

[The Kellys on Williams Street]

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6 B SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: THE KELLYS ON WILLIAMS STREET

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Name of Person Interviewed The Reverend Charles M. Kelly (white)

Fictitious Name None

Street Address 305 Williams Street

Place Columbia, S. C.

Occupation Preacher

Name of Writer Mattie T. Jones

Name of Reviser State Office

Reverend Charles Kelly, pastor of the Nazarene Church (Holiness), was out in his back yard feeding the chickens.

“We like to keep chickens,” he said, “like to have one to eat whenever we want it. These bantams are mostly pets for the children, but they aren't such a bad investment after all.

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Three of their eggs equal two of the hens' eggs in weight, and they lay practically every day of the year.

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Those guineas in the coop over there are waiting for the fence I'm planning to build 'round the yard. I'm going to turn 'em out and raise guineas, too. We eat a lot of eggs at our house."

The tall, red-haired minister put the chicken feed away and walked to the house, a four-room annex to the Nazarene Church. Both buildings are of wood, the unpainted boards of the church are vertical; those of the house, horizontal.

"Come right in," Mrs. Kelly said, "we're glad to have you. No intrusion at all. The latchkey always hangs on the outside at our house. Well, I believe it's the first parsonage I've ever seen joined on to the church like this, but we like it. Makes us have lots of company, especially on Sundays. It's so convenient for folks to slip through this door from the church. It's all a temporary arrangement, of course. We built our house in a week. Did it last summer when the mill operatives had a vacation. We hired one carpenter, as foreman, and the rest of the work was donated. Just cost us \$300, but we expect to make lots of improvements along."

The door opened and two little boys in pink and blue pajamas came running into the room.

"Mummee, look at tattoo! Daddy, tattoo, tattoo!" they shouted, showing marks of red and blue ink on their wrists.

"Always into something. Charles, please see if they turned over the ink bottles," the mother said, as she changed their sleeping clothes to overalls. We let the boys sleep as late as they want to, and they've just gotten up. We're all sort of resting from the Christmas holidays. Haven't even gotten the house straight this morning.

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“Yes, they are both well and strong. But they should be; they drink about a gallon of milk a day. We have a cow now. But, even before we got her, we sometimes bought as much as seven quarts of milk a day. We believe in giving the children plenty of wholesome food - fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals and eggs. We try to keep fresh fruit in the house all the time; they like it. And both are crazy about spinach. Popeye is responsible for that, I think. Somebody has to read the funnies to them as soon as the Record gets in the house. The oldest boy, Charles Wesley, is in the second grade now, and he can read a little to them. At least, they all enjoy looking at the pictures together.”

“They get their blue eyes from my grandparents, I guess,” said Mr. Kelly. “They all had blue eyes. On both sides of the house my grandparents were tenant farmers, from Lexington and Richland Counties. When my Grandfather Kelly died, my grandmother married John Paschal, the father of John Paschal who is practicing law here now. There was a big family of children - thirteen in all. My grandmother had four; Mr. Paschal had five; and together they had four. Making ends meet was a problem with them, as you might imagine, with that many hungry mouths to feed. So they decided it would be easier to make a living at the mill, and they moved here to Olympia Mill.

“That was possibly not such a bad step to take, since they didn't get much cash money from the farm in those days. None of the thirteen children had much chance at an education. My father was put to work in the mill when he was just a boy; first as a spinner, then as a weaver, and finally as a loom fixer. He worked for \$15 a week for about fifteen years. He married my mother, who also worked in the mill. They were both young. Children came to the home all along; but they managed somehow to save a little.

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Finally, my father decided to put his small savings in the grocery store business. He and Ben Davis were partners and ran two stores. Made money, too. Some weeks their sales ran between \$1,200 and \$1,500.

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“The one thing my parents wanted was a home of their own. So, as soon as they saved \$3,000, they decided to invest it in a home on Hayward Street.

“Father was simply crazy about hunting. One fall he and Ben Davis were shooting doves on the State Farm. The dog sensed danger. The men rushed to the spot. A rattlesnake coiled and was ready to strike. In the excitement of killing it, my father was accidentally shot by Mr. Davis. Before a doctor could reach him, he died. Mother was left a widow with eight little children. It was an awful struggle for her to hold things together. But she managed to get along for several years. Then she married Sam Hawkins, who was working in the quarry. Finally, she lost everything she had but her home.

“I was born while they were living at the mill, but they moved to their home when I was five years old. School didn't interest me much, so when I was fifteen, and in the ninth grade, I went to work in my mother's store. She paid me \$10 a week and my board. In two years, when I was seventeen, I married Mamie Barber. She was fifteen. But she only lived three months. She had a ruptured appendix and died with peritonitis.

