

## [Edgar Wynce]

October 1, 1939

Edgar Wynce (Textile worker)

Charlotte, N.C.

Ethel Deal, Writer

Dudley W. Crawford, Reviser Original Named: Changed Names:

Edgar Wynce Elmer Wayne

Charlotte Riverton C9- 1/22/41 - N.C.

Elmer Wayne, with his invalid wife and seven children , lived in a shabby little house, a duplicate of fifty others along one of the narrow unpaved streets in the new industrial section of Riverton. Unlike all the others, Elmer's yard was filled with flowers and shrubs, a bed of dahlias ran the entire length of the house, while a well-kept vegetable garden could be seen in the back.

The front door opened into a small vestibule between two bedrooms, one of which was used as a living room. The walls of the living room were unpainted, decorated with two crayon enlargements of deceased members of the family, a large calendar and a framed embroidered motto, "Rest patiently and wait for Him."

"Have off your things, no one here but me and the baby; Elmer and the other children are at church."

## Library of Congress

Elmer's wife was a little woman of twenty-six. Her tired-looking face bore the marks of suffering and her body was stooped and distorted by frequent child bearing. She moved nervously about the room placing chairs, picking up playthings and papers from the floor, and giving directions to her visiting sister-in-law 2 about dinner.

“Our house looks shabby, the rugs are all worn out. Elmer can't make any extra money to buy things. I feel so sorry for him. He works hard at night. My health is not good. I've been nothing but a doctor bill since we've been married. Elmer does the washing every Monday morning. We have seven children and you know what that is. We pay three dollars a week rent, and it has to come every Monday morning or we get out. He makes fifteen dollars a week. With nine of us in family we can have only beans and potatoes. My children don't have a thing to carry for lunch. Fat back and flour gravy makes our breakfast.

“This is a terrible neighborhood to live in. There's four sets of bootleggers on this street. Last night we got no sleep for the cursing and carousing around us. What can we do about it. We can't afford to pay higher rent. The law locks them up, but others take their place.”

Elmer and the six children came in. He was good looking, tall and slender, with blue eyes and dark hair. His clothes were well cut and he moved about with ease and assurance.

“I want to show you a surprise I've got for my 3 sister,” he said, and returned in a moment from the kitchen with a show white cake trimmed in pink roses and birthday greetings.

“Today is Sister's birthday. I wanted her to come down for dinner and I made this cake myself. I have to cook a lot when my wife's sick.”

Elmer sat down and began talking about himself.

“I belong to the little white church at the end of the street. I'm thirty seven years old; was born on a farm, quit public school in the fourth grade. My folks were mill people. Father was an invalid and mother had it so hard I quit school and went to work in the cotton mill.

## Library of Congress

I was only eleven at the time. I worked twelve hours a day for three dollars a week. I been working in the cotton mill twenty six years. Today I make fifteen dollars. The most I ever made was twenty eight dollars. I worked in one mill twenty-two years. I'm a speeder hand, but I can do other things as well.

“My wages won't stretch to feed my family. I tell you the truth. If it wasn't for God's people in the church my family would have no clothes. Every shred of clothing I have on except my underwear is a gift from my wife's brother. I couldn't send my boy to school as I had no money to buy books or clothes. Our pastor found it out and they made up ten dollars at the church in less than five minutes. That's the kind of people we have in our church. The next week some of the ladies sent each of the two girls two nice dresses apiece. I have no money to buy clothes. Every thing we have to wear is gifts from our friends and relatives. I'm not ashamed of this. There was a time when I'd been too proud to accept them. I went to school at night and finished the seventh grade. The house work took so much of my time, after eight hours in the mill, I couldn't finish. I hope to take up night school again soon and finish High School. I attend church regularly and have a class of intermediate children. One of my boys has a nine year record in perfect attendance, another has a four-year record.”

Dinner was served in the kitchen. The long table was covered with a white linen cloth. A low cut glass bowl filled with roses in the center. Elmer bowed his head and asked the blessing.

“I have but one ambition, he said. That's to raise my family to be christians and serve the Lord. I don't wish to be rich. If I was I'd want to use it to help others. I'd like a better job, so I'd be able to support my own family. Church work interests me more than any thing else. I'm a retiring person. They asked me to take the Sunday School class at the church, I tell you the truth I didn't think I could do it. I told the pastor I'd try it one Sunday. I wouldn't promise to take it regular.”

## Library of Congress

“And you forgot all about yourself when you got started,” I offered.

“I didn't,” he said laughing. Laying down his knife and fork he continued seriously. “When I got up before that class a cold sweat broke out all over me. I got so weak I could scarcely stand. I taught the class; that's been six years ago. Doing things gives you confidence. My six year old girl wants to lead the family prayer every night. Children come in off the street to join us.

“My wife didn't have much education either. She's been sick so much and the children to look after she hasn't learned much, but there's a WPA teacher comes here once a week to teach her and she's learning fast too. Last week she counted up the grocery bill and got it right. If we had a car we could go for a ride.

6

I've never owned a car, and I know I'll never be able to at such rates. I'd rather have a home on the edge of town. I'd like an acre of ground to plant in flowers and vegetables; but I guess that is out of the question too. You might say in the story, we're happy if we are poor.”