

FAYE COLLINS
Regular & Volunteer - Carter Family Fold – Hiltons, VA

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, SFA Oral Historian
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Carter Family Fold

[Begin Faye Collins Interview]

00:00:00

Amy Evans: All right, this is Amy Evans on Saturday, February 21, 2009, and I am in Hiltons, Virginia at the Carter Fold, and I'm now in the office here off the stage at the Carter Fold with Faye Collins. And Faye, if you wouldn't mind saying your name and your connection to the Carter Family Fold here.

00:00:21

Faye Collins: My name is Faye Collins, and I'm a volunteer at the Carter Fold.

00:00:27

AE: May I ask you to also share your birth date for the record?

00:00:32

FC: I was born April 13, 1947.

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AE: Are you a native of the area?

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FC: I'm a native of Tennessee. I live in Kingsport, Tennessee.

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AE: How long have you been a volunteer at the Fold?

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FC: Probably at least twelve—at least twelve years.

00:00:58

AE: And how did you get involved with the family—in coming up here?

00:01:01

FC: Coming to the Carter Fold and becoming friends with Janette [Carter] and [her daughter] Rita [Forrester] and then we just got to be very close friends. And Janette was very dear to my heart. And we loved the music and—and, of course, I like to dance. And—and it's really the only—it's more like a Mother Church when you come to the Carter Fold. I mean they're singing Gospel songs; you can feel the Lord. And it's just a really a place that you can bring your family. And it's—I sat with Janette a lot when she was ill, so I became very close to her and Rita.

00:01:57

AE: And I think—and Mary [Hartsock] was telling me that early this morning that—that you took really great care of Janette.

00:02:04

FC: Yes.

00:02:06

AE: So do you remember, you and your husband, Blanard, when you—twelve years ago when you decided to come up here, do—do you remember what gave you that wild hair to drive up this way?

00:02:18

FC: Oh, well, we had been to the Carter Fold before then, so—but that's when, you know, we started coming just more like every—regular Saturday nights a lot. But no, we had been to the Carter Fold.

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AE: Do you remember the first show you saw here?

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FC: No, I don't.

00:02:42

AE: Do you have a favorite one that you've seen here over the years?

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FC: Over the years there are so many. I—I really just could not begin to say because if I did, I might, you know, regret, so—. But, you know, there's not really a—I don't have a favorite. I enjoyed, of course, Johnny Cash being here last and then Marty Stuart. I enjoyed that very much.

00:03:25

AE: Now Marty Stuart is a big fan of the family and—and comes here a lot.

00:03:28

FC: Uh-hmm, yes.

00:03:31

AE: So then what was it—what was the turning point twelve years ago when you started coming regularly and you decided to start volunteering? How did that happen exactly?

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FC: Oh, there was just a need of more volunteers and, you know, we more or less was involved with a lot of the music like the Pickin' Porch [radio show] and—which Tim White has. And, you know, we were just—had the love of the music and it just kind of evolved and came around like that, so it was more people was needed here. So we just kind of fell in, you know; you know it was—that's basically how I—you know, I wouldn't know how to explain it any other way. Just one—just kept, you know—they would ask another one that was—started volunteering like some at the Pickin' Porch, so we just got more involved everywhere then.

00:04:43

AE: Have you—were you assigned specific tasks early on or have you just kind of fallen into a routine that—and what is that now?

00:04:51

FC: Well, I volunteer in the kitchen. And we—we serve the food. I don't know what else you want me—ask of me. You know, we do dishes.

00:05:10

AE: Just do what needs to be done, huh?

00:05:10

FC: Absolutely. Just whatever—I do whatever needs to be done.

00:05:17

AE: And you've—I've been watching you today. You've been a busybody when I've been in and out of that—the concession stand.

00:05:22

FC: Yes, I do whatever there is because it takes a lot of volunteers behind what Rita—.

00:05:30

AE: And you—you and your husband arrived at right about lunchtime, did you not?

00:05:34

FC: Yes, it was almost lunch, uh-hmm.

00:05:38

AE: Now you put in a good, you know, eight, ten hours here working—. Or no, you're going to be there even longer because you said you're going to be here until midnight, so you'll be here for twelve hours.

00:05:46

FC: Yeah, until closing, uh-hmm, yes. And I—it was a joy knowing Janette Carter, and I love Rita. Really, it's hard for me to talk without really getting choked up about her, so that's—she was a beautiful lady, Christian, you know, inside and out.

00:06:17

AE: I've been hearing so many wonderful stories about her today. I'm sorry I didn't have the chance to meet her. And I—but Rita seems so much just a mirror of her mother.

00:06:29

FC: She is a shadow of her mother.

