

Miemy Johnson

Interview with Miemy Johnson, 82 years old

—*W.W. Dixon, Winnsboro, S.C.*

Miemy Johnson has no particular place of abode. She is a transient among her children, kin people, and friends. In whatever home she may be temporarily an occupant, she does the cooking and family washing.

"I knowed when dat bunty rooster hopped in de door, flap his wings and crowed, dis mornin', dat us gonna have company today. I told Sam so befo' he left here. Him laugh and say: 'Ma, dat bunty rooster is a big liar sometime. Maybe him just wanna recommend hisself to you and beat de pig to de slop bucket dat you ain't carried out to de pen yet.' It's sure glad dat you come, for it'll show Sam dat dat chicken never told a lie.

"Set down dere and let me fetch you a plate of boil peanuts, which I just is set off de fire. You lak them? Glad you do, honey. Most white folks love them dat way, 'stead of parched. How you been? You sure is growed since de last day I clap my eyes on you. How's I been? Poorly. It's just a waitin' for de chariot to carry me home!

"Well, us done cut down de underbrush, now let us git into de new ground. You just wanna talk 'bout me and what happen to me all 'long de last eighty years? Dat's some big field to go over.

"My pappy was name Henry. My mammy name Ceily. They both b'long to old Marse Johnnie Mobley, but my pappy's pappy b'long to de Johnson's; they's big white folks on de Catawba River side of de county. They sold deir plantation and some of de slaves, to old marster and his daughter, Miss Nancy. She was de widow Thompson befo' her marry dat Kentucky hoss drover, Marse Jim Jones.

"Freedom come. My pappy 'membered de Johnson's and took dat for his name. I never been able to git 'way from dat name. I marry little Phil Johnson. My brudder was Adam Johnson and my sister was Easter. Her marry Allan Foster.

"My husband and me live in de old Mobley quarter, three miles southwest of Woodward and just 'bout a quarter of a mile from where you settin' dere a writin' right now. Long as him live, him was de carriage driver for de Mobeys. He 'tend Fellowship Church. All de Mobeys done dead or moved 'way. Dere is nothin' left to tell de tale but dat cemetery you passed, comin' 'long down here and de ghosts dat shiver 'round dere in de nighttime. Whenever it snow, them ghosts have been seen travelin' down de road and up de avenue to Cedar Shades. You know dat's 'bout a quarter of a mile farther down de road from where Marse Johnnie's brudder, James Mobley, lived. Fine old house dere yet, but just colored folks live in it.

"Our chillun was Roxanna, Malinda, Ben, Mary, Waddell, Queen Elizabeth, Russell, Pearly, Thomasine, Helen, Alberta, Maggie, Mary Jane, Willie, Sam and Roy. Had de easiest birth pains when, to my big surprise, de twins, Sam and Roy come. Dat been forty years ago last July. I 'members well, dat de twins was born on a Wednesday and I walk to Red Hill Church de very nex' Sunday. Rev. Richard Cook was de preacher. Him didn't see me a settin' in de church and he pray for me by name, as bein' in de perils of childbirth. And bless God, me right dere in dat church a goin' 'long wid de rest of them a singin': 'Amazin' Grace How Sweet De Sound Dat Saved A Wretch Lak Me'. I was a proud wretch dat day as sure's you born!

"Does I 'member anything 'bout de earthquake? Jesus my Lord, yes! Us was holdin' a revival meetin' in Red Hill dat night! It was a moonlight Tuesday night. Brother Stevenson and Brother Moore was a helpin' Brother Richard Cook carry on de meetin'. It was de last day of August, in '86. Brother Moore had preached, de choir had sung a hymn, and Brother Stevenson was in de middle of a prayer. Him said sumpin' 'bout de devil goin' 'round lak a roarin' lion a seekin' folks for to devour. Then de roarin' was heard. De church commence to crack and shake and rock. Then all de folks holler: 'Oh Lordy.' They run out dat church and some took up de big road to de depot at Woodward. Some fell down in de moonlight and cry and pray. Brother Cook say de Bible says: 'Bow down, or kneel or fall on your

face befo' de Lord'. Then he say: 'Let us all fall on our faces dis time.' Us did and each one of them preachers pray. 'Bout time they git through, us see a rider on a milk white hoss a gallopin' up to de church wid de white mane and tail of dat hoss a wavin' and shinin' in de moonlight. De people went wild wid fear and scream at de top of deir voices; 'It's de white hoss wid his rider of de book of Revelations goin' forth, conquerin' and to conquer.' They bust forth in dat mighty spiritual 'Oh Run Here, Believer, Run Here, Oh Sinner Your House On Fire! Oh Sinner Your House On Fire!' They run and surround de white hoss and his rider and what you reckon? Us find out it was just Marse Ed Woodward on his white hoss, John, comin' back from courtin' my young mistress, Tillie Mobley, dat him marry de nex' Christmas.

