

[Albert and Anne Denham]

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Bob and Anne Franklin (white)

Hicoria, Florida

Country store proprietor and farmer.

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ALBERT AND ANNE DENHAM

“Anne, my wife,” said Albert Denham, “she has gone to town this mornin with another lady. They ain't come back yet. I'm sorry she ain't here, and I hope she come back before you gets gone; she'll be plum glad to see you.”

We were sitting on the front porch of Mr. Denham's home near Hicoria, Florida when he made this statement. he was out of breath from hoeing in his garden ad sat panting. While he panted, he wiped his brow with a dingy bandanna.

“She don't get to go to town much for we ain't got no car, nothin 'cepting my old truck, but I always lets her have it whenever I gits the chancet. It's a right nice change for her too, and gives her a chancet to get away from things. She works so hard.”

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Upon my arrival I had found Mr. Denham in his little vegetable garden between the front of his house and the back end of his grocery store which faces the main highway. I had told him what I wanted, so he laid his hoe aside and insisted on coming to the porch, adding that he needed a rest anyway.

He was a tall, thin man, with light hair and clear blue eyes. He assumed a serious attitude toward the interview, but talked freely of himself and his family. His manner was pleasant and friendly.

“Talkin about Anne though, makes me think of how she's been sufferin lately. She has a lot of pain in her side. I think she works too hard, tryin to keep us all clean and fed right. C 14 — 12/20/40 Fla.

“Somnetimes she washes as much as twice a week, especially when the 2 younguns is goin to school. Did you notice all them clothes on the back line, dryin? Well she put them out before she went to town this mornin.”

There was a mixture of pride and sadness in his voice, but he went on with his story.

“She keeps the house clean too, and wears herself out scrubbin floors. I try to tell her not to do too much, but she won't listen.

“Of course the children all help, we are raisin them that way. But when they're all gone off to school, there ain't much they can do. We try to teach our younguns to be mindful of their of their home, and feel a responsibility in it. And lots of times they take right a-holt of things and do them without bein told. We ain't got much of a home now, or much furniture in it, but we like to take care of what we got. I hope to fix up some day, but there don't seem much of a chancet now. Would you like to see what we got? As I told you before, it ain't much, but it's curn and it's clean.”

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He led me indoors. In the living room a center table with a linen cover caught my attention at once, on top of this was a large Bible. Other furnishings included several chairs, a cot, a trunk, and kerosene lamps. The bedrooms had little more than a bed and one chair in each. But the beds were clean, neatly made, and covered with hand embroidered muslin spreads. High shelves draped with muslin served as clothes closets. In the kitchen was a wood stove, some shelves for groceries and cooking utensils, besides a table and three crudely made benches.

There weren't any modern plumbing facilities. A pump in the yard supplies them with water, and a large galvanized tub, hanging to the side of the house, serves for bathing and washing. I saw an old fashioned outhouse about 150 feet beyond the house. We walked back to the front porch, and seated ourselves in one of the old, unpainted and weather-beaten rocking chairs.

"The younguns ain't home now," he explained, "they're off to school. I'm alone. So bein there warn't no business at the store, I jost been hoein in the garden. It was good time I was gettin to them beans, cabbages and okra, they shore needed it. That's how come you to find me there. I gotta another piece over back of them pines in yonder, but the land ain't any good; I just don't seem to have the luck farmin here to what I had in Alabama. I always made a pretty fair livin there till the last few years before we come here. But it seem that everthin has gone wrong in money matters now, for a long time."

We talked along on general economic conditions, then he reverted back to his own problems.

"Anne and me was both born in Geneva County, Alabama, and lived right near each others farms. I'm 45 now and she's 37, or I'm thinkin that's what she is. I never can keep up with dates and ages exactly: seems like it takes a woman fer that anyway.