00:06:38

AE: Well what do you think—you know there's so many people that feel such a connection to coming here and being here and, you know, I talked to Chickie [Renfro] earlier. She's been coming here for twenty-nine years and just the people that have this longstanding relationship with this place and the people behind it and, you know, you explained that, I guess, already a little bit. But I wonder if there's just—it's just the magic to it or is it just the people or is it the music or is it the food or is it a combination of all those things?

00:07:07

FC: Well, as I said, the—the Carter Fold is a Mother Church. And when you walk in the foyer, that is—you know, that's, from my viewpoint, you can feel the Lord. It's like a Mother Church here. It's the atmosphere; there is the music, bluegrass, old time—that's what everybody likes. So this is really the only—it is the only place.

00:07:48

AE: Yeah. I mean I would imagine that the—you know. Definitely the—the music of this region would not be as well known without this place.

00:07:57

FC: It would not have been.

00:08:00

AE: So did you grow up—did you grow up in a musical household at all?

00:08:05

FC: Yes, my father sang. He sang Gospel. He always would lead the singing of the church. He knew music. So I grew up seeing my father sing, and then he sang in quartets on request, even at funerals, so I—I just have the love of music. You can't get enough of the Carter Fold. And my mother and—and father also sang duets together. And a lot of my mother's family, they played music, so I have a little music. I—I was born dancing. **[Laughs]**

00:08:58

AE: Oh, I like it. Well what about the food? Because you know a lot of what's offered here is traditional Appalachian food, you know, specifically the soup beans and the cornbread. Did you grow up with that?

00:09:10

FC: Sure. Yes, I did.

00:09:13

AE: Do you like the version here?

00:09:14

FC: Yes, uh-hmm, yes.

00:09:18

AE: Do you cook much at home?

00:09:20

FC: Yes, I do.

00:09:22

AE: Do you make traditional food or learn—what kinds of food do you like to cook at home?

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FC: I make just the simple food. Well I mean I can do any food, but that's what we like the most, so—.

00:09:39

AE: Do you make much cornbread at home?

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FC: A lot of cornbread. It's one of my favorites.

00:09:42

AE: Do you happen to also make Fern's cornbread recipe [*Rita Forrester's cousin Fern Carter Salyer's recipe is used at the Fold*] or do you have one of your own?

00:09:47

FC: No, I don't have—I don't have no one's recipe. I just you know that was—that was something I learned to do was cook. My mother was a great cook. So I come from a family of that.

00:10:03

AE: Can you share how you make your cornbread?

00:10:05

FC: I just make it. [*Laughs*]

00:10:10

AE: It happens. [*Laughs*]

00:10:10

FC: It happens. I use a lot of skim milk because we—you know where a lot of people don't because of the—it's just healthier. So I might—you know that might not be the same; I wouldn't want to share that. That wouldn't be your typical cornbread, would it? **[Laughs]**

00:10:29

AE: Everybody is different anyway, so it's nice to kind of compare notes. So what do you like to eat while you're working here and helping out at the Fold?

00:10:38

FC: Oh, well, I like the hot dogs; that is the world-famous hot dogs at the Carter Fold and the chili is wonderful. It is a—everything is homemade.

00:10:54

AE: That's—that's what's really striking about this is that they put so much effort into the—you know keeping the music alive but then they also put so much effort into this food and—and sustenance for people that also you know it's got—it adds to the celebration here.

00:11:05

FC: Yes, yes, it does. You know the Carter Fold is—it's just being more and more well known. I mean there's people that comes from overseas. We have a friend that came here—we went, you know, and he knew every Carter Family song. He could name them all. He went back and learned to play the autoharp so he came here for the Carter Family; that was why he came from—.

00:11:55

AE: Far-reaching influence.

00:11:58

FC: Uh-hmm, yes.

00:11:59

AE: Do you know of anybody who comes here as much for the food as for the music?

00:12:03

FC: I have a lot that says that they have—you know, they come—they come to eat, have food, but that I—I can't specifically answer because they seem to enjoy their self, you know, and they always come back. Most everyone that's not been here always comes back and say they left having a ball—really enjoyed it.

00:12:28

AE: So what about just kind of the schedule of how things happen here, like the music doesn't start until 7:00 or 7:30 but people started coming here at 3:30.

00:12:38

FC: It's just some just come in early and just sit around and chat. You know, it's the only way I can answer that.

00:12:52

AE: Well what would you like for everyone to know about the Carter Fold and—and if they haven't been here, what would you like for them to know about it?

00:13:00

FC: They just need to come and see what the Carter Fold is like, and they will be back. As I said, it's a Mother Church. And that, to me, says it all.

00:13:25

AE: It's a sacred ground here, for sure, to a lot of folks.

00:13:27

FC: Uh-hmm, it is. There—that's—you asked me—.

00:13:43

AE: Well I don't—you know, I don't know if there's anything, maybe, that I wouldn't know to ask you that maybe you would share.

