

Mary Wright
204 W. Fourth St.

I was born at Gracey, Kentucky on Mr. James Coleman's farm, in a log cabin with a dirt floor and a stick chimney. Folks used to wear what they call a Polanaise. It was kind of like a wrapper made of calico made tight in the waist and withe in the bottom. Then I remember the basque waist on the overskirts made real tight waists with a point in the back and over the stomach. The skirt was really full, then a skirt over this to the knees with a big pucker on the hips.

My mammy bound me out to Miss Puss Graham to learn to work, for my vittles and clothes. Miss Puss gave me a pair of red morocco shoes and I was so happy, I've never forgotten these shoes. I heard my mammy talk of thee Nigger Rising. The Ku Klux used to stick the niggers head on a stake alongside the Cadiz road and the buzzards would eat them till nothing was left but the bones. There was a sign on this stake that said 'Look out Nigger! You are next.' We children would not go far away from the cabin. I tell you that is so. I just knew that this Ku Klux would do that to us sure if we had been caught.

I remember when Hopkinsville had just a few stores, an ole jew by the name of Shyer bought bones and iron and rags. Once we children found some bones on the creek bank and took them things and wanted to sell them to Mr. Shyer and he said, 'Take these things away they stink, they aren't cured up yet. Bury them and then bring them back to me.' We children had a hard time getting home because we stank so bad.

I remember when we used to have a big time quilting in those days, we sure had a big time. Before we'd start in the morning with a watermelon feast, then we'd quilt awhile then a big dinner was spread out then after dinner we'd quilt in the evening then supper and a big dance that night, with the banjo a humming and us niggers a dancing. Oh, Lordy what good days those were.

When we were young we used to have parties called Dideoos, the banjo would play and then the girls would line up on one side of the cabin and the boys on the other side while the folks were clapping and playing while the boys and girls would choose their partners, then we sing:

'Ole Brer Rabbit, Shake it, shake it, How I love you, Shake it, shake it'. I'd rather play that game than eat.

We used to tap maple trees and have big gatherings to make maple sugar, that was while I lived at Gracey. The stagecoach day was a big day, when the stagecoach was coming through, why little niggers would try to keep up with the horses and run alongside the coach and sometimes a man or woman would drop us a penny, then there was sure a scramble.

I remember when we used to wash clothes with a paddle. You wet these clothes and put soft soap in them, the soap was made out of ash lye and grease, then these clothes were spread on a smooth stump and beat with paddles till they were clean. Then came the wooden washboard, it was just a piece of wood with rough places or ridges chiseled in it. When we used to wash quilts we used to cut notches into barrels that made the tubs, my mammy would put water in these tubs then soft soap the quilts, then we children would get in the tubs with our bare feet and tramp the dirt out. We used to use grease lamps, these were made out of iron, with a piece of cotton rope down in the grease and this just sent out a puny smelly light. Then the brass lamp came along. It was a little lamp with a wick with a handle in the stem, no burner or anything. It burned coal oil but had no chimney. Hee, Hee, Hee, I remember about a story Mary Beard told to me about a slave woman that was foolish. Her master couldn't get anybody to buy her, hee, hee, hee, so he dresses her up nice and buys her a thimble and gives her a piece of cloth to sew on. It was right here in Hopkinsville in front of the court house - the block where he sold this woman as a sewing slave, and she was foolish and couldn't make a right stitch and she sure brought a good price. And when her new master found out she was foolish he sure was mad. He tried to sell her but - pshaw - he bought something he couldn't get rid of. Hee, Hee.

These ole nigger slavetraders used to, so my mammy said, steal the niggers from one master and they would leave at night and stay in Campbells Cave, then they would take these niggers with a promise of freedom to Clarksville, Tenn., sell them again on Mr. Dunk Morr's slave market. Sometimes these niggers, if they got a new master that was mean would run away and come back to their old masters.

Yes I believe you can be haunted, I never saw one though but I've heard them and I just get creepy and I know they are around. Dreams come true, I don't remember one now, but if I have one again I will try to remember and tell you.

No, I never saw a ghost. I feel them sometimes and I just shut my eyes and pray to the Good Lord to send that ghost away. If you find a horseshoe and put it over the door you will sure have good luck. Thirteen has always been my lucky number. That's foolish to think 'Thirteen is unlucky'. Seven is lucky to me, too. I always win when I think of a seven. Now, if you break a mirror you can't keep from having bad luck. Nothing you do will keep you from it. Sure is bad luck to meet a cross-eyed person. Blue gummed niggers is posion because if one bites you, you will be sure to die.

My mammy sure did have a big wedding. My pappy's master asked my mammy's master for her, and then my mammy's master gave her a big affair that cost him \$200.00 with the bridal supper and all.

They used to do niggers pretty bad about their funerals. When a nigger did die, why the rest of the niggers had to work, and one nigger made the box while another nigger dug the grave and the nigger was just covered up. On the fourth Sunday in August every year all the colored folks would take a basket dinner to the church and each family that had buried a nigger would pay the preacher to preach the sermon for that darkie who died. We ate dinner and supper at the church and sometimes the funeral, for some of the darkies wouldn't get preached till next August. We went to this funeral, we had a big time talking with our neighbors and of the dead.

Dogs howling means bad luck, if he howls under the house means someone is going to die. If an owl comes around the house and hollers, a death will happen in the family before the next day. I remember I was sitting in the house and a peckerwood was pecking on the house, 'Pure bad luck.' I was working once for Mrs. Shelton when a little wren kept trying to get in the house. I kept shooin' it away when he got in somehow, just as soon as it did, Mrs. Shelton called me and I had a telegram from Chicago saying my niece was dead. See, by that I know that I am bad luck. I don't like wrens anyhow.

When a cow loses its cud, just give it an old dirty dish rag and then the cow will find her cud again. Sometimes a cow gets sick and lays down, and if you will feel her tail on the end it is all soft. That cow has hollow tail, and unless you split that tail and fill the hollow with salt and then bind it up, that cow will surely die.

I asked Mary if she was superstitious and she said 'No, because niggers are educated these days and they don't believe in all that tom-foolery. They never would've been so foolish if the white folks did not tell us all that rot.' Mary neither reads or writes and is not superstitious according to her admission. What do you think of it. I am afraid that I do not agree with. M.D.H.)