

Williams, Joyce Justice: Farm Days ^[1]

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Joyce Justice Williams: Farm Days

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 6/8/2008. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

Joyce Justice Williams grew up sharecropping on a farm near Wake Forest in the 1960s. Her father, J.C. Justice, was a carpenter and often worked away from home, so her mother Josephine and the children ran the farm. Today Williams lives in Durham and is the proud mother of two children in college. Her life has changed a lot since her sharecropping days, but now that her children are out of the house, she often finds herself thinking about her childhood: its hardships, but also its joys. Recently she wrote down some of those memories. She was also nice enough to let me publish part of them here.

In Joyce Justice Williams's words:

There were lots of good memories growing up in Wake County. I remember the crisp mornings when dew was on the ground and everything smelled so fresh. I remember having the freedom to roam the roads and woods at my leisure. I remember the times I wanted to forget, but now realize I never will and shouldn't, are the farming days. We were up at dawn and worked until dusk. From the time you were able to carry a cucumber bucket, you were a part of the work force on the farm. "Wake up, time to rise and shine" my mother's famous words each morning. "Get up and get ready to go to work. You can come back home and eat some breakfast." This same routine was carried out each day in our household. You went to the cucumber shed after picking cucumbers and peppers was very exciting to us because it allowed us to meet people from all over the county. All would gather around the cucumber shed sharing stories, catching up on what had happened. It was something to watch the cucumber machine working. It would separate the cukes into three sorters. There were the No. 1s (small the most expensive), No. 2s (medium sized) and No. 3s (large cukes). Once my mother was paid, the money was used to go to the State Fair. That was a grand occasion for us kids. The lights, the smell of lots of families stayed on the L.T. and Mamie Barham farm (that's where we lived). I remember the Webbs, the Davis family, the Bradfords and the Wilkerson family. We all worked together daily until all crops were harvested. On the farm, there was no segregation. All children played together. No one ever treated me less than equal on the farm. I remember white kids that would come to our house and my grandmother's house and eat. If we were playing in their yard, I loved school. We went to school and worked afternoons until we finished the crops. Amazingly, all eight children graduated from high school. My two favorite teachers were Mrs. Jones (science) and Mrs. Martin (P.E.). They both allowed us to play on the girls' softball team. My mother was our coach. Our name was "The Justice All Stars." It was some team. We played in the country against other little town teams. Two of my sisters and I and seven or eight cousins made my mother loved coaching us. She really knew the game and taught us so much. The farm we lived on was so large, the owner let us take one of the fields and convert it into a softball field. Boy, did I ever have some great times on that field. Fishing was my mother's pastime we had a pond behind our house. She would sit on that pond for hours whether she was catching fish or not. She said it was a time of peace for her. Her thinking spot. When she fished, we didn't intrude unless

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