

The WPA Life Histories Collection

[In-Laws and T. B.'s]

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: IN-LAWS AND T.B.'S

Date of First Writing March 9, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Carrie Johnson


Fictitious Name Jane Carrol

Street Address House No. 1400 1/2 (known just as 1400 Block)

Place Winnsboro Mills Winnsboro S. C.

Occupation Winnsboro Mills - Runs sides in Cardroom

Name of Writer Lucile Clarke Ford



"Good morning! Come inside! I was just sitting here on the doorsteps minding Jacqueline to keep her out of the street. She's just four years old and wants to be out of doors all the time. On rainy days, we have to keep her in. You say you just as soon sit here as to go inside? This is where I sit all the time in good weather. You can sit here on this porch in the sun all the winter in the mornings. In summer, it is shady and cool in the afternoons. Here's where our neighbors sit when they come by."

Jane got up from the steps and took one of the chairs close to where I was seated. The porch, about eight feet across and five feet deep, with a substantial banister railing around it, was exactly like the one on the opposite side of the duplex house. The sage-green weatherboarded porch wall gave a pleasing background for Jane's golden blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair, naturally pink complexion. She wore a flowered cotton print, crisply starched and ironed.

"I have been here with Thelma, my sister, a week," Jane continued. "I always stay over here with her and her husband, Toney, when Bill's gone. He goes about a lot. He's not satisfied long anywhere. I know he oughter go on back to the State Park and stay till he is cured. But he don't want to stay there. He just stayed five months and left there on his own. They wanted him to stay eighteen months, or just as long as it would take to cure him. They are trying to get him back. The nurses tell me it's hard to get them back when they leave like that. They want you to sign up for eighteen months. If you are not cured in that time, you sign again for another eighteen months. No, it wasn't that he was mistreated. Bill said they waited on him and done for him same as if he was a baby. He just didn't like to stay there.

"Bill's Ma is the same way. Dr. Bryson and the health nurses sent her to State Park. They told her she'd oughter stay eighteen months anyhow. You want to know how long she was there? It was three or four weeks. I disremember which. They have all moved to a farm in Dutch Fork, Lexington County. I reckon she thought the people there didn't know nor care if she had the T.B.'s or not. So she up and left that State Park. Looks like she don't care nothing at all about herself. She had all sorts of encouragements to go and then didn't stay.

"Bill's family always lived on farms. They didn't own their land, just rented. They were born and raised in Lexington County, the Dutch Fork section. It is a good farming county. They moved to Winnsboro Mill village about eight or nine years ago. While they lived here, they moved three times that I knew of.

"They lived on the hill once, then moved into the little house on the edge of the mill village. That house belongs to Dr. McCants. There's where they stayed three or four years. They moved over into the Mexico settlement and lived there for several years. It's hard to rent a house here when a family that has had T. B.'s has lived in it. [Frew?], the house man, gave that house to three different families before anybody lived in it. The ones that moved in fumigated it themselves. But the outside mill hands has already cleaned it up good. A body never knows when they are moving from place to place whose been in that house and what they have died of.

"I wish I could get rooms here on the hill where I could have a bathroom, lights, and water. We have a sanitary privy outside there in Mexico. There is a house near us that has a faucet in the back yard. I have to get my water from there. I do enjoy the bathroom here at Thelma's. The houses over in Mexico belongs to different men uptown. They ain't much houses, and nothing's around them like the grass and shrubbery the mill houses have around them. I just rent two rooms, and it costs me \$1.25 a week. They ain't big enough to cuss a cat in. Look like they ain't never [been?] fixed up. I have to sleep in one room, and we cook, eat, and sit in the other. Thelma and Toney just pay fifty cents every week for each room. She has two rooms and the bathroom and this porch. Thelma can have a garden here in her back lot, but she don't have one. All of us go to the mill. Then we do all the work here together. When I stay here, I help with Jacqueline and the work in the house, too. I don't pay any board. There's plenty of room in the bedroom for Thelma and Toney and Jacqueline. It's cool in the summer.

