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## [Agnes Harrell]

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Life History

TITLE: AGNES HARRELL

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Fictitious Name [md]

Address Marion, S.C.

Place Marion County

Occupation Housework

Name of Writer Annie Ruth Davis [?]. N. S. C. Box, 2.

Project #3613

Annie Ruth Davis

Marion, S.C.

February 24, 1939 AGNES HARRELL

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(White) MARION SOUTH CAROLINA

Agnes Harrell, a mother of three sons, lives in a five-room rented apartment on the eastern edge of the town of Marion. Two of the boys, Charlie and Jasper, ages 19 and 15, live with their mother, while Louis, age 17, is married and lives in Sumter. Mrs. Harrell's husband deserted his family seventeen years ago and though he drops in to spend a night with them occasionally, his wife states that he had not provided a penny of support for his family since he left home. It has been only by hard work and the help of others that Agnes has been able to get the necessities of life for her little family throughout these years.

It was about two o'clock on this somewhat warm, but cloudy February afternoon, when a visit was made to the home of the Harrells. Agnes had just finished washing up her dinner dishes and was ready to begin on another job, for she always kept busy, but expressed a real willingness to stop and talk awhile.

Entering the front doors one passed directly into a large living room, simply but comfortably furnished and well-lighted by a flood of sunshine coming through two large windows. The room was sufficiently heated by a coal heater; fringed shades and coarse lace curtains hung at the windows; a gay-colored 2 linoleum rug covered the greater part of the floor, and a number of tables and chairs were placed about the room, while in one corner stood a mahogany-colored whatnot of six three-cornered shelves. The shelves were put together with six spools at each corner, which Agnes explained were given to her at the W.P.A. Sewing Room. Out of these few empty spools and some rough boards, this useful article of furniture had been made at the cost of only a dollar. On the walls hung several calendars and a framed copy of the Lord's Prayer. A wooden-framed clock ticked lightly on the mantel and on each side of it, paper flowers of various bright colors presented gay decorations. Agnes, who often does house cleaning for other people to earn their daily bread, had spent some of her energy on her own rooms, too, for everything looked spotless and in perfect order.

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A short woman, only five foot in height and weighing over two hundred pounds, Agnes offers a pleasing countenance to all who meet her. Her well-rounded face, big bright eyes, mass of pretty black hair, and complexion glowing with health, little show the hardships she has undergone in the last seventeen years. She expresses a deep gratitude for every blessing that has come to her and is indeed proud of her hair. On one occasion, when complimented on the beauty of her hair, she remarked: "Yes, my hair is pretty. You know, the Bible says a woman's hair is her glory, and there's a lot of truth in them words too, if you know'd it."

Dressed in a black silk skirt, a blue and white checked cotton jacket, and a big print apron, Agnes insisted that her 3 visitor take the large rocker near the heater. Then she began to poke the fire a little and sweep up some falling ashes beneath the stove as she continued to talk: "Had to go to work this morning and ain't got things cleaned up like I generally keeps them looking. But that's all right - reckon you've seen things tore up before."

When Agnes learned that the purpose of one's visit was to ask her to relate a true story of her own life, she did not hesitate to quickly reply: "No'm, I don't mind telling you whatever you might want to know 'bout me. And I don't see no sense in putting no other name different from mine to what you write 'bout me neither. I've lived a life I don't mind nobody knowing and I hope when I ain't able to keep going, there'll be some way provided. Yes'm, I've mad a honest living for me and my children seventeen years and I ain't got nothing I care 'bout keeping under no cover. People need'nt come up and say they had to do this and that sharp trick to get along 'cause if they live a decent life, there'll always be a way provided.

"I've got three children - all them's boys. I've sho' had a tough time raising my younguns, too, but I thank the Lord for sparing me to get them up big enough to help themselves. I've had lots of trouble and hard times to get along, but by the help of the good Lord and other

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people, I've pulled through to the present and I'm thankful. Yes, I'm thankful to Our Father and President Roosevelt for what they've done for me and my children.

“Long an my father and mother lived, I never did know what it was to want for anything. I was born and raised in No. 6 4 Township, Georgetown County, on my father's farm along with twelve other head of children. No. 6 Township, that's thirty-two miles from Georgetown, twixt there and Hemingway. I always was a poor girl, but we never knowed what it was to want for anything. My father owned a two-horse farm and we made enough of provisions on the farm to last from one year till the next. One year, we made thirteen banks of eating potatoes and two big barns of corn outside of our cotton. Then in the summer we made enough market stuff to buy all our little extras. Yes, if I had today what I used to have, I wouldn't have to worry over life. No, when I was a child and wanted a thing, it wasn't to worry over for we done had it - all we had to do was to go out and get it. But I'll tell you, when you lose your mother and father, seems like everything you've got's gone.

