

Mississippi Narratives
Prepared by
The Federal Writer's Project of
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Molly Vance

Foreword: Aunt Molly, a short, dumpy little black woman, is one of those "shut-mouthed" persons from whom information must be almost literally pried, if indeed, it then can be secured, should she set her head against talking. Slightly deaf, too, she has an eternal quizzical expression on her face that gives her, it seems, the right to ask instead of answer. But Aunt Molly lived during slavery time, so she must talk a little! One might guess that she remembers more than could be forced from her for her face lights up as if by magic when certain subjects are mentioned. She starts to answer and then looks sadly into the distance and says, "Law, I can't 'member like I useter."

Uncle Dick, Aunt Molly's last marriage venture, is his wife's opposite. One might imagine that her life with him had somewhat added to her already quiet nature, the supreme silence. He is one of those effervescent souls who hardly ever gives anyone a chance to say a word. He is ten or more years younger than his wife. Does he love to show off? Why he has been to school, he never says for how many grades, and can recite the names of every state in the Union giving the capitals of each. He does this with the least provocation from any audience that will deign to listen. He is "powerful sorry" that he did not live during slavery "cause he is one more story teller." After several attempts to stop him from talking Molly is finally given a chance to say her few words, as Dick must climb up on his lop eared mule and go to town for a little 'baccy.

Molly starts her tale with, "Huh? What you say? Didn't Dick tell you all you wanted to know? You say he couldn't tell you? Well, dat's de fust thing I is heard of dat he couldn't tell. Taint no wonder he went off."

"Cose I was born in slavery time but I doan 'member much 'bout it case I was such a little tike den. My mem'ry ain't what it was either, but maybe I can tell you a little somthin' you want to know. I doan know what year I was borned in, I ain't never had no cause to try to find out about it and I doan s'pose I could remember case I cant read an' write. Never went to school a day in my life. I reckon dey had schools but I never seed one. My mammy and pappy died when I was a baby and I never knowed even what dey names was. Dey diden tell chillen nothin' in them days. Who raised me? Why my uncle, Calvin Whitaker took me and my brothers and sisters to live with him til we was old enuf to look after ourselves. Marse Lance Whitaker was de man dat own us. He daid now and so is all his family cepten Marse Johnny what lives in Amory. Marse Lance had 4 chillen and us four would play wid dem and have de bestest times. We never had no kinda pretties to play wid but sometimes I hol' Miss Willie's doll for her. Dey never give us nothin' even at Christmas, cept a little fruit maybe and a little extry to eat. Cose I doan know what dey did for de older folks case I was a little tike and then I jest doan remember."

"De Yankee soldiers came by when de war started, four 'breast from sun-up til dark and us kids went and hid case we was scared of dem. I doan remember hearin' much 'bout de war but I think Marse Lance went and I know iffen he did, he come back, he woan killed. When it was over de ole folks was all 'cited over being free and Uncle Calvin move us to de Hogan place. I worked in de field after dat and stayed wid him till I was grown. I never drawed no wages but I guess dey paid him for what I did and he took care of me wid it."

"Long come Dan Sykes bout time I was growed up and I married him. We stayed on de Watkins place and made a crop dere. He was de fust husband I had and when he died I married agin. I's had four, no three, husbands and I is out lived all of dem, well, cepten Dick here. Henry Moore was my second husband and we wukked over cross de river. I ain't never done nothin' cept farm all my life. I married Dick 'bout 10 years ago. He ain't quite as old as I be but he mought not outlive me at dat. I ain't got nare child a livin'. Dey is all daid, and dey ain't nobody but me and Dick left."

"Dat's bout all I know to tell you. No mam I never heard tell of de Ku Klux doin' nothin' round our folks and we never had no church meetin' durin' slavery dat I knows 'bout. Cose, dey mought have gone off de place. I dunno. Anyways dat's all I knows case my mem'ry's bad and I can't member like I useter. Maybe iffen youd go over dere 'bout five miles cross de other side of de creek my sister could tell you some more. She be's older dan me. Her name is Ann Casen and everybody knows her."

"Come back to see me Missy. Goo'bye!"

Interviewer: Unknown

Transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan