

Klansmen

In those days, blacks didn't have any voice at all, and there was no such thing as taking the white man to court. You couldn't vote; you weren't even considered a citizen. We were afraid to approach certain white men in the wrong way because of the Ku Klux Klan. We wasn't afraid of all whites, just certain ones, because the Klansmen were very dangerous people. I mean they could hurt you or kill you for no reason at all, and there was nothing done about it.

I was afraid to walk the road at night because of the Klansmen. It was all dirt roads in those days. If I was walking down a road at night, I would constantly be looking behind me. If a car came, I automatically jumped down the embankment and hid in the ditch, or if it was a wooded area, I would run out in the woods and lay down and be real quiet, because if they caught me, they'd beat me up and hurt me, and they called it having fun. To them it was fun.

If you were hidden and they saw you, they would yell at you and try and get you to come to the car by saying they weren't going to bother you. Or they would slam the car door like they were gone and then drive off and leave two or three of them standing there, and if you came out of the bushes or whatever, they would jump on you and beat you up. We used to walk the railroad track or walk the footpath at night in the woods at the edge

of the fields so we wouldn't be seen out there in the open. If you did, you would really regret it.

Sometimes the Klansmen rode horses or walked. They carried a cross with them. They would burn the crosses in people's yards. We would go into the little town of Fuquay, and the word was passed around that you had better be careful tonight because the Klansmen were going to be riding. And we wouldn't know whose house they were coming to or what they were going to do, but we heard that the Klansmen were coming somewhere tonight.

Sometimes Mr. Johnson would say to my father, like on a Saturday night, "You all better lay in tonight, you better be careful, I heard the Klansmen is gonna be riding." Now, he was a good guy, and he'd probably said to the Klansmen, "Just give 'em a scare." The whites, they wanted to keep us home so we

wouldn't meet up somewhere. Now, if you had done something wrong to any white person, then you wasn't protected, and the Klansmen would beat you. The point is, if you did what you was supposed to do, walked the chalk line, was a good guy, no problems, they would just ride through, let you know they still here, and frighten you.

Those nights my father would climb the ladder and go up on top of the house and sit beside the chimney, and I'd climb the ladder, too, and take him coffee, and sometimes my grandfather would sit up there with him. They would be watching for the Klansmen. When the Klansmen came, my father would pound on the roof three times. Nobody was in bed but the young-uns. We sat up with the lights out to wait and see if the Klansmen came. If they came, we used to take off—my father and mother and grandfather and us kids—everybody had a hiding place that we

knew where to go, because we lived in the woods anyway, and we would go hide until the Klansmen left.

That was the type of life we lived in those days. But it was all natural, it was all part of survival. Most of the time it wasn't even discussed. You see, our parents were real religious, and they felt as though God was going to take care of them. Anything that happened in the neighborhood by one of the whites, they didn't hold that against them, they wasn't angry about it. They used to pray, and they would say, "God's gonna punish him." See, to them—they were superstitious-like—there was a few things that happened to some white people, and they would say, "See?" I remember this one man that was mean to his tenants, he was riding his horse and hit a limb and it killed him, and they said God punished him. They wasn't interested in participating in marches and stuff like that; they felt like

Moses was gonna lead the blacks out of bondage like he did the Jewish people. They was thinking—don't forget, we're dealing with people here who are uneducated, real religious, and they believed everything—the only thing they could believe in was God, they prayed about every little thing that went wrong. They figured He was going to send somebody from heaven. Thank God they had that to hold on to.

I've had people ask me, "Why didn't you call the police or why didn't you get the police?" We were afraid of the police because a lot of them were Klansmen. We didn't call them police in those days. They were called either a sheriff or a constable. There was this one constable who had been an amateur boxer. He would lock up a black person and he would put gloves on them and practice on them. And there was one boy, Scott, that he

put gloves on, and he hit that boy and he killed him. Scott's brother went up there to check on him and try and get him out, and he found out his brother was dead. He approached the constable to see what happened, and the constable killed him, too. Both brothers in one night. It was never, never investigated or nothing. He had beat up people and knocked people's teeth out and everything, and nothing was never done or investigated or nothing.

