

[A Fish Basket]

Interview - Sketch

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History of Dale County

Alabama.

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STORIES AS TOLD BY MY

GRANDMOTHER

A LADY OF THE DEEP SOUTH

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"A Fish Basket"

I am a little girl and live in Ozark, Alabama, and am fourteen years old. I go to school and am in Junior High School. My mother is dead, my father living and I have an older brother. We live with my grand-mother, who is a widow, and she is very sick at this time in a hospital. She has told me lots of tales about the things which happened long time ago when she was a little girl living down on the river plantation near Clayhatches, which is in Dale County, down below Daleville. She is over seventy-two years of age, and I think she is a wonderful woman. My mother died when I was six years old, so she has sorter raised me ever since. She is very nice to me, and we live in a nice old house in Ozarks where

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there are plenty of trees and ground around the house where we will have lots of room to run around and play in.

She was one of the younger girls in her family, and while her father, my great-grandfather had good eyes, he couldn't hear very well, so he would carry her with him most of the time on his hunting and fishing trips. She must have been his favorite among his girl children for he would always call on her for lots of things to help him with. 2 She told me they lived way down in the country in an old log house; and that while it was made of logs it was a large and rambling kind of a house. I have seen it, but most of the old trees have either died or been cut down. They had lots of barns, and cribs, and smoke-houses, and other out-houses. She said this was the old river plantation that my grandfather went back to after he had a big fire at Daleville and lost almost everything he had; he and my grandmother went back there together. She said her life down there was a very happy one when she was a little girl. They didn't have much opportunity to go to school, as the nearest one was four miles away, and they had to walk, but she was just naturally liked to live down there; everything was so pleasant and the family was such a happy one. She said she used to go fishing and hunting with grandfather, and I am going to tell you the tale she told me about going to the fish basket.

When she was a little girl, such a long time ago, her father would call her very early in the morning, even before day-break, and tell her to get up and put on her clothes and shoes, that they were going to get their fish from baskets down at the river. They wouldn't even eat any breakfast before they started out; they would go out of doors and the early morning star would be shining so brightly, and the dew would be all over the grass, and it would be kinder cool; they would call "Ruler", Tho was the old hound dog that they all loved so well, and who always went with them on their trips; sometimes he would be away when they started out, and when they got back old "Ruler" would look like he 3 had been insulted. Anyway, they would start off towards the swamp and the river, which was about a mile and a half from their house.

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It would be just beginning to get light; and the chickens and the birds would begin to get up and cackle and sing, and the crickets would begin to “Sputter”, and away off they could hear the cattle low. They would go off down to the swamp through the lane, and the fields, with the dew on the grass; they would finally come to the swamp, and would go down a little part and finally come to a little stream of water, and it was very marshy all around it; and it was mushy too; it was too wide to jump, although it was not very deep, but she had her shoes on so she couldn't wade it; anyway she was always afraid of snakes. So they had to cross this little stream by walking a foot-log across it; old “Ruler, would almts always go ahead and scare away the snakes.

They would go on down through the swamp and finally would come to the river, which was named the Choctawhatchee river; she said back in those days this was a very large river, and wasn't muddy at all, but just as clear; they had a boat hidden back under some brush hanging over the river, tied to a tree; it was just an ordinary kind of boat, made of wood, with home-made paddels paddles , and had only one seat across the middle of it, and a seat across the back of it. Grandfather would get into the back end of the boat, and she would 4 get into the front end, and they would push off and start to paddling down the river, and finally they would come to where the fish baskets were placed. They had fish baskets in those days, and not fish traps.

These baskets were made out of white oak whithes whites which were long slivers of wood from a white oak tree, and were entwined just like you do in knitting, except they were not placed so close together. There were two of them, the small one on the top and the large one on the bottom; the upper one had a little kind of trap like a swinging door, and the bait was in the large basket on the bottom. The fish would smell or see the bait in the large basket and run or swim all around them until it finally found the hole in the small basket and come down through the small basket through the trap into the large basket where the bait was, and then they couldn't get out.

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She said that Grandfather would catch the limbs of an over-hanging trees, to which the baskets were attached, and pull up the baskets, and pour out the fish into a bucket. These fish were usually river trout or cat-fish, and sometimes what they called brim. She said she always took off her shoes before getting into the boat, because there was always some water in the bottom of it, and sometimes the fish would fall out of the bucket and she didn't it for those slimy fish to get on her bare feet, and anyway she didn't like fish nohow. Back in those days, she said there were always some fish in some of the baskets. Grandfather would 5 then bait the baskets again, and put them back into the water, and they would go back to the baskets two or three times a week, whenever he thought the family needed fresh fish, instead of eating hog meat all the time. But she said sometimes they had fresh beef, and that there was always some kind of wild game, like squirrel's and in the fall plenty of birds, like dave and quail, and sometimes ducks and wild turkey to eat.

Well, anyway, they finally paddled back up the river to where they kept the boat, and hid it again, and tied it up, and put the fish in a sack and started back home. On the way they found the old alligator wallow, which had been there some time, at least a few months, and it smelled awful, and the place this alligator went down to the river from his wallow looked like a broad path—it was just as smooth through the underbrush of the swamp—, but they didn't stay around to find the alligator that morning. Horever another morning they all went down there to try to kill the alligator, that is, all the men did, but she went along. But I will tell about that some other time. They carried the fish on home, and put them into barrels of fresh water, and ate them whenever they got ready, but, grandmother said they were always ready to eat fresh fish, so they didn't last very long.

Whenever they got home it was just after day-break, and great-grandmother was cooking breakfast of pan-cakes and ham and eggs. They were very hungry and sat down and ate lots. 6 Well, sometime, if you want me to I will tell you about the 'Coon hunt, and when the Red Bird got into Uncle John's pants and bit him on the belly, and when the rattle snake

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got after him, and lots of tales like that which grandmother has told me of what happened when she was a little girl a long, long time ago.

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December 8, 1938. George S Barnard. The above and foregoing six pages is a true story as told me by a little girl named Caroly Carolyn Elizabeth B , which her grandmother, Mrs. Laura D. B , who live lives in Osark, Alabama told her, so Caolyn Elizabeth says. All parties and their true names are known to me, and I have a record of same.

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December 2, 1938 George S. Barnard