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“We both learned to farm and our fathers both raised lots of corn and cotton. We married back in 1919, and I think it was then that we come to Florida for the first time and looked around for a place. We heard they was some fine farmin land down around Lake Cheechobee in the muck, but we didn't get no farther when we seen this place. I jest up and bought it. It was all jest pine land when we first came. We didn't like it much though, and Anne was homesick all the time so we went back home and farmed up there fer a while.

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“You [?], up in Genova county, I raised the finest corn and cotton you ever seen. I [?] it for nigh on to three year, and I made right good money at it too. Then the dry weather come, and the bugs started in and killed everything we planted. After about three years of [?] troubles we got up and come back to Florida.

“At that time I still owned this place, it was jest [?] land, but I [?] right in to clearin a spot for the house. I went in more [?] to get [?] to build jest this front room. Then we moved in, and I kept a-clearin more land till I got that little patch there done, and ready to plant. Then I started on that larger one over yonder back of them pines. Anne, she kinder likes them big tall pines and the wind a-whistlin through them, that's how come I left them.”

Mr. Denham sighed deeply and a [?] look came into his blue eyes.

“Then all of a sudden we tuk a notion to go back to Alabama agin, and [?] ifon we couldn't stay there. You see, mam, its been our home all our lives, and all our relatives were there: we jest felt like we wanted to live there if we could. [?] we wasn't [????] do. All my people have lived right in Genova County a mighty [?] time. I reckon. And I've heard my pa tell that his grandpa come over from England and come to Georgia first, then right on to Alabam. My [?] named [?], and [?] my grandpa.

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“Well we didn't stay long that trip for things was sure in a bad fix up [?], seemed like the farmers jest couldn't make a go of crops no more. So we come back again, and we stayed. I think that was late in 1925, mam, but it mighta been in '86, I ain't real sure.

“I was this time I started to raisin corn and cabbage. The cabbages 5 done all right, but the corn jest wouldn't grow. [?] take to working out on farms for other folks around here, and I found out for myself jest what to plant and how to raise it best. I kinda figured I'd like to be a good farmer like I use to be back in Alabam. But it didn't do no good. This Florida land ain't like land is other places, and when you larn to farm in, you jest got to start from the beginnin and do it all over agin. Well, that's what happened to me. [?] when I'd learned folks [?] my land [?] [???], so I planted [?] fir a crop, to [?] the land. While this was going on I still hired out to other folks and managed somehow to live and take care of my family. But this taking care of them wasn't nothin like I had expected to give them.

“Well mam, along about '33 I got \$50 unexpected like. It came from some work I had done in [?], an had left there with it a-owin to me. So with things goin so bad in the farmin, I reckoned I'd take that money and start a little store right here. I got enough lumber, the rough kind, to build that little deck you see over there. I had to go more in debt for it, but [?] the onliest way. The [?], he [?] I was tryin my best to make livin, an [?????].

“I used most all of that \$50 for groceries, and [??] glad even though I didn't get to sell any. It jest meant that I could get my food [??] wholesale, and that [??] living. But, with what I did [?], and what I made with other work, I managed to stock up agin and keep a-goin. [??] the store times when I was hiring out.

“I don't make much in the store and never have, but it helps us and gives us a chance to give the children some of the proper food they need, like milk. Sometimes the milk is the canned kind, but they get it, and 6 that's what counts most. Then too, we kin give them dried fruit, apples and bananas, and things like canned tomatoes. I never could buy all those things at retail prices, especially the way prices is up now.”

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He paused for a moment in thought, then [?]: “Then, [?] the store gives us all work to do, and it's better to keep tryin to work than to give up and sit down and do nothin, ain't it now?”

“The young-uns can all help too. Thy can farm, help in the store and with the house. And believe me, they do it! I was raised that way, for my pa believed that everyone should work. So I'm raisin them that way.

Just then a large car stopped at the store with a [?] blast of its horn. Mr. Denham [?] himself and went out to see what his customer wanted. I heard a [?] voice [?] a Coca-cola and a five cent box of crackers. When he returned there was a [?] twinkle in his clear blue eyes, he said: “Well I made three cents that time. When I seen that fine car stop I hoped they'd buy out the store, but it never happens. They comes here and only buys five or ten cents worth at a time.”