“I went to a little school called Carver's Bay first and then the name changed to [Dunnogan?] School. Yes'm, when I left that country, the school was still passing through the name of [Dunnogan?]. But going to school in my young days sho' wasn't near like it is now. I never went to school no higher than the fourth grade and then I hadn't done much. I remember, we had to leave home at seven-thirty o'clock in the morning to get to school on time and walk every bit of one and one-half miles. School lasted from nine o'clock to four o'clock and that'd put me to get home about five o'clock in the evening. Soon as we got home, we had to go to work on the farm. Finally it just got to the place where I had to quit school to help my father make a crop. You see, there wasn't but one time to make a crop just like I learned afterwards there wasn't but one right 5 time to go to school. Children's wonderfully blessed to go to school this day and time, I'll tell you.

“I reckon I was 'bout fourteen years old when I quit school and got married at nineteen. My husband was a farmer and we stayed on his father's farm six years and made a good living. But that last year we stuck together, everything fell through on the farm. My

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husband said, "Love, I believe I'll go and work in the cotton mill next year and then we'll have something to get another start with.' I begged him not to go for I know'd cotton mills was fast places and he'd drift away, but he would go in spite of all I could say. And I was right, he never come back to live with me and the younguns no more. I felt it; knowed it was coming. That's what wrecks so many homes and how-come I hated so bad for him to leave me. It nearly run me crazy "cause he'd been good to me as could be 'fore he left home. He just got out and kept a-drifting; never did have no fusses in all our married life. Seems like I could over burying my first child, what died with the stomach colitis and yellow t'rash, better than I could him leaving me.

"He comes back home off and on to spend a night, but he ain't been no service to us in seventeen years. Some poeple's ashamed to tell sech stuff as that, but I ain't. The good Lord knows it and I don't care if the world does. A woman can't help her husband walking off and leaving her, but she can live a respectable life. When he left me with them younguns and went to work in the cotton mill, he was making eighteen and nineteen dollars a week. He know'd my little children were suffering, 6 but he wouldn't give us a penny. Yes'm, my oldest boy was a-crying for bread and I don't know what we would've done, but the good Lord opened and provided a way. And since I've been in Marion, I've worked by the hardest and shed many a tear, but trusting in the good Lord, I've always got along. My husband was to my house here in Marion last October, but he still don't give us near a cent - always sets like he's down and out when he comes to see us.

"I stayed on where I was for five years after my husband left me and worked for what I got. Worked on the farm in the summer and took in washing in the winter to keep us going. I decided while I had my three children in a hut, I better keep them there 'cause I know'd it's hardly ever two families can get along. Yes'm, I've kept house to myself ever since I was married.

"I was getting along so poorly a-working so hard down in Georgetown County, I moved to Mccall and worked in the cotton mill for twelve months. No'm my husband was working in

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a mill to Rockingham, North Carolina at the time. I was making four dollars a week there a-working on the winders and at them rates, I could buy all we wanted to eat and pay house rent out of it, too, but I sho' can't do it now. I worked on that job till the mill shut down and left me to get along best I could them last four months I stayed to McCall. Why I picked cotton along and along for a living and the good people give me something to eat.

“it wasn't long from then till Janie Johnson, a woman I knew'd in McCall, moved up here to Marion and persuaded me to tear up and come to Marion, too. She said she had a job for 7 me to start on time I got here, but I found myself dropped down in a bunch of strangers and not a piece of job to bring me in a bite of bread. Had to go in the cotton patch down to Mr. Leitners and pick cotton to pay my house rent the first year I come here to live. Then my little baby was having chill and fever and I never know'd which way to turn.

“Yes'm, I moved here in 1929 and rented a house over on Montgomery Street for six dollars a month. Well, it ain't no use to round a stump to tell the truth - might as well come up and face the fore. I've raked lawns and cleaned house for people many a day to get something to eat. Mrs. Lide, she's the best friend I ever know'd. She's all the time a-going 'bout this town and helping some poor creature get along. She learned about the trouble I was in and she went to people all over this town and said, 'Agnes is here on us with those three children to take care of and if she can get anything to do, she'll do it. Now, people, I want all of you to give her a job.' Yes'm, Mrs. Lide taken that much interest in me and I'm thankful to her for it.

“Well, I went to work doing house cleaning for a dollar a day and I don't say it 'cause it's me, but ain't nobody never complained 'bout my work yet. Cose getting a day's work onced in awhile wasn't enough to feed and clothe me and three younguns and pay house rent, too, but everybody was mighty good to help us along. Why these people at the schoolhouse give me enough of what the school children carried there at Thanksgiving for poor people to last me till Christmas. Then they give me another 8 load at Christmas to carry me over another month. And Judge and Mrs. Lide, they've sho' been good to me.

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Don't seem like just a friend - seen more like a mother and a father. Yes'm, that's the way I feels 'bout Judge and Mrs. Lide, 'cause when you lose you mother and father, seems like the sun don't shine nowhere. Then there's Miss Eunice Lambert, she's got out many a day and got me something to eat. Don't know where she got it from, but she'd come stepping in with it herself.

“From then on, I kept on a-catching what work I could, 'cause I've got the will to do and don't mind putting my hand to any work that's got a honest living to it. It's many a day that I've worked for the county cleaning up the City Hall and health Department. But I've done so much hard work in my life, I can't work like I used to. Bringing children into this world, tending toem, a-laboring to make a living, and doing all the housework, that's more than half, if you know'd it.

“I kept on a-doing a day's work round and 'bout till this government relief work come up. I didn't join it right off, but Mrs. Lide's sister got to be head over the sewing room and she sent word for me to sign up on the government work. Mrs. Lide explained to her that I was embarrassed to do sech as that, but she said I might as well get it as the others that was getting it. You know, it wasn't a bit of trouble for me to get on. They started me off making quilts in 1934 and then I worked myself up till I got to be a pretty good seamstress. They raised and cut as so much on that sewing room job till it's hard to tell how much I was getting, but our average wages was twenty-six dollars 9 a month mostly. Then the government give us some commodities along with the pay each as plain flour, pack of butter, and some prunes. Best thing they give us was this here smoke meat - that was just fine. Cose it was all a help, you can feel that.

“I started working for the government in 1934 and in 1936, I thought to be sure they'd cut me off. My boy, Charlie, went off to the C.C.C. Camp at King's Mountain. But 'bout the time they made up to take me off the sewing room, Charlie quit and come home- just didn't like it. You know, while that boy was in the C.C.C. Camp, I never got a dollar of his money. He'd spend his part soon as he got it and time the other part come home to me, he'd be

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here to grab it. No'm, he never stayed in the C.C.C. Camp but four months. Woman, I'll tell you, I've worked for myself.

"I worked on for the government till 'bout a year and six months ago. Charlie got a job at the veneer plant and just 'cause he was making a \$1.90 a day, they took my job away from me. Charlie lost his job at the veneer plant last July and we've sho' had it tough getting along since then. No, I never tried to get back on the government work. I ain't spent no thought over it only I knows some people's working for the government that don't needs it like I does. There's plenty women foreman have husbands a-working and just 'cause my little boy had a job, they cut me off. It's a dishonest proposition, I'll tell you, the way they work so unfair with it. But I don't reckon I ought to talk sech 'bout it. They 10 considered I didn't need it and if it ain't helping me now, it's helping some other poor somebody and I'm thankful for them. Anyhow it don't matter with me - anything that's got a honest living in it, I'll go right at it. Still when this government work plays out, a heap of people go feel what a pinch is. I knowed where it helped me and felt the need of it, but don't care how good a job some people have, they don't appreciate it. They'd feel just like my boy, if they was cut off now - wouldn't have no job and couldn't get none. Can't hardly buy a job these days.

"Little as people knows it, I've sho' been up against a tough proposition since I got [?] dropped from the W.P.A. I work a day and a half a week now cleaning up the Methodist Church and the City Hall and don't draw but three dollars a week for all both jobs. Yes'm that's all the work I can find anywhere to do. Cose it'd take me a longer time to clean up that big Methodist Church, but my oldest boy ain't got nothing to do and he helps me along on my job. That's Charlie - he come home sick the fifth of January and his doctor's bills have cost me two dollars a week ever since. The doctor said he had some kind of blood disease - had awful chills and fever to start with. He's up now, thank the good Lord, but he's still mighty poorly. Now, ain't I getting a heap out of my work? No'm, ain't nobody knows my troubles but the Lord.

