

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.' I'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. I'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 Mobleys. He 'tend Fellowship Church. All de Mobleys 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