“My folks [?] tell me I had a head for business, but it don't look much like it no more. I [?] if I'd had a better education I mighta done more. I think I wont as far as the sixth grade in school, and that ain't much. But it was different in them days and nobody cared much whether they get an education or not. I can remember when we had a little one-room school house with only one teacher for all of us. Every youngun brought just any kind of school books he had, and that's what he studied.

“I never did care much for school and was always glad to stay at home and help with the farmin, for I loved that work. Yes, mam, I had to stay home a lot and work. [??] pa had a nigger once in to help, but you 7 can't depend on them, they're always gettin up and leavin without notice.

“You know, when I was young and jest married, I figured I'd be a rich farmer in no time, but it aint never [?] work out that way now.” At this Mr. Denham sighed regretfully. “And it's all because I ain't got much of a education.

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“You bet I believe in education. Ever since I've been growed I've tried to get all I could. I read and study all I can, and I like to talk to education folks. I read the papers and good magazines, when I can get them. Them trashy ones I wouldn't let in my house, and I'm hopin my young-uns never get to readin them neither. Why do they let them be printed, they don't do no good, and in the longer run they're bound to do lots of mischief.

“[?] got five childrens. Betty, she's the oldest, she's 18 now, and in high school. I'm hoping she'll be a teacher when she finishes. And if I can, I'm [?] to send her to college to study for one. Grace is 15 and she's about ready for high school I think. I jest ain't [?] of their [??] in school, mam, but I reckon that's about right. Darline is our youngest girl and she's 11 now. I [?] two boys too, John who's 13 is a pretty good farmer if I do say so. But ifon I can help it I don't want by boys to be farmers, there's too much hard work and too much disappointment in it. Gene, who is the baby, is nine. Gee! You'd better not ever call him a baby, he don't like that, and he gets awful mad.

“Yep, we have a good family for bein such poor folks, but the younguns all behaves and gits along good in school. Their teachers, and each one has a different teacher, it ain't like we [?] have it, tell me that they don't never have no trouble with them. Well, both Anne and 8 me, is aimin to bring them up right and in the [?] of God and the Baptist Church.

“Sometimes I wish I had more boys, then I'm glad I ain't got no more, for they're such a responsibility and cost a lot to bring up. Mine don't always have everything they want, and not always what they're needin neither, but I do my best for them. Right now they're needin some work on their teeth. John needs some tonic too, he's been right [?] lately, but jest ain't got the money. I always say the Lord don't send no more younguns than what a man can tend, and it looks like that it my case.

I want my younguns to have a better life than what I had, and I'm hopin that educations will fit them proper for to make decent livins. I don't know as yet what all of them is aimin to do, but I'm tryin to put the idea of some special kind of work in their heads. Betty of course

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wants to be a teacher, so ifon I can get her off to college she will be fixed, I sure hope I can.

“The schools out here ain't so bad neither, they teach all kinds of things I never learned. They even get business courses and the like, it makes me wish I could go sometimes. The teachers is pleasant too, and comes to visit me now and agin.

“My younguns all like school, so I never keep them home. They always have parts in all the school entertainments and do might well. [?] and me always attend those doing and most of the time we enjoy them. Then of course the younguns like for us to be on hand. I don't know how to say it, but it seems that with the things I jest mentioned, and their readin and writin, they learn more than we ever did. It seems they're fitted better to meet the world and do their part in life when they get through.

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‘Of course I don't know whether I can get them all well educated or not, they ain't much tellin until its all done, but I'm aimin to try. If I was makin the money now what I useter make in [?] when I first started working for myself, everything would be all right. But those times is different, and when I do make something I have to spend it right away for things we need.