"Marse Ed got down off dat hoss when us beg him to stay wid us. It's a pow'ful comfort to have a brave white man 'round at sich a time 'mongst a passle of terrified niggers, I tells you! And to think Marse Ed done dead.

"You goin' now? You ain't eat all your peanuts. Put them in your pocket and eat them on de way to de Boro. Goodbye—I 'spect I'll git to glory befo' you does. If I does, I'll be dere a waitin' wid a glad hand and a glad voice to welcome you to de everlastin' home."

Ella Kelly

Interview with Ella Kelly, 81 years old

—*W.W. Dixon, Winnsboro, S.C.*

"Yas sir, I was born a slave of Mr. Tom Rabb, they call him black Tom Rabb, 'cause dere was two other Tom Rabbs. Marster Tom's hair was jet black and even when he shave, whisker roots so black face 'pear black. Yas sir, I come to birth on his place two or three miles from Monticello in de country, so I did. They say de year was de year President Buchanan was president, though I dunno nuttin' 'bout dat.

"My pappy name Henry Woodward, and b'long to old preacher Beelie Woodward's son, John. But all dis was just what I heard them say 'bout it. My mammy name Ella. She was de cook. I too little to work in slavery time, just hang 'round kitchen wid mammy, tote water and pick up chips, is all de work I done I 'members.

"Money? Help me Jesus, No. How could I ever see it? In de kitchen I see none, and how I see money any where else, your honor? Nigger never had none! I ain't got any money now, long time since I see any money.

"What did us eat? Dat's somethin' I knows 'bout. My mammy de cook for de white folks, wasn't I right dere at her apron strings all de time? Eat what de white folks eat, all de time, sho' I did! Too little to 'member much what slavery was like; can't tell nothin' 'bout clothes, never had no shoes. Us went to church some Sundays. Funny, them dat had not been good or done somethin' bad was kept at home by de white overseer, and some of them played wid de white chillun. Sorry I can't answer every question.

"One story I 'member 'bout is de pa'tridges and de Savior. My pappy allowed de reason pa'tridges couldn't fly over trees was: One day de Savior was a-riding long on a colt to de Mount of Olive Trees, and de drove flew up, make sich a fuss they scared de colt and he run away wid him. De marster put a cuss on de pa'tridges for dat, and ever since, they can't fly over tree tops. You reckon dat so boss? They say they never does fly over trees!

"I had a good marster and mistress. When de slaves git sick, they 'tend to them same as one of their own chillun. Doctor come quick. They set up and fan you and keep de flies off. They wouldn't let de slaves do dis, 'cause certain times you got to take medicine 'cordin' to doctors orders, and a slave might make a mistake. Oh, they was 'ticular 'bout sickness. They has a hard time wid some nigger chillun and dat cast' oil bottle, I tell you!

"One of my young marsters was name Charlie. After freedom he marry one of Colonel Province's daughters and me and my mammy moved and lived wid them a while. Then I got married to Wates Kelly, and went to live and work for a white man 'bove White Oak. His name was Long John Cameron, de best white man to work for, but when Sat'day come and all de hands paid off, he git dat red hoss and turn and gallop to Winnsboro and bring back a passel of low down white trash wid him to de disturbment of all de good colored person on de place.

"Yas sir, Klu Klux was a terror to certain colored persons. I 'members they come dressed up in white and false faces, passed on to de Richardson place and whipped somebody one night.

"My husban' been dead twelve years. I's got thirteen chillun and Minnie is de onliest one livin' wid me in dis house. Her name Minnie Martin. Got whole lot of gran' chillun; they cover de earth from Charlotte to Jacksonville, and from Frisco to Harlem, New York; but never see them, just three, Franklin, Masie and Marie Martin.

"I heard 'bout Lincoln and Booker T. Washington. De President now in de White House, Mr. Roosevelt, have done more good for de nigger in four years than all de other presidents since Lincoln, done in fifty years. You say its been seventy-two years? Well, than all de rest in seventy-two years. Don't you know dat is so? Yas sir, dats de gospel truth.

"I's a member of de Baptist Church. Been buried wid my Lord in baptism and hope for a resurrection wid him in Beulah Land.

"Yes, de overseer was de poor buckra, he was what you calls dis poor white trash. You know boss, dese days dere is three kind of people. Lowest down is a layer of white folks, then in de middle is a layer of colored folks and on top is de cream, a layer of good white folks. 'Spect it'll be dat way 'till Jedgegment day.

"I got one boy name Ben Tillman, livin' in dis town. White folks calls him Blossom, but he don't bloom 'round here wid any money, though he is on de relief roll by sayin' he got a poor old mammy nigh a hundred years old and he have to keep her up. 'Spect when I gits my old age pension my chillun will pay me some little 'tention, thank God. Don't you know they will, sure they will."

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36022/36022-h/36022-h.html#id30>

site for slave narratives easily searchable