valley on weekends to stay at the family's summer home. There they would be under the watchful eye of their Aunt Lucy Brown, who owned and operated Camp Jocassee for girls.

Although many boys were tempted to get a glimpse at the many well-to-do girls who would come up from Miami to spend their summers at Camp Jocassee, few dared to do so. Sarah Godbold, one of Aunt Lucy's physical fitness experts employed at the camp had a reputation for being quick on the trigger with a rifle.

"She wasn't afraid to use it," Wayne McCall said. "Nobody messed around the camp."

Although they saw Debbie Fletcher occasionally at the valley, the McCall brothers say Claudia Whitmire Hembree, who was raised there, is more authoritative in her book, "Jocassee Valley."

However, not even Hembree's book is able to capture many of the insights the McCall brothers were privy to.

Even the eyes of the youngest brother, Keller McCall, glisten at the mention of the name Thomps Hinkle.

He taught the boys how to get the best bait for fishing, where to fish, how to "hook and cook 'em."

He also taught the boys a little about moonshine.

Photo

[Click on photo to enlarge](#)



Photo courtesy of McCall brothers

From left: Harry, Wayne and Keller McCall return from a successful fishing expedition with neighbor Winifred Hinkle. Two rivers converged into the Jocassee Valley to create a hub of recreational activity in the summer.

Photo

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Photo courtesy of McCall brothers

A handful of residential homes such as this one were perched on the hills of Jocassee Valley in the 1960s. Duke Energy flooded the valley in the early 1970s to create majestic Lake Jocassee.

Photo

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Wayne McCall said Jocassee Valley boomed during prohibition. In fact, he said it became such a notorious spot for buying booze that it spawned several hotels.

Wayne McCall said he was drafted into service in 1969 and missed the commotion when it was announced that Duke Energy planned to dam the rivers and flood Jocassee Valley in 1970.

Harry and Keller saw the waters rise. They'd get on a boat and drift past rooftops trying to topple chimneys.

For them, it was the end of good old days.



Carlos Galarza

The McCall brothers, from left, Keller, Harry and Wayne, grew up near Charleston but spent their summers at their family's summer home in the Jocassee Valley before it was flooded to create Lake Jocassee in 1970.

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