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“The rent got so high where I was living over on Waverly Way Street and me not making anything to speak of, I know'd I had to figure out another place to stay. Mr. Tindall offered me these five rooms for five dollars a month and I thought that 11 was reasonable enough. Cose I furnishes my part and pays for my lights and water. Mr. Tindall's wife died awhile back and him and his boy live in that other part of the house. Yes'm, they keeps to their side and I keeps to mine.

“If I had it all to do myself, I couldn't do it, but my baby boy helps me a little. If Jasper wasn't working, he couldn't go to school for he wouldn't have nothing to wear. That's how-come Louis and Charlie had to quit going to school. I wasn't making it to sent them and they couldn't get nothing to do. 'Twas all I could do to get something to eat and a place to stay, so my two oldest boys had to quit school in the sixth grade. Louis went to night school last year, but he's married now and that ends his learning, I reckon.

“Yes, my baby goes to school in the morning and works at Roger's grocery store in the evening. He comes home from school and swallows his dinner in a hurry, so as to get to the store by three o'clock. Then he knocks off work at six o'clock and goes to Mrs. Lides every night at that time to get his lessons. Mrs. Lide, she sees to it that Jasper learns his lessons every night for the next day. He gets done studying 'bout eight-thirty o'clock and then he goes back to the store and helps them straighten up things for the next day. He don't never come home no sooner then eleven o'clock of a night. He's in the eighth grade now and I think he's done mighty well minding he had to take it rough and tumble.

“When Jasper settles up of a week to the store, he brings home two dollars and onced and again three dollars in a busy week. He uses it mostly to get his school supplies and school 12 lunch, 'cause I ain't got it to give him to buy them with. Then if I runs short a week, he takes it up. Yes'm, if I was to die tonight and they called for a penny to close my eyes, I wouldn't have it.

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"I ain't never moved my church membership to Marion myself, but my three boys belong to that big Methodist Church up there on Godbold Street. Still we go to the Church of God over yonder on Spring Street mostly. That's a Holiness Church and Sunday night's the big time over there, but they have prayer meeting every Wednesday evening. The regular pastor lives on Waverly Way Street and the other preacher in one of these evangelist and he lives in a little trailer house right behind the church. Well, they do, they do have big crowds over there. Bet they entertains one hundred and fifty head of people on a Sunday night. Gracious Lord, the Church of God is as different from the Methodist Church as night is from day. You just ought to go and see for yourself - couldn't hardly explain the difference to save my life. I'll tell you, don't see no dancing and shouting at the Methodist Church like goes on at the Church of God. Don't allow no woman to bob her hair, wear no kinda of jewelry, gold tooth, short sleeves, anklet socks, nor dip snuff. And they's strictly against a man rolling his socks. Forbids a man to belong to a secret order, smoke, chew, nor drink liquor. Can't nobody go to no shows, dances, nor play cards. Why they calls their dancing the holy dance. That's the rules of the Church of God and them what joins that church, they've got to abide by it's rules. No, sir, I'll tell anybody I 13 ain't joined no Church of God, 'cause I've sho' got to have my short sleeves and low neck dresses a-working like I do. Just go there to look and listen like most of them other folks, I reckon.

"I could vote, but I don't. I just don't feel like it's right for lady folks to vote, 'cause I wasn't raised that way. Come we's here and if we don't vote, other people will run it over us and get everything a-going their way. But I ain't never voted but twice in my life. I voted in Georgetown the first time and then I voted for Mr. Lide when he was running for senator. Mr. and Mrs. Lide had been so sweet to me, I felt like I could do that little job for them. Cose Mrs. Lide, she come and carried me up there and showed me how I was to do.

"Thank the good Lord, I've been blessed with strong health all my days, else I never could've carried my burden. Weighed two hundred and fifty pounds the last time I stood on the scales. Yes'm, when I begin to fleshen up, I wanted to take something to reduce,

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but Mrs. Lide wouldn't agree to it. She said I might injure my health and get so I couldn't work for my living. Mrs. Lide used to tell me I was the funniest thing 'bout my eating, but I can't work on none of these queer diets of salads, ices, and a stingy sandwich. I've got to have my good old standby home cooking, such as, rice, hominy, corn bread, some sort of greens, and boiled meat. You see, I works 'bout all the time and I've got to eat a heavy ration to keep a-going.

“Days I'm at home, there's three meals a day to cook, and when I do that, the housework, and the washing, there's no time 14 to recreate. Even sit up here at night and make quilt squares. I know I've got the will power about me all right - know I've got a share to do long as I live. I believe, when a woman lives seventeen years and keeps enough to eat for herself and three growing children, does all the housework, keeps the beds repaired, and something for the youngsters to wear, she just done well.”