

[Fannie Colbert]

July 17, 1939

Fannie Colbert, (Negro Farm Woman)

Star Town, N. C.

Ethel Deal, Writer

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

Fannie Colbert Flora Collins

Emily Eva

Hickory Haddon

Baker Mountain Banks Mountain

Sue Suky

Brookford Brooklyn

Sigmon Sams

Star Town Morton

Jake Joe

Mrs. Coulter Mrs. Curtis

Jane June

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Charlie Cris C9- N.C. Box 1.

Flora stooped over the fountain to get a drink, came up with a gasp and said, "Lord have mercy, how good that ice water tastes."

The fountain was in the court house hall; terribly crowded today. A woman was scolding a little girl she was leading by the hand. I'd stopped for a moment by the fountain to watch the people, and was attracted by an old colored woman who took out a big white rag and mopped her face as she frowned at the scolding woman and said: "I declare to goodness, some people don't know nothing when it comes to taking care of children. Now me, I raised fourteen of 'em and never had no trouble with none of them.

"Yes, all the mother they ever had. I got seven of my own and I raised four for my sister, Eva. (Her husband killed a nigger woman, the trifling thing.) When they tried him right here in this court house, they give him life sentence in the penitentiary at Raleigh. That left Eva with her four small children to raise. They'se living in Haddon then. I'se living over at Banks Mountain. I went over to Eva's to see how they's getting along. She had gone to work and left them kids to shift for themselves. I jist brung them home with me. I already had sister Suky's 2 three children to raise. She died of cancer nineteen years ago.

"Well, I'se tried to raise them and raise them right. Some people don't care how chilluns is brung up. I'se brung mine up to go to preaching and Sunday School and to respect their daddy and mammy like the good book says.

"My daddy and mammy brung me up like that. When they spoke I knowed what to do and I done it. Children these days usually tell the parents what to do theirselves.

"When I was a girl we lived at Brooklyn, that's two miles from Haddon. I went to work in the Brooklyn cotton mill when I was twelve years old. I swept the floors and made good money too, nine dollars and a half a week, worked twelve hours a day.

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“Every Saturday when I drewed my money I brung it home and give it to my mammy. I'd no more tore my pay envelope open and look in it then I'd a flew. My mammy was a good woman, and we was raised to be honest and truthful. We didn't know nothing else.

“The children now growing up, when dey draws der check gives the parents whut dey sees fit. My mammy give me twenty five cents a week. I thought that was big money.”

A car going around the square advertising a show 3 attracted Flora's attention.

“This is the gospel truth. I never seed a show till I was twenty years old. Now kids go to the show before they can hardly walk. After my mammy give me a quarter she took the rest and went to the store and bought her rations for the week. We didn't live high but we lived good.

“Lordy, how I'd like to see that show,” said Flora, as the music started again around the square.

“I ain't seen a show since before my last baby was born. That's been, let me see, sixteen years ago. When you have as many mouths to feed as I've had, you've got no money to go to shows. But thank the Lord I'se fed them and raised them. Eva was no good at raising children. She could help some with them if she wanted to. No, she spends her money for herself. Before her husband killed that woman she didn't half raise them kids, jist left them at home to do the beet they could. Last year Eva's oldest daughter got in a family way. I don't know who the man is. I jist took her back to Eva and told her she had to take care of her herself.

“I've got three girls, they's all born in August. My oldest boy died with cancer same as my sister did.

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"I'm thirty nine years old, got seven children, one dead. I went to the eleventh grade in school, but didn't finish it. I go to preaching and Sunday School and I make my children go too. I say start them right and they don't know no better. We have a hard time on the farm feeding such a crowd, but they can all work. I like the work at the mill the best but its hard around here fer colored people to get jobs.

"We live out here at Mr. Sam's place now, close to Morton. I always come to town with a white lady who lives close to me. She's a fine woman, 'course she's old and crabbed and sick lots, but a good old soul. She says to me the other night, I had to go over there about midnight, to rub her back with liniment. 'Flora,' she says, 'I don't know what I'd do without you.' "My fourteen years old boy jist lives there. She thinks a lot of him.

"What kind of a house do you live in Aunt Flora, and do you have a nice landlord?."

"Yes, Mr. Sams is a nice man to work fer. He's not always a grouching and growling about something. We been living there three years now, never have no trouble either. When Joe, that's my man, and the boys catch up 5 with their work on the farm they go out and work fer the other people.

"We picks a lot of berries and can them. Its not much fruit on the place, but I always fill all my jars. We never have got to the place where we been hungry, and we have never been on relief. Work was my mammy's motto and its always been mine. If people done more work and less whining and complaining I think they'd get along better. I never been in court nor none of my family has. I'm awful proud I seed you.

"I wish I could read the story after its writ up. I'll have to go now, Mrs. Curtis will be looking for me. I forgot to tell you how my place looks. We live in a big old two story house with six rooms in all, four upstairs and two down. It needs a new roof and paint. Mr. Sams said he'd put on a roof this fall. We have a good spring just below the house, a fine place to keep butter and milk. I couldn't do without a cow, with such a crowd. Cornbread, milk and butter

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is our supper. At dinner we have two vegetables with pie. Breakfast fatback, corn meal mush and coffee. When we kill hogs we have fresh meat. That don't last long with so many to eat.”

At this point in Flora's story a little old lady 6 come in. She wore a print dress, white with a black polka dot, her hair was snow white; she wore a black sailor hat, and carried a large shopping bag.

“I declare Flora, I've hunted all over town fer you. I was setting out there in the truck with June waiting fer Cris to come from that farm meeting, when June looked up at the window and seed you. I says 'June, I bet Flora got in trouble, if she is upstairs in the court house , so I come up to see.’”

Flora laughed, “No, I ain't in no trouble. It was cool up here, and I was enjoying telling this lady about how I was raised.”

“The town clock has done and struck four. I like to git home fore night, I got to milk a cow and they's chickens to feed. My peaches is out on the roof drying. They has to be brought in.”

“Oh I'll come over and milk for you,” said Flora. “Joe can git the fruit off the roof for you.”

The little old lady turned to me with a smile. “I declare,” she said, “I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't for Flora and Joe. They are as good to me as my own children.”