

NANCY CARTER
Family Member - 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 Nancy Carter Interview]

00:00:00

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, February 21, 2009, in Hiltons, Virginia, at the Carter Family Fold. And I'm in the kitchen at the Fold with Nancy Carter, and, Nancy, if you would say your name and your relationship to the family, please, ma'am.

00:00:20

Nancy Carter: I'm Nancy Carter, and I was married to Joe Carter [son of A. P. and Sara Carter]. We had four children: three girls and a boy and our little boy passed away. And—and the girls all grow(ed) up and made nurses. They wouldn't take up the music and they one can play but they don't. And anything else you want to know? *[Laughs]*

00:00:46

AE: Yes, ma'am. We talked a little bit while we were sitting here drinking our cocoa about A. P. and how much you liked him. Can you talk about that and how you held his coffee?

00:00:54

NC: About—about me holding his coffee and his shakes a lot, and I held his coffee for him to drink it to keep from spilling it everywhere. And he'd come to my house and eat every morning and he'd eat—and he'd walk to his oldest daughter up there [Gladys] and eat and he—whichever one he wanted to eat with, why he'd walk from one to the other to eat with us. He was a wonderful man. And is there anything else you want?

00:01:25

AE: Well can you tell me a little bit more about his personality and what you made him for breakfast?

00:01:29

NC: Well just whatever he wanted—scrambling him eggs, give him eggs and coffee and toast or biscuits—mostly biscuits. He didn't care about toast much, and he liked jelly and biscuits, so that's just about what he wants for breakfast, and he'd eat just anything we'd put on the table.

00:01:53

AE: So he never did cook for himself, then? He always came to y'all?

00:01:56

NC: No, he shook too bad to—to cook for his self because he'd spill it, you know. He was—there's one thing about him, he was a wonderful person. He was as good to me as he could be and children—and he loved them every one. But now our last daughter that was born, he'd already passed away. He passed away in [nineteen]'61, and she was born in '65. And I don't know anything else, and my mind ain't very long. I can't think of—. [*Laughs*]

00:02:29

AE: Well tell me about marrying Joe. Tell me about your husband.

00:02:32

NC: About—tell you about marrying him? I met him at the Bristol Weaving Mill and we—
we—during World War II and he went to the service. Well anyhow, we dated, and we married in
'48. Our first child was in '52.

00:02:50

AE: And what is your birthday, again?

00:02:52

NC: My birthday was October 23rd, and I was born in 1924.

00:02:58

AE: And where—you were born in Bristol?

00:03:01

NC: Yeah. Well, up here to the foot of the hills of Clench Mountain, between Bristol and—
and—right up the road here not very far between Bristol and Hiltons here. I was born up there.

00:03:15

AE: What was your family name?

00:03:16

NC: I was a Keller and married a Carter. And I've carried that name a long time—60 years.

[Laughs]

00:03:24

AE: So when you married Joe Carter, what did you—what did you know about the Carter Family?

00:03:29

NC: I didn't know a thing about them. I didn't even know they existed. *[Laughs]* I didn't. I never had, you know, been around none of them. We just met at the Bristol Weaving Mill, and I worked up there from '42 on until they shut it down in '84.

00:03:50

AE: And did your family play music when you were coming up?

00:03:53

NC: What's that, honey?

00:03:54

AE: Did your family play music?

00:03:57

NC: My family? My mother could but she wouldn't play out—and family, my mother played the piano or organ most of the time is what—she played the organ a lot. Yeah, mother was a good singer. It's been a long time.

00:04:14

AE: Was your mother a big cook?

00:04:16

NC: Was she what, honey?

00:04:17

AE: A big cook?

00:04:18

NC: Yes, she was a big cook. She's a good cook. If you cooked for as many as she did, you'd get to be a good cook.

00:04:25

AE: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

00:04:29

NC: Eleven. I had—there was eleven of us—the whole family—and I was the oldest and the meanest. *[Laughs]*

00:04:40

AE: Can you tell me about some of the things your mother would make when you were growing up and—?

00:04:44

NC: I don't know if I could tell you or not. She cooked so many different things. *[To her sister]* Mary, what did mama cook the most of?

00:04:58

AE: *[To Nancy]* They're telling you about her apple pies.

00:05:01

NC: And she'd bake cakes, and she'd bake them everything from scratch. She's good with it. And—what, honey? Chicken and dumplings. **[Laughs]** She'd make chicken and dumplings. She'd cook—they killed hogs and pigs, you know, and she'd cook a big ham, stuff like that—we just lived the—the old ways. **[Laughs]**

00:05:30

AE: And now Mary [Hartosck, Nancy's sister] and Rita [Forrester, Nancy's niece] are telling me that you're a big cook.

