

## Interview with Fountain Hughes, Baltimore, Maryland, June 11, 1949.

Fountain Hughes: Talk to who?

Hermond Norwood: Well, just tell me what your name is.

Fountain Hughes: My name is Fountain Hughes. I was born in Charlottesville, Virginia. My grandfather belong to Thomas Jefferson. My grandfather was a hundred and fifteen years old when he died. And now I am one hundred and, and one year old. That's enough. [*recording stops and starts again*]. She used to work, but what she made I don't know. I never ask her.

Hermond Norwood: You just go ahead and talk away there. You don't mind, do you, Uncle Fountain?

Fountain Hughes: No. And when, now, your husband and you both are young. You all try to live like young people ought to live. Don't want everything somebody else has got. Whatever you get, if its yours be satisfied. And don't spend your money till you get it. So many people get in debt. Well, that all was so cheap when I bought it. You spend your money before you get it because you're going in debt for what you want. When you want something, wait until you get the money and pay for it cash. That's the way I've done. If I've wanted anything, I'd wait until I got the money and I paid for it cash. I never bought nothing on time in my life. Now plenty people if they want a suit of clothes, they go to work and they'll buy them on time. Well they say they was cheap. They cheap. If you got the money you can buy them cheaper. They want something for, for waiting on you for, uh, till you get ready to pay them. And if you got the money you can go where you choose and buy it when you go, when you want it. You see? Don't buy it because somebody else go down and run a debt and run a bill or, I'm going to run it too. Don't do that. I never done it. Now, I'm a hundred years old and I don't owe nobody five cents, and I ain't got no money either. And I'm happy, just as happy as somebody that's oh, got million. **2:11 ...**

**7:47** Hermond Norwood: ♦ Who did you work for Uncle Fountain when ... ? ♦ ♦

Fountain Hughes: ♦ Who'd I work for?

Hermond Norwood: Yeah.

Fountain Hughes: ♦ When I, you mean when I was slave?

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Yeah, when you were a slave. Who did you work for?

Fountain Hughes: Well, I belonged to, uh, B., when I was a slave. My mother belonged to B. But my, uh, but, uh, we, uh, was all slave children. And after, soon after when we found out that we was free, why then we was, uh, bound out to different people. [*names of people*] and an all such people as that. And we would run away, and wouldn't stay with them. Why then we'd just go and stay anywheres we could. Lay out a night in underwear. We had no home, you know. We was just turned out like a lot of cattle. You know how they turn cattle out in a pasture? Well after freedom, you know, colored people didn't have nothing. Colored people didn't have no beds when they was slaves. We always slept on the floor, pallet here, and a pallet there. Just like, uh, lot of, uh, wild people, we didn't, we didn't know nothing. Didn't allow you to look at no book. And then there was some free born colored people, why they had a little education, but there was very few of them, where we was. And they all had uh, what you call, I might call it now, uh, jail centers, was just the same as we was in jail. Now I couldn't go from here across the street, or I couldn't go through nobody's house without I have a note, or something from my master. And if I had that pass, that was what we call a pass, if I had that pass, I could go wherever he sent me. And I'd have to be back, you know, when uh. Whoever he sent me to, they, they'd give me another pass and I'd bring that back so as to show how long I'd been gone. We couldn't go out and stay a hour or two hours or something like. They send you. Now, say for instance I'd go out here to S.'s place. I'd have to walk. And I would have to be back maybe in a hour. Maybe they'd give me hour. I don't know just how long they'd give me. But they'd give me a note so there wouldn't nobody interfere with me, and tell who I belong to. And when I come back, why I carry it to my master and give that to him, that'd be all right. But I couldn't just walk away like the people does now, you know. It was what they call, we were slaves. We belonged to people. They'd sell us like they sell horses and cows and hogs and all like that. Have a auction bench, and they'd put you on, up on the bench and bid on you just same as you bidding on cattle you know.