“There was a Home Store right across the street from ours, and the cashier was a pretty little brunette, capable as she could be. So after I had lived alone nearly two years, I persuaded her to try living with me. One Monday morning we slipped over to the Methodist parsonage, and R. C. Griffeth, the pastor, tied the knot for us.”

“You mean, Carl, we thought we slipped away. We hadn't gotten on the porch good till here they came in their overalls and print dresses right 5 out of the mill. Must have been thirty or forty of 'em. And they carried us high, too. I reckon we should have had something out of the ordinary; we didn't have a wedding and didn't take a trip.”

“Well, we both got off from work for a few days, anyway. To tell the truth, I didn't have enough money for a trip. I was making only fifteen dollars a week, and I couldn't make myself believe two of us could live as cheaply as one.

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“After our little vacation, we went to board with Mother and paid her eleven dollars a week. We boarded a few months and then we started housekeeping. We bought our furniture on the installment plan. Then doctors' bills and hospital bills took all we had saved, and more.

“By that time I began to feel my lack of education; so I decided to try a year at Textile Industrial Institute. You know about the T.I.I., I guess. How you make your expenses as you go, working two weeks and studying two. We didn't stay there long, however, because there were no convenient apartments for married couples with children. So we came home with no money and no job. But I soon had a job in a Home Store and a raise of salary. I got \$25 this time.

“I had been a pretty rough fellow. I did about what the other boys were doing, and a few of the extras. But the first year Mr. Griffeth was sent to our church, I was converted. Then I became enthusiastic about church work. I knew less than nothing about the Bible, but I took a man's Bible class to teach. Very few men were coming to Sunday School; but it wasn't long till we had 200 men on roll. One year we had the second largest class of men in Columbia. I tell you I had to do some studying to keep ahead o' those rascals.

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I soon felt a call to preach. Evangelistic work appealed to me. With a partner, I tried independent evangelistic work at two different times. But our tent was destroyed both times by storms, and we finally gave it up. But we made a very good living while we were doing it, about twenty-five dollars apiece a week.

“During these years, I preached for the Negroes occasionally, and I recall one experience I had. I arrived at the church about 11 o'clock, by appointment, and by 2 or 3 o'clock the crowd had assembled. The pastor announced that they would take an offering of two or three dollars, which they must have that day. He called for the members to walk right up and put their offerings on the table. Then the brethren passed the plates - frying pans, covered with colored paper and attached to the ends of broom handles. Still there wasn't

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enough. They lacked seventy-six cents. The preacher announced that the choir would sing till the amount was contributed. Whoever wanted to make an offering would kindly raise his hand, and he would go to him and receive the gift. The choir began to sing, but the response was disappointing. Finally, the pastor announced, 'Big Six is in his pocket,' and he looked in the direction where Big Six was sitting. He walked hopefully towards Big Six and received his offering. 'The choir will continue to sing; we don't lack but seventy-five cents now.'

“But back to my story: I felt I had to do something to help support my family; so about that time, I borrowed \$850 and bought a grocery store of my own. I worked in the store and pastored this church for four years. But a pastor should give his whole time to his church work, I think, and I'm doing that now. This church grew out of a Whaley Street revival. In these five years, we've grown from twenty-one members to eighty-five. And that means 7 eighty-five; for, if a member fails to attend church in six months, we drop his name. The building was at first an open shed with a sawdust floor. Gradually, we added to it until we made a right respectable house of worship, we think. We've got \$1,000 invested in it now. The land isn't ours. We just leased it for ten years, and I don't know what will happen. I do know we're planning to build us a new brick church and parsonage somewhere real soon. This parsonage is fairly comfortable. It has water on the back porch, and the fixtures are bought for sewerage and a bath. But the plumber just hasn't had time to put them in. When we have these conveniences, we'll have a lot more time to give to our work.”

“Bruce, gimme that ball!” exclaimed Jimmie.

“I ain't gointer do it. It's my ball.”

“Tain't no such a thing. It's mine. Daddy, make Bruce gimme that ball.”

By this time the boys were engaging in a fisticuff, and the father had to settle the quarrel. As he took Bruce on his lap and dried his tears, he said, 'Very often I lead Bruce's evening prayer with him, and we close with this petition, 'And don't let me jump on Jimmie any

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more.' He repeats it seriously and then adds, as he looks up, 'But I will jump on him whenever he bothers me.'

"Charles Wesley doesn't have much fighting spirit in him," Mrs. Kelly added. "He likes to get out with his slingshot. When he came in yesterday, I asked him how many birds he had killed. His answer was, 'None. How you 'spect me to kill them birds? They run faster than the rock every time.'"

