

it was.” The woman seemed to feel that the White researcher might be writing a “selective” history that would not be a true picture of life as it was. Thus, the researcher opened her notebook and, with pen in hand, began to listen and to write.

The quotation from this woman is presented below because it provides a first-hand experience that illustrates what Dorothy Foster said above: “A White man could do what he wanted with a Black woman.” Not all White men behaved without conscience, but some did, and the quotation reveals another aspect of the life of some of the Black women who were part of the sharecropper communities.

The woman who is quoted lived (“back then”) along Gillespie Road, in a location that could easily have been part of the arsenal had the boundary been cut a bit differently. Gillespie Road was still a rural area in 1941. While the woman has not been referred to by name here, this is not because of her lack of consent. She insisted the researcher could use her name. However, giving her name would not add to the impact of her words and might be unappreciated by some of her younger family members. By the same token, the names of the men she tells about have been replaced with a blank.

_____ lived on one side of the road and his brother lived on the other. _____ raped me when I was eleven years old.

My mother was a sharecropper on his property. She sent me to the big house to get milk. I had my dime to pay for it. She told my brother to go with me. Maybe there was a reason. But my brother didn’t go to the door with me. He was playing with the dog.

I went up and knocked at the door. Sara Rice, the [Black] housekeeper, was not there. He answered the door himself. He took my hand and led me in. Instead of getting the jug [of milk], he put me on the day bed. He put a pillow under my back. I screamed. I was hurt and scared.

Then he let me up and gave me back my dime and gave me the milk. I was crying. My mother never sent me back there again.

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_____’s older brother did the same. His name was _____. We’d moved. We all lived in their little houses. Mother was the man and the woman. She was a sharecropper for 20 acres. Mother had rented his [the older brother’s] old home house. It was where he was born. He built a nicer house. It was a two-story house with steeples. He never married.

The old house we lived in was a log house. It had an upstairs, but it was old. Sometimes we’d climb up and look.

Ms. Sally was his [the older brother’s] housekeeper. She lived in a little house that was across from him. When my mother went to the field to work, sometimes I go to _____’s house with Ms. Sally and help her. One day I was there helping her, and he caught me by myself and took me to the inner room. I was twelve by then. It didn’t hurt so much that time. Then he smiled and said, “Be nice. What you gonna get mad for?” I hated him.

In talking about Ms. Sally, the woman commented that _____[the older brother] used to go to Ms. Sally’s house when Ms. Sally’s husband was gone [the tone implied his purpose in going there].

The researcher had not stopped the woman while she was talking steadily, but when there was a pause, the researcher asked two questions: “Did you tell your mother what happened when you were eleven years old and went home with the milk, crying because you’d been abused?” and “What did the sharecropper-husband of Ms. Sally do about the landowner’s unwelcome visits to his wife?”