Hermond Norwood: Was that in Charlotte that you were a slave?

Fountain Hughes: ♦ Hmmm?

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Was that in Charlotte or Charlottesville?

Fountain Hughes: ♦ That was in Charlottesville.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Charlottesville, Virginia.

Fountain Hughes: ♦ Selling women, selling men. All that. Then if they had any bad ones, they'd sell them to the nigga traders, what they called the nigga traders. And they'd ship them down south, and

sell them down south. But, uh, otherwise if you was a good, good person they wouldn't sell you. But if you was bad and mean and they didn't want to beat you and knock you around, they'd sell you what to the, what was call the nigga trader. They'd have a regular, have a sale every month, you know, at the courthouse. And then they'd sell you, and get two hundred dollar, hundred dollar, five hundred dollar.

Hermond Norwood: Were you ever sold from one person to another?

Fountain Hughes: Mmmm?

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Were you ever sold?

Fountain Hughes: No, I never was sold.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Always stayed with the same person. [*Hermond Norwood and Fountain Hughes overlap*]

Fountain Hughes: ♦ All, all. I was too young to sell.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Oh I see.

Fountain Hughes: See I wasn't old enough during the war to sell, during the Army. And uh, my father got killed in the Army, you know. So it left us small children just to live on whatever people choose to, uh, give us. I was, I was bound out for a dollar a month. And my mother used to collect the money. Children wasn't, couldn't spend money when I come along. ♦ In, in, in fact when I come along, young men, young men couldn't spend no money until they was twenty-one years old. And then you was twenty-one, why then you could spend your money. But if you wasn't twenty-one, you couldn't spend no money. I couldn't take, I couldn't spend ten cents if somebody give it to me. Because they'd say, "Well, he might have stole it." We all come along, you might say, we had to give an account of what you done. You couldn't just do things and walk off and say I didn't do it. You'd have to, uh, give an account of it. Now, uh, after we got freed and they turned us out like cattle, we could, we didn't have nowhere to go. And we didn't have nobody to boss us, and, uh, we didn't know nothing. There wasn't, wasn't no schools. And when they started a little school, why, the people that were slaves, there couldn't many of them go to school, except they had a father and a mother. And my father was dead, and my mother was living, but she had three, four other little children, and she had to put them all to work for to help take care of the others. So we had, uh, we had what you call, worse than dogs has got it now. Dogs has got it now better than we had it when we come along. I know, I remember one night, I was out after I, I was free, and I didn't have nowhere to go. I didn't have nowhere to sleep. I didn't know what to do. My brother and I was together. So we knew a man that had a, a livery stable. And we crept in that yard, and got into one of the hacks of the automobile, and slept in that hack all night long. So next morning, we could get out and go where we belonged. But we was afraid to go at night because we didn't know where to go, and didn't know what time to go. But we had got away from there, and we afraid to go back, so we crept in, slept in that thing all night until the next morning, and we got back where we belong before the people got up. Soon as day commenced, come, break, we got out and commenced to go where we belonged. But we never done that but the one time. After that we always, if there, if there was a way, we'd try to get back before night come. But then that was on a Sunday too, that we done that. Now, uh, when we were slaves, we couldn't do that, see. And after we got free we didn't know nothing to do. And my mother, she, then she hunted places, and bound us out for a dollar a month, and we stay there maybe a couple of years. And, she'd come over and collect the money every month. **14:55 ...**

**15:51** Hermond Norwood: ♦ Who was you father a slave for Uncle Fountain?

Fountain Hughes: He was a slave for B. He belong, he belong to B.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Didn't he belong to Thomas Jefferson at one time?

Fountain Hughes: He didn't belong to Thomas Jefferson. My grandfather belong to Thomas Jefferson.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Oh your grandfather did.

