

## Survivors remember 1967 loss of sisters, friends

By Rebekah Davis

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“They was real sweet girls, they both was,” Steve Maples says. “They had their whole life ahead of them. They had plans.”

Nearly half a century after the wreck that claimed the lives of his sisters, 15-year-old Mamie Lou and 14-year-old Mary Frances, along with their friend, 19-year-old David Otis Grigsby, Maples still chokes up when he talks about that night.

Maples was driving the car ahead of them, with his mother and his siblings Dwight, Vandora and Jacqueline, on their way back to their home in Lester after a Round Island Missionary Association revival at Little Zion M.B. Church that Saturday night, when two cars came barreling down the road toward them, drag racing, and narrowly missed them before one hit Grigsby’s car.

“I told Mama I seen something in the side mirror and the car was turned over. Mama said, ‘Don’t turn around, it’ll be bad luck and you will make something bad happen,’ but I turned around anyway and headed back down there and man. Mmm, mmm, mmm. Mama jumped out, people were hollering and crying everywhere... I jumped out of the car and when I went down by the wreck I seen daddy sitting on the ground, behind Otis and them, rocking Frances, her body laying in his lap. I said, ‘Daddy, is she alright?’ and he said, ‘She’s just broke. Everything, she’s just broke,’” Maples says.

Maples, along with three others who were there that night – sister Jacqueline Davis and friends Don Horton and Wade White – shared their experiences and memories after a recent article in *The Valley Star* shared the story of the teens’ triple funeral. They said the story wasn’t related in the Sept. 26, 1967 *Limestone Democrat* exactly the way it happened; namely, that Grigsby had not pulled his car into the left lane of Lucas Ferry Road, causing the wreck. They said Grigsby was driving in the right lane, Horton had pulled beside him on the side of the road, and that the wreck happened when two cars drag racing came from the other direction and hit them.

“We had been to church at the Round Island Missionary revival and it was over,” Horton said. “When we left, I told Wade, let’s get something to eat, so I wanted to find out where we were going. I pulled off the road onto the grass, and Otis pulled up beside me. Mamie Lou rolled the window down; I asked where we were going, and then Bam! They come over hill and all I seen was headlights.”

“All I really remember is lights and Mama saying, ‘They gonna hit my kids, they gonna hit my kids!’” says Davis, who was only 6 at the time. “I can’t remember looking back and seeing the accident, but I did look back saw lights. It was a blur, but I know what Mama and them said, that some people were racing and came over the hill.”

Maples grabbed Grigsby’s sister, 17-year-old Carolyn, and another of his sisters, 17-year-old Alma Jean, out of the wreckage.

“I put them in the station wagon, laid Jean in the back, and flew to the hospital,” he says.

The ambulance arrived with Grigsby, Mamie Lou and Frances, and later a nurse, spotting him in the hallway, asked if he knew who they were.

“I told her who they were, and how old they were, except I didn’t know Otis’ date of birth,”

Maples says. “She asked me how I knew them and I told her that Mamie Lou was my sister, and Frances was my sister, and Otis was one of my best friends. She just cried. She hated that she had asked me to identify them, and she told me she was truly sorry. I went across the hall to the bathroom and just about fell out.”

Maples remembered that he had teased Mamie Lou about Grigsby, but she really liked him and they were just starting to date.

“She was a regular teenager, real quiet, you didn’t hear a whole lot out of her,” he says. “Frances could draw. They were both sisters, all right there together, just real good sisters.”

“Frances played with me,” Davis recalls. “She was a good artist, real talented in crafts. She made a bouquet out of flowers out of the field.”

“Otis was my best friend,” Horton says. “If he went somewhere I was with him. He was somebody that was likeable, just a good friend. No matter what you needed, he would help.”

“I didn’t know him to drink, smoke, or anything,” White adds.

“We were classmates, had home room together and everything,” Horton says. “He was person everyone liked. He had just been drafted in 1967 and never got a chance to go.”

The death of the three teens saddened the entire community, many of whom still remember them today.

“Everybody at Trinity knew them,” White says. “They had it at the gym and it was packed. They turned folks away.”

All three teens were laid to rest in Legg Cemetery. When the girls’ mother, Annie Will Maples, was living, she would visit their graves; now she and their father are buried by their side.

“I go down to the cemetery sometimes, but it’s hard,” Maples says. “All the sudden they were gone.”

#### **About the Archives:**

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