‘We like it better here in Florida now that we've been here so long. The weather is better and things are a mite cheaper. We also don't have to use so much wood in winter. We don't never even buy no fuel, all we have to do is take the truck and go pick up all we want. And of course the place is all paid for, so that's a heap ofon my shoulders.’

With the future of his children still in mind, he added: “Anne and me both, always tries to see that the younguns have the right food and clothes. I don't mean fine vittals, nor fine clothes, but the right kind and ones what's always clean. We have both studied dicts, so as to give our children the best as we know how. They like milk even when it's the canned kind, and they like vegetables too, that is, all but carrots. They eat corn, butter-beans,

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string beans, and [?]. Now they shore do like okra, and it's good for them too. I never did care much for vegetables myself, but since the kids came along I've larn to get a lot of things I never like before. Sometime I have to take part pay for my work in vegetables around here, so then we had to cut them.

“No, mam, when I was gettin started here, I didn't sell no groceries much for tradin, unless it was fruit. Some of the folks cut on the [?] around here, raise good bananas though and then they'd bring them in I'd trade for them occasionally. But I couldn't do that much and stay in the 10 business. Then again I'd take some grapefruit or oranges, because ifon I couldn't sell them, the younguns could always eat them, and they're good for them. Mostly though, I sells for cash, that's the best way. I also don't give no credit, because I just ain't able.

“[?] this little store sure has lots of benefits, for it helps me buyin clothes and other things besides groceries. I can usually got a discount, whereas ifon I weren't in the business I'd have to pay the same as other folks. And them younguns of mine, [???] of clothes. Shoes too, they just don't last no time at all. You may not believe it, mam, but these [?] clothes what I've got on are the best I've got, but I don't need no better. Five work shirts and pants are plenty good enough for me. It does make me feel kind a bad though, when my folks can't dress up like the rest of the folks. I [?] wear those here clothes to church. Anne keeps them all washed and ironed and I don't mind for myself if I ain't got no suit like other men have.

“I couldn't say exactly, mam, jest how much it would take for us to live comfortably. I ain't figured on that for a long time, and of course it would take a lot of money for us-uns to have all the things we really need, besides these what we want. Well I reckon [??]j we was to start life all now agin, and to have the proper clothes and food, and maybe see a doctor, like I always plan things for my family, it would take [?] on to \$75 if it was regular. Then agin, maybe that might not be enough, I jest don't know. I wish Anne was here, she could

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tell you right quick, and she's better at that than I am. And it's mighty hard to say with price going up all the time.

“Sometimes I sell [?] vegetables out of my garden, but prices for 11 them is so bad it ain't hardly worth the trouble to tote them to town. Besides we can always eat them. Sometimes I think I'll jest give up farmin all together, it's so aggravation; and jest let the land go back to woods and trees. But I do love the work, and when I gets to thinkin of all the time I spent in clearin and cleanin, I jost can't let go. [?] like there's somethin about bein a farmer oncot you got into it.

“We all likes the store too, but it would be a [?] better ifon there was more business and we could stay busy all the time. The childrens can keep store as good as Anne and me, and they knows how to weigh out grits and the like, and make change. Most folks never thought I could make a living with this here little store way out here on the highway, but I shore have, even when it was so far from town.

“I got that there little old truck too, and I can use it sometime when I get work, especially ifon it's county work. We've done right well in spite of all what folks said I couldn't do. Anyway we ain't starved, and that's somethin big.’

Mr. Danham then spoke of life in town: “I wouldn't want to live in town, but I do like to go in sometimes and watch to see what the rest of the folks are doin. But I ain't never seen none what looked happier than we are. They always seems to be in such a hurry.

“I think out here's a [?] to raise younguns too, they got plenty to do an no time to get into mischief. In town they want to stay on the street all the time. I've seen little bitty youngun in town roamin around all by themselves. [?] like they'd be [?], but they ain't, and they jost go walkin right down the streets. I can't keep from wonderin what their parents is like when I sees it.

