

Sally Murphy

Interview with Sally Murphy

—Preston Klein, Lee County, Alabama

SLAVERY WAS ALL RIGHT IN ITS PLACE

When I was looking for Sally Murphy, I went into a clean, four room cabin and found a small, neat Negro woman.

"Are you Sally Murphy?" I asked.

"I'm sho' is, honey, and who is you? Lawdy chile, you knows I know Mr. Pompy (my father). She laughed. "I'll tell you anything I knows.

"I was jes' 'bout ten years come slavery done. I was borned down on de Clayton place at Smith's Corners. My pappy he come from South Car'lina, where his pappy was sold. He name was Calop and my mammy was Hannah Clayton. There was eight of us chillun. Fred, Silas, Calop, Mary, Dolphus, Dora, Lula and me. Us all lived down in de quarters, which was five log houses, daubed wid mud. Dem logs was big ones, hand-hewed, and de fireplaces was big, too. Us went to de fiel's early in de morning and picked us a mess of young hick'ry and oak leaves to scald and cook in de pot wid meat. Dey made good greens and us had poke salad, too. (Made from the leaves of the pokeberry).

"When dey dried de fruit us would cook our kind of fruit cake. I don't recollect what went in it. Dere was plenty though. Mistis had de fruit dried on tins in de yard, and at twelve o'clock every day all hands went to de house and turned de fruit.

"Our beds was homemade, scaffold bedsteads wid ropes wove acrost de top what could tighten up. Sometimes us had homewove bedspreads on de beds most every day, but in gen'ally dat was for Sunday only.

"Our menfolks used to hunt possums and wild turkeys, but dey didn't mess 'roun' none wid rabbits. They didn't waste time on fishing either.

"Ev'y morning in May Mistis would call us little niggers to de house and ev'y other morning give us oil and turpentine. We made our own cloth for clothes. Our mammies wove us long drawers outen cotton. Dey bought wool and flannelet to make us pantalets. Us wore homemade homespun dresses. Some of hit was dyed and some checked. Us had shoes reg'lar in winter.

"Ole Marster Joe and Miss Rosa Clayton was good as gold. Dey had Sara, Jane, Henry, and Joe. De live in a big, two story house wid six rooms to hit and had a brick kitchen off from de house out in de yard. Ole Marster had a big plantation and his two aunties live dere, too. Dey was Miss Easter and Miss Charlotte.

"De slave women folks what had chilluns was 'lowed to go home half hour by de sun to wash ev'y day, and ev'y Sunday morning all de little chillun had to be washed and carried to de Big House for de Mistis to inspect 'em.

"Us mostly stayed at home and didn't go 'bout none, and effen us went to Mt. Jefferson Church us had to have a pass or de paterollers would sho' git you. I did think dat 'Hark from the tomb in doleful sound, how careful, how careful den ought I to live, wid what religious fear' was de prettiest thing, and I sho'

did love to hear dem sing hit. I never seed de baptising, 'ca'se I used to go to de 'Piscopal Church wid Mistis and open gates and hold de hosses. I sot in de foot of her carriage.

"Christmas dey'd give us provisions and de chillun some trash (meaning toys). Dey sho' had good times on moonlight nights at de cornshuckings. Dey would haul de corn from de fields and put it in a big ring, and as dey shucked dey would throw it in ring and den into de crib. Sometimes dey was so much corn it would stay on de ground 'twell it rotted.

"Mr. Dickey Williams' mother, Miss Emily, ma'ied while us was dere and my grandma cooked de cake. My daddy made de cake stand. Hit had three tiers, each one full of little cakes wid de big cake on top. Hit sho' was pretty.

"Dey let de little niggers have all de fun dey wanted. Us played jump rope and swung in de grapevine swings mostly. Den us had rag dolls. When any of us got sick, we was give hoarhound tea and rock candy. Sometimes effen dey wasn't looking and us got a chance us spit it out. Dey got de doctor effen us needed it.

"One of our Marsters was killed in de war and brought home and buried. He was Mr. Joe. All de silver was hid out enduring de war but de sojers never did come to our house.

"One day my daddy says, 'Hannah, Marster said us is free now to do what we want to do.' But us stayed on two years mo'. In a few years I ma'ied Milton Heard and had a calico wedding dress and Judge Reed ma'ied us in Opelika in de ole plank court house. I didn't have no chillun and I lives now wid my niece, Sally Thomas.

"I don't know what I think 'bout Abraham Lincoln. I don't know nothing 'bout him. Slavery was all right in its place, I guess, 'ca'se some needed it to make 'em work.

"Folks get so sinful I thought I was safest in de church. I believe God intended for us all to be religious."