00:13:52

FC: My time here, well, I just enjoy it. We all enjoy doing what we're doing because you know with the—we love the music and we want the music—the heritage has got to be—I mean there's not very many people that have the heritage we have right here in Hiltons, Virginia. So that's why we're here volunteering to keep this going.

00:14:25

AE: Have you—I mean I know you took care of Janette a lot, but had you been there before that? Would you come other times during the week just to visit and be with the family?

00:14:37

FC: Would I come to—?

00:14:41

AE: To Hiltons to visit the Family—?

00:14:47

FC: Oh, I sat with Janette when she was ill. It's always been usually whatever we did was something to do with the—here at the Fold. Or, I sat with Janette or something that she would need—Rita and, you know, it's here at the Fold is the work.

00:15:11

AE: So do you feel like, with all the hours that you spend here each and every weekend volunteering and—and being a part of this, do you feel like you're, you know, adding to the collection plate at the Mother Church by doing that?

00:15:24

FC: I feel like everything you do is—you contribute to the heritage here because it takes people here to be behind Rita to run—it is—I mean that's just it—it takes a lot of volunteers.

00:15:43

AE: What do you think the future of the Fold is?

00:15:48

FC: I can't answer that but I think there—it will not—it will be nothing less. It will be more.

00:16:01

AE: It will always be here?

00:16:01

FC: Uh-hmm.

00:16:03

AE: Well that might be a good note to end on, what do you think?

00:16:04

FC: Pardon?

00:16:05

AE: Well that might be a good note to end on, what do you think?

00:16:10

FC: Unless you need me to say more about the food in the kitchen. And, as you know, that, as they say, soup beans or browned beans, that's another one of the favorite foods and the cornbread muffins—is definitely just—everything that's—that's made is homemade so you don't get that.

00:16:35

AE: And I understand Rita makes a lot of soups and they have a—a soup—homemade soups that they alternate.

00:16:44

FC: She makes vegetable soup, potato soup; she makes the chili beans, and I can't recall.

00:16:59

AE: The last time I passed through there—there's a lot of beautiful cakes out there tonight. What kind of cakes do you have on that counter tonight?

00:17:08

FC: I have chocolate cake; I think there's chocolate cake there and lemon. I think there's lemon pound cake, carrot cake, two chocolates, I think, is the way it is—with coconut icing is one of them. So they have—there's candy bars; there's all kinds of tea; there's cider; there's lemonade; there's hot chocolate, plus all the other cold drinks—coffee, you know, so—variety.

00:17:47

AE: Something for everybody.

00:17:48

FC: Uh-hmm, yes.

00:17:50

AE: Have you had your hot dog yet? When do you have your hot dog? Don't tell me at midnight.

00:17:54

FC: I—I did have one earlier, which I—a lot of times I'm busy and I don't need to eat—sometimes late at night—a hot dog. I just, you know, I'm here getting things in order and helping Rita, getting things in order and kind of helping her see that, you know, the volunteers are kind of in here. If they're, you know, trying to help her, she would tell me, you know—might need to pass a message on or something to another one, so that's part of what we do too—or I do. I don't know what else you want.

00:18:43

AE: Are you going to find some time to dance tonight?

00:18:46

FC: Always. Most every Saturday night we try to slide in there. [*Laughs*]

00:18:51

AE: Well I'll keep an eye out for you on the dance floor.

00:18:55

FC: Well I want to know if you dance?

00:18:57

AE: I do. I enjoy dancing. I might cut a rug out there with you and—and Chickie.

00:19:00

FC: What kind of dance do you do?

00:19:04

AE: I don't know if I would name the dance that I do [*Laughs*]. I don't do any like traditional—I guess like a two-step but no ballroom dancing kinds of things, just kind of move.

00:19:15

FC: Well this—do you clog and tap or anything like that?

00:19:19

AE: [*Shakes head “No.”*]

00:19:22

FC: Well, as I said, just so you get out there and do whatever you feel. That's all it—what it's about.

00:19:33

AE: Yeah, I've heard about the clogging here. Do you clog?

00:19:36

FC: Yeah, I try. [*Laughs*]

00:19:39

AE: All right.

00:19:42

FC: Oh, goodness. Tell me a little bit about you.

00:19:44

AE: Well I'll do that when I turn this microphone off, how's that?

00:19:48

FC: [*Laughs*]

00:19:50

AE: They're not paying me to talk about me. But if we—if you want—if there is nothing else that you want to add then we can just tie this up and—.

00:20:00

FC: Well there—as I said, there—coming to the Carter Fold you can bring children. They dance from three years to ninety, so and there will be no drugs or alcohol or anything like that. It's all family; that's the wonderful thing about it.

00:20:26

AE: It feels like family when you're here, definitely.

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FC: Yes.

00:20:31

AE: Thank you very much, Faye, for sitting in this tiny office with me.

00:20:34

FC: Thank you very much.

00:20:36

[End Faye Collins Interview]