

# Graetz: 'A Look into the Rear View Mirror'

By SUSIE JAMES

For the Commonwealth

**VAIDEN** — There are elements of a way of life that likely will not come our way again in Carolyn Sue Noah Graetz' homespun, sometimes intense, paperback memoir, "A Look into the Rear View Mirror."

In writing her 213-page book, Graetz repeats genealogical information, linking the life and times of some of her ancestors to events of the wider world. This is a good method that might invite borrowing from any number of amateur genealogists who take the plunge Graetz did and do some volumes.

Granted, there's a lot Graetz didn't include. During a recent trip from New Orleans, where she's mostly lived since leaving Vaiden for nursing school at the famed Tuero Infirmary after high school graduation in 1956, Graetz strongly hinted there's going to be a revised second printing of her current offering, if not a second volume.

Graetz describes growing up in rural Carroll County. Until she was



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15, her family's market town was Vaiden, before the family moved into the town in the fall of 1954. In writing about this, Graetz is leaving a legacy for her own descendants as well as to the succeeding generations of other families who might

like to learn how different things were.

In her telling, Graetz often charms, and the reader might enjoy even more anecdotes. This aspect of her writing might inspire an entire "Foxfire"-like series, in fact, with

**The daughter of Robert and Dolie Noah, Carolyn Sue Noah Graetz grew up hard-scrabble, first in rural communities in southern Carroll County, and then in Vaiden. She shares some of her life's experiences in a memoir, "A Look into the Rear View Mirror." Here, she signs a copy of the trade paperback for a fan.**

contributions sought from old-timers who grew up plowing mules, walking to the country store, milking cows by hand before catching the school bus weekday mornings, using an outhouse, and making moonshine whiskey.

She also sometimes makes for head-scratching, as when she tells about hog-killing time. Maybe Graetz didn't mean to suggest on page 124 that cracklings are the result of boiling the skin of a hog in hot water in the old black iron pot the Noahs used in other aspects of farm life. It's the way she comes off, however.

"The skin of the hog was boiled in hot water in the heavy black iron pot we used for heating water for washing clothes. The resulting boiled cracklings produced our lard. At first the lard was a thick liquid. It solidified. This lard and the ham bones were used to season our turnip greens, string beans, squash, black-eyed peas, and corn on the cob or to fry chicken and everything else that we ate," Graetz recalled.

Cracklings would've come from chunks of hog fat and skin put into that cast iron pot, all right, but without the addition of water. The



Diane Jones

It's good to come home again when you've gotten a book published, Carolyn Sue Noah Graetz discovered recently. Graetz, a native of the Vaiden area, now lives in New Orleans. Graetz, extreme right, chatted with, from left, high school chums Joyce Howard Herod of Carmack, Martha Mann Bailey of McCaskey and Margaret Mann Griffin of Vaiden during a booksigning tour in Vaiden.

## Book

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resulting grease would've been likely enough to pop out onto the people constantly stirring the chunks with long, wooden paddles so they wouldn't burn without mixing grease and water.

The fat and skin chunks did "boil down," and the lard would be strained into containers; the cracklings, reserved and used, too.

While this writer shares much of a way of life gone by, Graetz injects enough of the reality factor, both good and bad, to neutralize sentimentality.

"A Look into the Bear View Mirror" said Vaiden historian Frances "Bud" Welch, "is a cute book."

Graetz also writes about her experiences in nursing school, a world away from Vaiden.

Ida Dunn Alderman of Greenwood, a classmate from Vaiden days, wrote a blurb for Graetz' dust jacket: "I have really enjoyed reading your book. I believe that you can sell a book to half of the people in Carroll County," Alderman said.

Graetz's homegrown publishing house is called "Magnolia" Press.

"It's because I live in Louisiana, which has magnolia as its state flower, and I'm from Mississippi, which is 'the Magnolia State,'" Graetz said.