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by a class in oral history taught by Jeff Fiddler.

Dora Arrington

ORIGIN OF A BLACK CHILD

DORA ARRINGTON

ORAL HISTORY

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Oral History Project

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Elizabeth Balanoff
Director, Oral History Project

Laura Grinter
Signature of interviewee

ORIGIN OF A BLACK CHILD

Origin of a Black child is written for the sake of identifying my own Black awareness, This paper has been a challenge as well as gratifying for having known, that there existed ancestors before my time, who have stored memories which will never be forgotten.

These ancestors have exhibited values and customs that have enabled my family to continue taking pride in their heritage. If it wasn't for the woman who gave birth to me, some of the events and sentiments of this paper couldn't be presented.

The oldest ancestor who could be remembered was my great-great-grand-father Will, who was born in Tarry, Arkansas, in the middle seventeenth hundreds. His mother and father were Indian-Black mixture, They were both slaves during the early eighteen hundreds, and were in bondage as slaves were at that time. Will spent most of his early years on a White man's plantation. The man's name was Crowder.

During the time of slavery very few slaves had a last name. It was not until after the eighties, when slavery was abolished, when Will chose to take on his previous master's last name. The last name he chose was, "Crowder ", because this previous master was the better of all the rest of the masters.

At a young age Will became interested in religion. Later in the years, after the abolishment of slavery, Will joined the African Methodist Church, which was founded in 1787 by Richard Allen. This is where Will eventually entered the ministry,

Will married an ex-slave named Harriet York, from Yorktown, Arkansas. Harriet gave birth to five children; Nancy, the youngest girl, Sarah, and Wonderful Council, the youngest son. The other two children's names couldn't be recalled, due to the fact that these three children had a closer family relationship. I remember Wonderful Council better than the rest of the children, because he ended up not only being my great-grand Uncle, but also a grandfather.

Nancy married Paul Arrington in her teens. She had nine children; Julia, George, Paul, Joe, Grace, Thomas, Geneva, and Elevena. The other child's name couldn't be remembered.

Joe Arrington was born on August 8, 1910, the youngest child of Nancy, who was also my grand-father. He married Ruby Hicks, a native of Scots, Arkansas, Ruby's father was the only Black Medical Doctor in Scots, Arkansas. He was a mixture of Black-White ancestry. In town he was known to be a high-yellow Nigger, who was passing for White. From what has been told, he was just that.

Ruby had given birth to twins, but they didn't live. Later she gave birth to a baby girl, whom she named Betty Joe. The middle name Joe was taken from my grand father's first name Ruby only lived to see her daughter to reach five months of age.

She was twenty-one years old at death. There have been several stories told of her death. The one that constantly stays on my mind is that she had a cold one day, and died the next day. It has been told by doctors, that Petty has a Sickle Cell Anemia Trait, and her children would also have the trait, therefore Ruby was a true Sickle Cell.

Betty was a very ill baby, when Ruby died. Her father thought that she wouldn't live, because there was no hospital in town for her to go to. Joe's Uncle Wonderful took Betty, because Joe was so sure that his child would die. He made the statement, " If the child lives, his Uncle Wonderful and wife, could have his child", since they didn't have any children of their own.

Joe went away, when Betty was one year old; never returned. He died when Betty was ten years old.

Even though the child was loved very much, she was very lonely, and occasionally depressed after the death of her parents.

Wonderful Council Crowder, was born on January 17, 1891. He married Kattie Nook; on September 7, 1924. When he took Betty from Joe they were living in Stuggart, Arkansas. in 1937; Wonderful traded his home in Stuggart, for a farm in the country. The farm was in the vicinity of Monroe county and Cascoe county,- located about 22 miles from Stuggart, Ark, and 15 miles from Roe, Ark. The small town was called " Look Out " .

Wonderful had 40 acres of land. There was a canal that ran from the out skirts of the town to approximately several feet of the farm. There were a lot of trees, shrubs, weeds, and bushes around the farm. Many of them were oaks, pines, wild weeds, blackberries, peach orchards, and muskedimes berries (grapes). Cotton and rice were the major crops.

There wasn't a lot bought from the store in town, except for clothing, sacks of flour, sugar, and corn meal.

These items usually lasted for months. Wonderful raised his own vegetables and meats. He always kept plenty of chickens and hogs around. Before the fall of the year approach, the hogs would be slaughtered. The deep freeze (freezer) was kept full.

Kattie preserved most of her fruits, such as peaches and blackberries. Quilting was for favorite hobby, Since Wonderful planted a little cotton, Kattie didn't have to worry about buying padding for her quilts. In the summer months Kattie spent alot of her time fishing. She was known for being one of the best fisher women in town. Host of the ladies enjoyed fishing with her, because she could kill a snake with a stick better than anybody else.

Wonderful was a very religious man. Like his father he was dedicated to the African Methodist Church. The town that they stayed in was so small until there was only one church. The town people had such a good relationship as far as the church was concerned, the Baptist would have their service a Sunday, and the following Sunday the Methodist would carry on their service.

