

Janie Grant showed how to be a 'good soul'

I loved Mrs. Janie Grant. Lots of people did.

She and her roadside vegetable stand were Hilton Head Island institutions. I will miss her — and her peach brandy.

I tried to get her recipe because my peach cobbler just isn't the same without a little bit of her peach brandy. But she claimed it was her secret recipe. She kept a little cooler in her vegetable stand with recycled pint bottles filled with the brandy. She said she and some other ladies had a "sipping society." They got dressed up on Monday nights and sipped peach brandy. I asked her, "Did you all get drunk?" She was insulted. "We are church ladies," she said. "There is no alcohol in my brandy." But she said they laughed a lot.

She also made wonderful primitive-style quilts. I brought the curator of the S.C. State Museum down to visit her and to look at her quilts. He bought two for the museum's permanent collection and one for himself. I keep mine in the mountains at my house in North Carolina, and it makes my heart feel good when I see my children and grandchildren wrapping themselves in one of Mrs. Grant's quilts.

She told someone I took to her place that I was a "good soul." I think it's the best compliment I ever had. She was a good soul. And I'm sure she has already set up a vegetable stand by the main road in Heaven.

Joe Adams
Hilton Head Island

Homegrown Hospitality

Native islander shares the bounty of the land

Because of her arthritis, Janie Grant can't fall on her knees anymore. But she can sit on the side of the bed and pray. And that's what she does each morning, thanking God for giving her another day. At the age of 89, Grant is practically an island institution and certainly a local treasure. She's the smiling face behind Grant's Vegetable Stand and Flea Market on Highway 278, just north of Palmetto Dunes.

Born and raised on Hilton Head Island, Grant's Lowcountry roots run deep. She is the oldest living descendant of James Aiken, a slave who was sold to American cotton farmers along the South Carolina coast. Aiken, his wife and baby daughter fled Pinckney Island by boat and came to Hilton Head Island, settling in an area known as Brownsville. The couple raised 5 children, including Grant's father, William.

The daughter of William Aiken and Maybelle Singleton Aiken, Janie Aiken married James Grant, Sr., and bore nine children (seven girls and two boys). Her husband farmed for a living, and when he passed away, Janie carried on. Besides tending the farm and raising her family, Grant said she worked for numerous peo-

ple on the island, including the Hilton Head Company and the Fraser family.

According to Grant, the vegetable stand was originally operated by her two youngest daughters when they were in elementary school, around the ages of nine and eleven. They ran the stand until they started college. Both went on to become school teachers and have since retired.

Grant took over the vegetable stand 35 years ago and is still "keeping the memory," she said. She plants her garden with just a few rows of everything, including corn, tomatoes, peas, butter beans, squash, cucumber, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, watermelon and cantaloupe. "These days, I can't do like I used to, but I get help from my farmer friends," she explained.

Besides home-grown vegetables, Grant sells used clothing, much of which is handmade and has been contributed by family members. She recently donated what she had on hand to needy families from the hurricane ravaged gulf coast area.

As she sits in her stand each day, shelling peas and snapping beans, Grant said she marvels at the pace of the cars, motorcycles, and scooters that go by. To

pass the time, she enjoys daytime television, particularly game shows such as Wheel of Fortune, Who Wants to be a Millionaire and The Price is Right. "I can answer some of the questions," she said, adding that she feels sorry for contestants who lose. "It's fun for me when they win."

The price is always right at Grant's vegetable stand, because she's not in it for the money. "I'm retired," Grant said, explaining that operating the stand gives her something productive to do with her time and is a wonderful way to meet people. Her customers are a mix of islanders and visitors, including many loyal regulars who have known her for years.

The adjacent vegetable stand is operated by Gertrude Grant, relative by marriage to Grant's husband's nephew. Each lady has her own garden, but the competition is nothing short of friendly. "When I don't have something, I send the customers to her, and she does the same," said Grant. "Her children help her like mine help me. It's all in the family."

At the end of the day, Grant is happy to put the windows down and get out to water the garden. Her secret to success? "There's not much to it," she said. "You



True Islander, Janie Grant at her Hwy. 278/Roadside Vegetable Stand. Freshly shelled field peas please! Oh & some okra too!

just put the seeds in the ground and let the good Lord take care of the rest."

Grant's Market is typically open through Thanksgiving and sometimes beyond, depending on the weather and other personal circumstances. If you miss out on this year's bounty, be sure to stop by in the spring. Say hello to Mrs. Grant and get a taste of homegrown hospitality.

Linda Hopkins