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“But here it's much cheaper to live too, [?] to buy, no electric lights and not even no water. Jest think of havin to buy the water you drink [?] wash in, it gets me. I got one fine deep well outside my kitchen door, and I aim to build another room around it sometime for the kitchen. And there it is, all the water a body could want, jest for working the pump handle a little. I don't believe the Lord intended for people to buy water, do you, mam?”

“No, [??] early in the mornin sometimes, that we have to light a [?] until sun-up. But we have plenty to do when we get up so early, anyway it seems like [?] that gets up early feels better than those what stays in bed. I always been use to gettin up like that though, for when I was a boy on the farm, we always got up long before daylight, my pa wouldn't have it no other way.”

He then discussed the political aspects of the country in general: Anne and me, both is good Democrats, like we was raised to be, and like I'm raisin my younguns to be.

“Anne and me both vote, but Anne don't take much stock in it, she's timid and don't like to go to the polls. I am [?] from the ground [?] and mighty proud of it. It sure looks like the Democratic Party is the only one for the country. Anyway it's the [?] one what ever looked on for the poor folks. Nothing much was ever done for the likes of me until the [?] administration. I sure do admire Mr. Roosevelt and I sure hope he runs for a third term: This country needs him. And if other [?] folks will let him be, without so much interferin, he will do a [?] betterin that. [??] he studied for years to be the President some day, so when he got in, he knew jest what was to be done, and how to do it.

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We ain't never had no President like that before.

Folks can't help bein poor and in a rich country like this, it looks bad. It also looks like folks could be helped a lot when we're so rich. I think Mr. Roosevelt saved the nation when we come in office. Before, folks was gettin discouraged and so despirited. There was jest

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about to be a war right here in our own land I'm thinkin. If he hadn't been elected, they ain't no tellin what would have happened. I'm prayin for him to [?] agin next time. And if he does I'll sure work for him.

“Anne likes him too, and we both read all we can about him. We try to keep up with affairs as best we can. I tell her she ought to be glad to vote for it shows that she is an American citizen, and that's a lot to be mighty proud of.

Mr. Denham paused and rocked excitedly for a few minutes. A slight flush crept into his pale ace. It was evident that he was interested in the future of his country and was willing to fight for what is right.

“With all them countries in Europe a-fightin, we got a lot here to be mighty thankful for. And we ought to do jest what the President tells us too, for he knows what is best. He sure is interested in his country anyway.

“Of course I don't understand much I read about them furrin matters, but it looks like war is headed this way and we oughta be ready. I don't believe in war, but if it comes we can't jest let them furriners come over and take our land. And believe we got lots of fine things to take care of here too, but Mr. Roosevelt would mind them for us, if them meddlin folks would jest let him be.

The political discussion ended with this, so I ask him about his church. He said: Yes, mam, I'm a Baptist. My whole family belongs to the Missionary 14 Baptist Church at [?]. We go every Sunday as regular as we can. Not havin no car makes us go on the truck, but be [?] we piles [?] younguns in and [good?] right ahead.

“We give towards the church whenever we can, it ain't never much, [?] we do our best. Preachin is the minister's work and he has to be paid the came as the rest of us. Sometimes I give groceries, or Anne bakes a cake for a dinner or a social, but we can't

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always do that, when we want to. They like for Anne to bake cakes for socials for she's such a good cake - baker.

“We are tryin to raise our children up to be good church members. [?] like the world needs a lot of that today. I mean more real religion and love for each other in it. While there is so much [?] and dishonesty going on, it ain't no wonder there's fightin and trouble everywhere.

“I think the church is mighty important, and bein a member and havin that responsibility helps lots of people to keep steady and behave right. Maybe we can't always like everybody in the church and sometimes even the minister don't even suit us, but we [?] in the church for a club, we gotta keep [?] for the Lord's sake. That's another thing I admires in President Roosevelt, he goes to church and he prays too, and he ain't afraid to speak of God when he talks to us people. Yes, man, he's right.”