

July 6, 1939

Leathy Lightsey (Negro)

712 E. Third St.

Charlotte, N.C.

WPA Project Worker

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"he 'u Git Along Somewhere."

Original Names

John Ed

Dorothy

Charlotte

John

Changed Names

Sammy

Shirley

Riverton

Elmo

He'll live Along Somehow.

Leathy Lightsey was stout, freckle-faced and middle-aged. She smiled shyly and bade me sit down on the tiny porch of her cottage. Almost immediately a bright-eyed little girl of about three years came to the door, pushed open the screen, peeped out and then went inside. One by one other children likewise came to the door and took an interested peep in turn.

"Yes, mam, they's all mine and some more too," she smiled. "I guess I have to count 'em sometime to remember how many I really has got." This was spoken apologetically.

"Yes ma'm, I guess they is right pretty. I wouldn't take a penny for 'em now but it's kinder hard to take care of 'em now that I have to do it all by myself. They's eight of 'em in all and every one of 'em stay right here at home. That makes nine of us in this little old three-room house, but we doubles up and does somehow. I aint got much furniture but beds and some chairs."

The house was bare indeed, but orderly, and the bedlinen was fresh and white.

"We had to send my husband away to the colored asylum. He was sick and then his mind got bad and I had to work and couldn't stay here to wait on him, so they ast me to sign a paper so I could get him in down there and I did.

I didn't think he was so bad, his mind seemed to go and come, but the children got so they was scared of him so I thought it would be better to let them take him away.

"He seemed to be worryin' a long time before we noticed anything. We never had much but we always did manage to live somehow. Then he was out of work for 'bout a year and-that was what he was worryin' 'bout. But I never thought he'd of took it that bad. I was working on the WPA then. Now I'm awful worried about him 'cause I ain't had a word from him since he's been down there and it's been three months now. I wrote 'em three times but didn't get no answer. I got another address from the lady that helped me git him down there and I'm gonna try it again. Wish I could go down there to see for myself but I ain't able to go. Don't guess I could do nothin' for him and I can use that travel money to help here. cf 1

"I'm workin' on this cannin' project now and I don't make as much as I did when I was working in the cafeteria at the school this winter. Now we is just barely able to live but we got along pretty good before. But I'm glad to git anything to do and I hope when school opens up again they'll let me go back to the school and work.

"I has to pay house rent and buy food and wood and

clothes. My house rent is \$2.50 a week here. We ain't got no 'lectric lights and no water so I don't have neither o' them bills to pay. We ain't been livin' down here but about eight months now. We lived farther up on this street but we had to move out so they could fix the house and then the rent went up so much I couldn't pay it nohow, so we just had to stay down here.

"After they took my husband away two o' the children had to come out of school 'cause they couldn't stay there. My oldest boy Sammy was in the tenth grade and I wanted him to go back to school so bad it seemed like he never could git his mind together to go back no more. Then Shirley, the oldest girl, had to look after the little ones 'cause somebody just had to be here with 'em.

"Sometimes I wish we was all back out there in the country where I was a kid. It seem like we got along pretty good. We never had much but it didn't seem like we had to suffer for nothin'. My Mamma had six children. We lived in South Carolina and while we was there Papa farmed and we helped. Sometimes when we'd git caught up with the work he'd do carpenter work. Seem like we got 'long just fine.

"I never did git to go to school like I wanted to. Mamma died when I was in the fourth grade and I never got to go to school no more. I was the oldest girl so I had



to come out and keep house for Papa and the other children. Then I didn't mind it at all but now I think about it and I know I'd be better off to take care of my family if I had education. I thought maybe I could send my children to school but now that my husband done got sick I done give up hope.

"Them days on the farm was good old days. I 'members how my Papa usta give the one of us that picked the most cotton a prize. We'd have some fun and the thing was we'd git the cotton picked twice as fast. Sometimes the prize wouldn't be nothin' but a little box of peppermint candy or maybe it'd be twenty-five cents but if you'd see us out there pickin' you'd think sure we was gonna git somethin' great.

"Once I 'member we had a awful time when we was out there. All the children but one had took the malaria fever and we was in some fix. The water got bad somehow and its a wonder all of us didn't die. But not a one of us died and Papa kept us goin' somehow. The doctor come to see us some but the neighbors helped out too. That's another reason why I like the country. When something happens in somebody's house all the people 'round you comes in and tries to do what they kin for you. They don't have much money in the country but people looks out for one another. It don't make no difference what happens to you here in town, don't nobody stop to do nothin' for you. I know 'cause when my husband

got sick ain't nobody talked 'bout helpin' me none. I know ain't nobody got to help other people, but if I was able I'd do what I could to help out my neighbors when they was in trouble.

"I got married before we left South Carolina but I lived on with Papa. So when we moved to Riverton I was still livin' with him. He thought we could come up here and make a better livin'. You know how it is with folks on the farm, seem like if you could just git to live in town you could do wonders. Oh, Papa and all the rest of 'em wanted to come to town. Me, I never was much in favor of movin' away.

"Papa, he got work pretty often doin' carpenter jobs and my husband, Elmo, did odd jobs for a while and then he got on steady at the lumberyard and made pretty good. My other brothers and sisters got different things to do, mostly domestic work. But just the same, seems like we ain't never really got on our feet since we been here. When you ain't been usta payin' no house rent and goin' to the store for every mouthful you eat it goes hard at first. We been here seventeen years now. Some o' them years we lived pretty good but most the time it's been a pretty hard struggle. I couldn't work much myself 'cause the children been on my hands. My oldest boy's just sixteen and the baby'll be two

years old in August. I usta take in sewin' for people sometime and make a little change that-a-way.

"I never could go to church much like I wanted to. We all joined the Ebernizer Baptist church but I ain't able to 'tend like I should. Now seem like I can't git nothin' much fit to wear to church. You hate to go lookin' worse'n anybody else there. I tries to keep some of the children in Sunday School when I can. I can't git 'em all fixed up at the same time but when I can I let 'em go. Shirley, she been had a little job workin' uptown cleanin' up a man's office so she can help me a little bit now. It ain't much, but it helps out.

"I try to keep the children from worryin' about they Papa. I don't guess he'll ever be well again, but we'll git along somehow."