"That fighting spirit in Bruce must have been picked up from his German ancestors, somewhere," was Mr. Kelly's comment. "Savors of Hitlerism, 8 doesn't it? I declare this war situation is getting tense. Looks like Uncle Sam will have to walk in over there again. I'm opposed to war myself; even opposed to spending billions of dollars in armaments, while millions of people are hungry. But I'm truly glad I don't have the responsibility of saying what we shall do."

"Well, Carl, how would you solve the problem of having so many people in the world; how would you feed and clothe 'em all?" Mrs. Kelly asked. "No birth control and no wars. Looks to me like we'll have to have one or the other. To save my life, I can't think it's right to bring little children into the world when you can't take care of them like you should. If you can't give children a decent living or an education and proper food, I think you'd better not have 'em. We see pitiful demonstrations of this sort of thing all around us every day. I don't think it's a bit of harm to prevent their coming, but I don't believe in destroying life. What you can't give you shouldn't take away."

"She's getting to be quite a modernist, isn't she?" Mr. Kelly suggested. "Well, for pity sake, Florence, be careful how you talk about birth control in these diggings. Whatever you do, don't let Sister Baker hear you say those things. We would probably be run out o' town over night. Well, that's a bit of pleasantry, of course. I try not to be too serious. I have friends who tell me I'm inclined to be a kill-joy in my religion and to take life too seriously. There's more danger of my getting an inferiority complex, I'm afraid. It's the one regret of

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my life that I stopped school, when I did. One lesson my dad taught me has helped me lots, and that is to concentrate on what I'm doing. The kids can romp and play all they want to, and Florence can talk a blue streak about the neighbor's chickens destroying 9 her flowers; but I don't hear a word of it.

"I know I can never be a successful preacher without more training, and I do want to climb. All our churches demand an educated ministry now. I've taken a correspondence course under the general board, and I'm taking a course now at the Columbia Bible College. This fall I'm planning to drop everything and go to Nashville to study, even if I have to go in debt for our expenses. We'll rent an apartment and all go."

"I want to take a course in church methods myself," Mrs. Kelly added. "I'm particularly interested in young people. Then I need some child psychology mighty bad. Every day problems come up with our boys, and I can't meet them. I am terribly handicapped in every way."

A car came up in the yard, and a guest walked in.

"Hello, everybody! I'm sure glad to be home again," Mrs. Baker said, as she seated herself in a comfortable rocking chair. "I reckon everybody's missed gas since I've been gone. Haven't been to town in more'n a week, not since two days before Christmas. Evelyn and me went over to Georgia to spend Christmas with my sisters. We had a mighty good time, too, and the best things to eat. I came a little early today. Feel just like gossiping a little, and then I wanted to see you and Granny before I go to work. It's an awful grind, this working in the mill every day. Sometimes I'm tempted to quit and stay at home. Evelyn needs me. Reckon if it wasn't for that check coming in every month, I'd have quit long ago. Mrs. Kelly, do you know if Granny's feet are any better? Poor old Granny. She does have a time."

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“Gee! it's cold outside. And here I am with this voile dress on and this one slip. If it was a steaming hot day in August, I'd have on a heavy print dress, two slips, a big canvas apron, and a sweater.

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“You all hear about Herbert Mitchum? Yes'm, the old man. They say he's got double pneumonia in both lungs, and he's too sick to be carried to the hospital. Just got sick yesterday, too.

“People don't wear enough clothes to keep 'em well these days. Did you ever see anything to beat these short dresses the little girls wear these times? Honestly, they come up to their little bumpuses. The skirt's no more then a frill below their sweater. And Evelyn's is shorter then anybody elses. No wonder they have to put powder and rouge on their faces before they're twelve years old. You can leave an old automobile a settin' out in the rain and weather and don't pay no attention to it and first thing you know it'll be all faded out and have to be painted over.

“I'm in the worst humor today. I reckon you all wish I had stayed in Georgia. Wonder what does make me so cross?

“Lord a mercy! Did you see that hat Miss Moore had on at prayer meetin' last night? That feather was two feet long and sticking straight up behind. The funniest looking thing I ever seen. I laughed right in her face when I spoke to her. I bet if I'd take that stuffed squirrel of Granny's hanging up on her wall and put it round my hat with the tail hanging down behind, every woman on this hill would put a squirrel on her hat, too. Ain't folks funny 'bout things like that?”

Without waiting for a reply to her question, she continued to talk, chewing her gum and rocking back and forth in her chair.

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"What you think about Miss Smith dying and they wouldn't have no doctor? I don't believe in no craziness like some folks do. I believe in holiness, but I believe in the right kind of holiness myself. The Bible says, 'Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.'

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All this sanctification, divine healing, speaking in tongues, and such nonsense. Whew, it's bosh to me. Most people wag their tongues too much anyway.

