

Julia Rhodes
Avondale Mills
Alexander City, Ala.
Tallapoosa County

JULIA RHODES
By Maude Cain

I found Julia Rhodes in her kitchen preparing the mid-day meal. It was a bright September morning about 9:30. When I arrived she willingly transferred her culinary duties to her daughter, Myrtle, while she invited me into the front bedroom.

This is the room which the Rhodes family use as their living room, evidently because it is the best furnished. It is very small, but its one bed looks comfortable enough.

At first Julia could hardly talk to me, but the difficulty proved to be only a mouthful of snuff. She had picked up the snuff-dipping habit from her playmates as a small child, she explained to me. She seemed to feel the need of some sort of apology. "I wished I didn't use it", she said, "but it's a whole lot of satisfaction." She did not wait for questions but, without further preliminaries, launched on the story of her life.

Julia was born on a farm in Tallapoosa County 35 years ago. While she was still very young, her father brought the family to town, hoping to provide for them better by putting the two older girls in the mill.

Julia was not old enough to work, so she did not go into the mill. She entered school. But she was "skeered of her teacher". She did not like school and her parents did not force her to go.

She was still too young to work when she met John and they decided to get married. She was 15 years old and he was 20. John worked in the mill. Julia's first baby was born when she was 16. After that a new one came every year or two. Now Julia is 35 and she and John have eight children, six boys and two girls.

Their home is on Peachtree Avenue in Avondale Mill Village. It is a dingy brown little four-room cottage on a hillside and it is surrounded by a grove of trees, most of them pines. Other similar cottages are dotted here and there on the hillside. Julia likes this place "right well" because the children can play in the back yard among the trees.

Julia is proud of her children, every one of them, and wants them to get "some schoolin'". But her John finds it difficult to provide for eight children with only one of them old enough to work in the mill. He is a weaver and "makes a right good salary--that is, when he can get regular work." But, even so, their income is very inadequate.

Herbert, their oldest child, is 19. He plays football and is able to work in the mill mornings and attend school in the afternoon. His mother said Herbert used to have a terrible cough "from smokin' cigarettes". He could not sleep at night. Five months ago he gave up tobacco and now he can sleep almost all night without coughing, Julia explained. "Smokin' was sure bad for him," she remarked earnestly.

I found the second child, Myrtle, a bright, and intelligent girl and one who would be considered good looking in any walk of life. She had to give up school to look after her younger brothers and baby sister, so that her mother could work in the

mill and help support the family. "Myrtle is ashamed to go to school, now that she's done got so far behind in her books," Julia told me. But Julia heard of a WPA teacher in a nearby community and she knew Myrtle wouldn't mind one person knowing how ignorant she was. So now Myrtle manages to have a few lessons at home each week from the WPA teacher.

The baby, when they showed her to me, was sleeping peacefully in her little bed, which had not a semblance of a sheet. The chubby little blue-eyed girl opened her eyes and smiled for a moment before snuggling back into the folds of the bedcover. (This last nondescript object, which had evidently had only a speaking acquaintance with soap and water, seemed to be some grown person's outworn and discarded kimona). Julia is especially proud of the baby, because she is the first girl since Myrtle and Myrtle is 17.

The second, third and fourth boys were at school when I called on the Rhodes family and the fifth and sixth, too young for school, were playing in the back yard.

Julia does not seem to have a single worry about the future, as the family has pretty good health and she is satisfied. She had to give up her job in the mill in April, 1938, but she expects to go back as soon as the baby is old enough for her to leave it.

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S.B.J.