"I have to be at the mill at four o'clock every afternoon and stay there till twelve at night. We can buy a supper at the mill. I eat somewhere between six-thirty and eight o'clock at night. Sometimes, when I go to bed at twelve, I don't get up next morning till ten-thirty. I do get up at six some mornings, because I like to eat breakfast with the rest. It tastes better, and I eat more. But I hardly ever go back to bed after I get up that early. At night, I get a glass of milk, some crackers, and maybe candy.

"I don't mind the work at night. I can't go to the picture show. The church don't like for us to go to pictures. I do hate to miss the [Mother's?] Club, though. That's such a help to the people. They have good times when they meet and sew. When a body that is down and out has a baby, they will send them clothes. I have known them to give a whole outfit for a baby, when a family was in bad. Seems like all women not working at night would go to the Mother's Club. But they don't care so much about going, and those that work at night have to give up such as that.

"There's the Community House, I guess it's more for men. If women visit the sick and do for the people that need them, it will give them plenty to do. Bill has always had a good job, and I've been lucky, too. But last year, when Bill was so sick and our little baby took sick and died so suddenly, the mill was laying off hands, and I couldn't get nothing to do. There was plenty that didn't have work in the mill. I signed up and got some of the Government work.

"First thing, I got a notice to go to the NYA. Mrs. Ford was foreman. A crowd of girls, most of them younger than me, sewed every day. We worked by the Government hours. That was the easiest work ever I did. We could sew on whatever materials Mrs. Ford could get for us. Just as luck would have it, Mrs. Wright, they called her attendance officer for the schools, brought bolts and bolts of the prettiest soft cotton cloth. It was pink, blue, peach, and lavender. She wanted baby clothes made. She said that after she would get clothes enough to go around in a big family, there would generally be a new baby and no clothes and no money to spare for it.


"Did I enjoy sewing on them baby clothes? Well, I guess! Looks like after my baby had died, I couldn't have sewed on baby clothes. But I enjoyed making up all kinds of little dresses, sacks, wrappers, and everything. Trouble was, I didn't make but five dollars and twenty-five cents a week, and we couldn't work straight time. Had to work a week and lay off a week. That gave me ten dollars and fifty cents a month to live on. Then Bill left the State Park. When the nurses come to see me, I promised them we would sleep in separate rooms. They said I would catch T.B.'s from him and that maybe another baby would come and be sickly and die like our little boy did. We couldn't hardly get on with Bill not working. My people helped us some. His people couldn't do much for us. So many of them are sick about all the time. Sickliest people ever you saw. My folks, the Waters ain't that way.

"The Government workers helped to get me on WPA. I was put to work at the Potato House, they called it. We sewed there, making rugs and quilts. I made twenty-one dollars a month. They sent for me to come back to the mill, when they started up full time in August. I make ten dollars a week. That's more than I could make at Government work. Back when I first learned to run sides, I could make as much as fourteen dollars a week. With the new stretch-out system and letting several work on the same job, ten dollars is as much as I ever make now. Bill and me both have to get on with that. It takes it, too, when house rent is paid and groceries and medicine is bought. I don't have a cent left to buy clothes or furniture or anything for the house. I do have to buy Bill clothes and a suit once in awhile. I always buy on the installment plan and pay as I can. I have learned I can get on without buying clothes. I used to get a new dress about everytime I got a check. I have been wearing my old dresses two years.

"If the rest of the people didn't buy no more than we do, Mr. Belk's and all the other dry goods stores in Winnsboro would close up. Mr. Propst did close in the hard times. They said he went into bankrupt. None of us here at the mills dress like we used to. You can see women wearing a plain cotton print out around the neighborhood now, even down to wives of boss men. Before the hard times, we wouldn't go nowhere without a good silk or satin dress on, summer and winter. But I'm thankful I have my health and can work. We never have had a collection taken for us. Everybody was having it hard when our baby died. I don't know what we would have done along about then if I hadn't had that Government work. Of course, they do say there is always a way, but I sure have been thankful for that work and my health.

"I like to eat, and I want my three meals a day. We just about have the same kind of breakfast every day. Most of the time it's grits, eggs toast, and coffee. Sometimes we have bacon or ham, if we feel like we can afford it. Once in a while we get steak for our dinner. When I stayed in that house in Mexico and took care of Bill, I couldn't eat any breakfast. [Thelma's?] been making me stay here, and we fix up and eat all kind of good things. But you can look at her and see she gets plenty to eat. Our people, the Walters, always had a plenty to eat and didn't have much sickness.