"Did you all hear Roosevelt's speech? I didn't, and I won't hear the next one neither. I don't like Roosevelt myself. Got no patience with him. I'm working hard as I ever did and ain't getting a cent more for it. If I'm gonna starve, I'll just kick my feet up on a dry-goods box, get me a good book to read, and sit right there and starve. I don't want Roosevelt nor anybody else givin' nothing to me. No sir-ree!

"My light bill come in today, and it's too much. I declare I ain't gonna pay that much for lights and live in the country, too. I'll move to town first. But, shucks, I'm in an awful mood today. Got to try to feel better before I go to work or I'll lose my job. I must have eaten too much in Georgia, eh?

"And there's that old car. I'll be glad when it's paid for. I ain't never gonna buy another one, 'less I've got the spot cash to pay for it with the day I get it. I'll walk first. This thing of having to plank out your money for a good-for-nothin' old car every time a check comes in don't suit me a-tall.

"You say you'd like to write my life story? Well, by George, it would be one worth reading. Full of tragedy, comedy, and romance. But geewhiz, I wouldn't tell nobody my life story for a thousand dollars. I come from Georgia, and some of them fellers I went back on over there would spot me sure. No, ma'am, couldn't tell my life story.

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"Don't Hugh Slater know he can't get no crowd over here today? Young people's got to work. They can't come to no meetin' Friday afternoon.

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I can't lose the time myself. He oughter know he couldn't have no young people's meetin' except on Saturday night. And delegates are comin' here from Winnsboro and Eastover and everywhere. It's a plumb shame. But lemme go before I bless somebody else out or start something else up. Yes, gimme an apple. I'll need it for lunch before twelve o'clock tonight.

"I'm glad to have seen you folks and sorry I've been so hateful today. Evelyn's coming from school by here for the meeting. And I believe I'll just leave my car here till I start to the mill. Good-by. You all come to see me. Going to see Granny now."

"Well, that's that," said Mr. Kelly, with a hearty chuckle, and he took up his story again.

"We find it a little hard to live on our salary of twenty dollars a week and keep everything going. But I do some extra preaching along, and average holding eight revivals in a year. I get about twenty-five dollars a week for that work. This helps us meet the bills. We have a new car. But the members made a down payment of eighty dollars, and they pay five dollars a week on it. So that's not costing me much. A car is a necessity with me. I have to do more visiting than I really would like to do, since I need so much time for study. But, after all, the personal contact counts a lot, I know.

"I'm due to take a patient to the Columbia Hospital at 12 o'clock," he said as he looked at his watch. "Florence can finish the story. But I have a little time yet and will tell you about an experience I had last spring. Our church is not fanatical on the subject of Sabbath observance, but so many grocery stores in Columbia were sending their trucks to back doors on Sunday morning, delivering a week's supply of groceries, that I decided I'd 13 try to put a stop to it. I circulated a petition, and many merchants signed it, saying that they

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did not want to do this, but competition had forced them into it. Several arrests were made when men failed to comply with the order, but the juries failed to convict. I feel the effort was worth while, even though we didn't accomplish our purpose. Anyway, it was a start in the right direction, and the stores were closed for four Sundays. No other church entered the fight, but some of the brethren attended the sessions of court and used their influence to help.

"I try to do constructive preaching. Sensational preaching don't appeal to me much. But I fail so often that I feel exactly like the tramp who dropped into an Episcopal Church one day just as the rector was reading the confession from the ritual: 'We have done the things we should not have done and left undone the things we should have done.' With a sigh of relief, he said, as he took his seat, 'This is the church I belong to. I'm sure of it now.'

The boys came from the adjoining room, each eating a piece of toast, and each with a good sprinkling of soot on his clothes and hands. "I thought they had been too quiet," the father mused.

"You've been in the stove again, haven't you? Well, you're fine boys just the same, if you do look like pickaninnies. Come tell Daddy good-by."

When the boys were sent to the yard to play, Mrs. Kelly said, "I'm three years older than Charles and the practical member of the family. I've had to be practical all my life. Father died when I was thirteen years old, and there were six of us children. He was a tenant farmer. After his death, my mother bought a home in Kingstree. She slaved day and night to help pay for it and to keep us children in school. I was sixteen years old when I 14 started making my living selling Calumet Baking Powder. And I've had to do all sorts of things since then. I had a little typing and bookkeeping in high school, and that helps me, of course."

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Near the step, the one step which was needed to enter the house, a large bulldog, white and black spotted, was being pulled about, with two husky boys clinging to her neck.

"I love Pup. Pup goes wid me everywheres I go. Jimmy, you git off. Pup's my dog. Git off, I tell you. Me jump on you, Jimmy."

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