Fountain Hughes: ♦ Yeah. And, uh, my father belong to, uh, B. And, uh, and B. died during the wartime because, uh, he was afraid he'd have to go to war. But, then now, you, and in them days you could hire a substitute to take your place. Well he couldn't get a substitute to take his place so he run away from home. And he took cold. And when he come back, the war was over but he died. And then, uh, if he had lived, couldn't been no good. The Yankees just come along and, just broke the mill open and hauled all the flour out in the river and broke the, broke the store open and throwed all the meat out in the street and throwed all the sugar out. And we, we boys would pick it up and carry it and give it to our missus and master, young masters, **16:56...**

**17:56** Hermond Norwood: ♦ Do you remember much about the Civil War?

Fountain Hughes: ♦ No, I don't remember much about it.

Hermond Norwood: You were a little young then I guess, huh.

Fountain Hughes: ♦ I, uh, I remember when the Yankees come along and took all the good horses and took all the, threwed all the meat and flour and sugar and stuff out in the river and let it go down the river. And they knowed the people wouldn't have nothing to live on, but they done that. And that's the reason why I don't like to talk about it. Them people, and, and if you was cooking anything to eat in there for yourself, and if they, they was hungry, they would go and eat it all up, and we didn't get nothing. They'd just come in and drink up all your milk, milk. Just do as they please. Sometimes they be passing by all night long, walking, muddy, raining. Oh, they had a terrible time. Colored people that's free ought to be awful thankful. And some of them is sorry they are free now. Some of them now would rather be slaves.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Which had you rather be Uncle Fountain?

Fountain Hughes: ♦ Me? Which I'd rather be ? [*Norwood laughs*] You know what I'd rather do? If I thought, had any idea, that I'd ever be a slave again, I'd take a gun and just end it all right away. Because you're nothing but a dog. You're not a thing but a dog. Night never comed out, you had nothing to do. Time to cut tobacco, if they want you to cut all night long out in the field, you cut. And if they want you to hang all night long, you hang, hang tobacco. It didn't matter about your tired, being tired. You're afraid to say you're tired. They just, well [*voice trails off*]. **20:24...**

**22:27** Hermond Norwood: ♦ You're not getting tired are you Uncle Fountain?

♦ Fountain Hughes: ♦ No, no I ain't. I'm just same as at home. Just like I was setting in the house. And uh, see what. I was thinking about oh, now you know how we served the Lord when I come along, a boy?

Hermond Norwood: ♦ How was that?

Fountain Hughes: ♦ We would go to somebody's house. And uh, well we didn't have no houses like they got now, you know. We had these what they call log cabin. And they have one, old colored man maybe one would be there, maybe he'd be as old as I am. And he'd be the preacher. Not as old as I am now, but, he'd be the preacher, and then we all sit down and listen at him talk about the Lord. Well, he'd say, well I wonder, uh, sometimes you say I wonder if we'll ever be free. Well, some of them would say, well, we going to go ask the Lord to free us. So they'd say, well, we, we going to sing "One Day Shall I Ever Reach Heaven and One Day Shall I Fly." Then they would sing that for about a hour. Then they, next one they'd get up and say let's sing a song, "We Gonna Live on Milk and Honey, Way By and By." They'd, they'd, oh I can hear them singing now but I can't, can't, uh, repeat it like I could in them days. But some day when I'm not hoarse, I could tell you, I could sing it for you, but I'm too hoarse now. And then we'd sing, [*pause*] "I'm Gonna," "I'm A-Gonna Sing Around the Altar." Oh, I, I wish I could, I wish I could sing it for you, "I'm Gonna Sing Around the Altar."

Hermond Norwood: ♦ Well I wish you could too. [*overlaps with Fountain Hughes*].

♦ Fountain Hughes: ♦ And they, they, well this, someday when you come over here and I'm not hoarse, you get me to come up here and I, I'll sing, I'll try to sing it for you.

Hermond Norwood: ♦ O. K. I'm going to do that. **24:44**