"My folks lived here about nine years. This is where I met Bill. We were married here. Pa worked in the cardroom. He got sick just when they were



laying off hands, and he was not taken back on his work after he got well. He got thirteen weeks' pay from insurance the mill gives people when they are sick. That thirteen weeks he got about seven dollars and fifty cents a week. That was a help, but not what he needed. He is not but fifty-five or fifty-six years old, but he's about done for in the mill. Now he's trying to learn something else. He's moved to a farm near Lancaster. He thinks he will like it.

"Mill work is all I know, and I don't believe I could do anything else. I like my job and try to run it the best I can. I can't stand to be without work, and, even when I don't get so much, I like my regular pay check coming. If I tried it out in the country, I know I'd die. It seems so quiet and lonely. I like to see people going and coming and to have somewhere to go myself. Here we have nice yards with green grass, shrubbery, flowers and trees, all planted by the mill company, and they keep it up. Thelma don't try to have a garden and chickens, but she does have a cow and pigs. They killed a pig not long ago. It's a lot of help.

"None of us have a car. There's so many accidents and so many people getting killed, I don't even want one. I couldn't never pay for a car out of what I make. Some people that have them and drive so much, I don't see how they make it on their pay. You can get on here without one. Can get a taxi uptown for ten cents. It's twenty cents a round trip. But I don't mind walking; I never expect to own a home, either. I know we will always have to rent. But my people has always rented, and all of Bill's people too, and they always got on.

"Bill's people have so much sickness all the time, I don't visit there. I'd rather be with my own folks. His mother coughs and spits up all the time. But she goes right on about the house work, cooking and everything. Bill's father is named Charlie Johnson. He has a brother, Clyde, about forty years old. He was sent to State Park, but wouldn't stay. His wife is dead. She got right weakly and died after she had been married to him a few years. I ain't kept up with them. I don't know whether any of her children are living yet or not. There's Pat's family, he is Bill's brother living at Rockton. The health nurses tested them and say none of them have T.B.'s. He has work here in the mill. There's another brother, Harry, about sixteen years old. He is at home.

"Bill's sister, Edna, is fourteen years old. She has T.B.'s and is the only one of that family that stays at State Park. She's been there a year on March the 19. When she went there last year, she weighed eighty-five pounds. Looked just

like a bar of soap after a day's washing. You just oughter see her now. Thelma and me got a chance to go to see her Sunday. She weighs one hundred and five pounds now. She didn't cough before she went there, but she was bad to have colds and was thin. She wouldn't eat nothing, either. Now she eats. I wish you could see the tray full of vittles she eat Sunday while we was there. She says they have good stuff like that all the time. She had chicken and ice cream. Sometimes they have ham and steak. And she drinks milk three times a day. They don't give her medicine often. But when they do have to give it to her, she says they put it in her vittles and she don't know she's taking it. She told us about having to take gas. It's put in with a big needle. I don't know what it means. You may know. It has 200 c.c. on it. She says it don't hurt. She has to take it about twice a week.

"They wear pajamas at State Park. She took hers with her. She also took a comb, a brush, a tooth brush, a house coat, and bedroom slippers. The State Park furnishes all the sheets, cover, towels, and soap. Mr. Turner, the superintendent of the school here, has been such a help to her. He had to go to a place called Oteen, in North Carolina, after he was gassed in the war. He stayed there until he was cured. He told Edna that still and yet he goes to bed and rests when he gets home every day. Edna says she is going to stay at State Park till she is cured.

"Bill didn't look thin and bad when they took him to State Park. He's tall and fine looking, about three inches taller than I am. He lied about his age. He wasn't but seventeen when we married two years ago. I was nineteen. He says he was afraid I wouldn't have married him if I had known his age. He ain't but nineteen now.

"I can vote this year, being as I am twenty-one. I don't care nothing about it, but it might help somebody else if I vote. That's one thing my pa never talked. He voted, and I never have heard him say a time who he was going to vote for.

"Mr. Ellenberg preaches at the Holiness Baptist Church. And I never hear him say a thing against women voting. I like to go to church, but I don't pay much to the church. I ain't able to.