

# Joyce (Sewell) Smith

## Remembering when the lights came on...

Joyce (Sewell) Smith was just 8 years old when her life changed in a way she would never forget. She moved from St. Louis—a city where electricity was simply a part of their everyday life—to the rural community of Bland, where modern conveniences were far from guaranteed. Joyce’s parents owned a modern rooming house in St. Louis, and electricity had always been part of her world. But when her parents purchased land in Bland, Joyce, her mother, and her two sisters—one of them just a baby—settled into a small country home without electricity or running water. Joyce’s father continued working in the city, making the long drive home on weekends to be with his family.

For a young girl accustomed to city living, the adjustment was unforgettable. Joyce remembers an Ashley wood stove in the living room where her mother cooked meals, kerosene lamps that lit the house, and a cistern that supplied their water. She recalls watching her mother scrub clothes by hand on a washboard at the cistern, then hang them over the fence to dry.

There was no refrigerator, so Joyce’s mother canned much of their food. When cold storage was needed, food could be placed in a container and lowered into the well. It worked—but it was a hassle, and leftovers were rare. A radio sat on the living room table, powered by a large battery, offering a connection to the outside world.

Years later, when they had electricity run to their rural home, it arrived in the simplest way—a single light bulb in a closet, turned on by a pull chain. More lights followed, and eventually Joyce’s father brought a refrigerator from one of the family’s rooming houses in the city. One of the last major improvements was indoor plumbing. Until then, the outhouse served the family’s needs. Coming from a modern city home to a rural house without electricity or water required a tremendous adjustment—especially for Joyce’s mother, raising three young daughters under those conditions. Yet those early years left a lasting impression.

Now in her 90’s, Joyce vividly recalls those memories and the transformation she witnessed firsthand as electricity and modern conveniences slowly became part of rural life. She graduated from Bland High School in 1953, carrying with her a lifetime of perspective shaped by both city lights and country living.