Wonderful was so religious until he wouldn't allow no dancing in his house. Sunday was most certainly a ritual day. There was no time for playing and definitely no washing, ironing, and house cleaning.

Wonderful was highly respected in town. He belonged to the Masons' Organization until his death. He served as Wishful Master for several years, in which he made a lot of young men across the state of Arkansas Masons. He made speeches often at Churches and town meetings. When time came for election of government officials, people in the town turns to Wonderful for advice, as to which candidate would best suit the position. He served as Chaplain in the United States Army during World War I While living in "Look Out ", he eventually built the Shady Grove A.M.E. Church.

Betty was about two-years old when Wonderful had moved to the farm. She attended Look-Out Grammar School and Immanuel High School. She was considered. a very smart student and well liked in the community. Betty met a young man named Edward Hatch at the age of sixteen, in which they conceived a child, whose name was Dora Dean. This name is taken from a radio day-time series. Betty and Edward did not get married. He had promised her when he got a leave from the service (U.S. Army), he would marry her. When Edward go this furlow, instead of marrying Betty, he came back and marry some one else.

Betty stayed in Arkansas until Dora was one year old. She didn't finish high school, because during that time when a girl got pregnant out of wedlock, it was a disgrace. Betty's determination was so strong, she felt that her having a child out of wed-lock, would not be a handicap to her. To make sure it wouldn't be, she left the little country town. In 1952, Betty went to Chicago, Ill. She lived with friends, worked in various factories, and attended Englewood High School, in the evenings.

In June 1955, Betty married Robert Conley Berry, whom she had met at Knockman factory Co. On (July 3, 1957, Betty gave birth to a baby girl, whose name was Vera Lynn. Betty was well liked by most people. She had always been the classical type of person. The type who was always her self. Simplicity in dressing was stylish enough for her, and as she often says.

" Criss Modeling School", taught her a lot about being a lady. Criss Modeling School at that time was the first successful Black Modeling School in Chicago.

Women Liberation Movement, never really annealed to Betty, because she feels that a woman is always liberated when she has respect and dignity for herself, and around her peers.

After completion of high school Betty still had determination of furthering her education, by going to Loop Jr. College, part-time. Illness has often intervened). Hopefully, someday she will receive her degree in sociology.

When I was a child, living in the country of Ark., there were a lot of pleasant memories. There were those days when Kattie and I, who was always called Grand-Ma, used to go fishing, picking Blackberries, and getting vegetables from the garden. There were days when we would sit around and crack walnuts, and I would listen to Grand-Ma Kattie and Uncle Wonderful, whom I never called Grand-father, but Just Uncle, talk about the good-old days.

Going to school in Arkansas; in those days, weren't like they are today. I had to walk 3 miles in order to catch the yellow school bus. Besides all that, the school bus had to go several more miles in order to reach the school.

The school was composed of separate buildings; grammar, junior high, and high school. Some of the teachers were old. In fact a few had taught Betty. This made it harder for me, as far as getting into devilishment. There was no kindergarten. A child started school in the first grade. I was a dummy in

school. Kattie and Wonderful were too old to really help me with my lessons. It was eventually decided by them that I should be sent to Chicago to my mother, Betty. They felt that Betty's husband was a good man and that Betty should now have her daughter, to be raised with her other daughter. and husband. I was eight years old, when I left Ark, The adjustment to the environment in Chicago took quite a while. I finished grammar school at Carrie Jacobs Bond, in 1965, and Parker high school, on January 1969. After graduation my parents sent me to Cook County Graduate School of Medicine, where I received certification in Medical Lab. Tech. Soon graduation I got a job at Cook County Hospital, in Adult Cardiology.

I must really say, going to school here was hell on the cross. My mother used to beat me every other day, for not studying my lessons. I didn't know my time tables until I was in the fifth grade that's how dumb I was.

On March 24, 1970, I gave birth to a daughter, whom I had out of wedlock. Like my mother Betty, de-termination has kept me going. Some days have been hard, some easy, but I still have a goal ahead that must be fulfilled someday.

One thing for sure, I never had Public assistance. I worked until I had my daughter. My job was waiting for me when I got off from leave of absent, with the same salary, and seniority.

In all of my years of growing up in Arkansas, I only met my father once. Even when I stayed in Chicago, I only heard from him once. It was not until May, 1973, a week before father's day, that I decided that I must contact his brother in Arkansas, so that I may know where he live. No one would never believe, that after 22 years, I finally got to really know what my father was like. The day to he exact was father's day, May, 1973.

On Saturday, May 15, 1971, at 3:00 p.m., Betty and Dora lost the woman who had raise them from babies, Kattie Nook Crowder. Tragedy for these two people wasn't over, because on December 28, 1971 in V.A. Hospital, Little Rock, Arkansas, the next closest person to their hearts, Wonderful Council, had also passed. Kattie and Wonderful might had a host of nieces and nephews and friends, but Betty and Dora were their children, who stayed by their sides through thick and thin.