00:05:33

NC: Oh, I don't know about that. **[Laughs]** I don't know whether I am or not. **[Laughs]** I—I got to where I don't have to cook much. What? Well I cook chicken and dumplings when somebody starts hollering but—. **[Laughs]** I cook chicken and dumplings quite a bit if they holler for them, but I don't cook them much if nobody—everybody but me.

00:05:58

AE: Can you tell me how you make them?

00:06:02

NC: Well I just cook my chicken and get it good and tender and take it out and take it off the bone. I make my dumplings and make it out of the broth that come out of the chicken and make it—well you stir it up almost like biscuits and roll them out and cut them and throw them in there and cook them, and then throw the chicken back up in there with it. Everybody loves it. I could—I could show you better than I can tell you. *[Laughs]*

00:06:35

AE: Was Joe a fan of your chicken and dumplings?

00:06:37

NC: Is what?

00:06:39

AE: Is Joe a fan of your chicken and dumplings?

00:06:39

NC: Oh, yeah, he likes it all. He liked anything. Biscuits and gravy—yeah, oh, yeah, he'd eat biscuits and gravy and—and he loved egg custard to drink, you know—malt custard. Lord he loved that. Well, yeah. Huh? *[Background conversation about tomato gravy]* Well I just put my tomatoes up in the skillet and put me a little—about a half a stick of margarine in it and make me a thickening and put in it and cook—make a tomato gravy like that and make biscuits. They all liked that. I just—whatever come to my brain I—. *[Laughs]*

00:07:33

AE: Did you make tomato dumplings?

00:07:36

NC: Yeah, I've done that. I've done a lot of things. I've forgot about what I've done. So that's just about the way it goes, and I can't remember what all I cooked. I've cooked a lot. My mother cooked a lot.

00:07:56

AE: Did you make a lot of cornbread at home?

00:08:00

NC: Quite a bit. *[Laughs]*

00:08:00

AE: Can you tell me about your cornbread recipe?

00:08:03

NC: They—most of the time I would—if I made it myself, why I just used salt and—and used cornbread that already had the seasoning in it, and I can't hardly tell you about it—buttermilk. You made it up out of buttermilk. I've about forgot—. Huh? I've got a Bill Bailey cornbread, but I forgot how I made it. I've got it—Grace's is good—my sister. Bill Bailey. Yeah, I made Mexican cornbread, too, but I'd have to have the recipe to show you how to make them because I've been—my mind is not that long no more. Everything I've got's left me. *[Laughs]*

00:08:50

AE: I don't believe that.

00:08:53

NC: You wait. I had a bad sick spell in November, and I was out for about three days—first sick spell I ever had. And I didn't know where I was at. They say I didn't know where I was at, but I didn't know I didn't. **[Laughs]** Mary can tell you more about that than I can. And I can't—I don't hear very good anymore. Yeah, Lord, we better give up before I say something I'm not supposed to. **[Laughs]**

00:09:22

AE: Oh, yes, we haven't talked about the chicken salad.

00:09:23

NC: I've done—I've done told her about the chicken salad, how to cook it and cut up the grapes and half white and half the red, chop the pecans and mayonnaise and—and what all that—see mayonnaise and—what's that—I can't see it very good. I ain't got—poppy seed and honey—and honey, uh-hm. And—and yeah, that sour cream but now the—it calls for three cups of grapes but you get them half white and half red. Put—mix it all up and put it in the refrigerator and let it sit overnight, and it's a lot better. You know when it sits it must get all the seasoning in there—everything.

00:10:16

AE: Uh-hmm.

00:10:16

NC: Yeah, I don't know.

00:10:16

AE: And you said Rita asked you to bring this recipe. How long have you been making it?

00:10:20

NC: I don't know. Tell you the truth I couldn't—I don't know how long I've been making it.

[Laughs] Have I been making it as long as you girls been—? [*Background Conversation*] They made it at my home, you know. Yeah, I made it a long time but I don't—I don't remember how long. It's whatever they holler—I make it.

00:10:48

AE: Rita—Rita is saying that a lot of times you do boxed lunches here at the Fold and the tour buses you'll get—they'll get a chicken salad croissant with your chicken salad on it.

00:10:56

NC: Yeah, I guess they did. I don't know. [Laughs] I forgot all that. They want me to remember things that I can't remember no more. My mind ain't that long.

00:11:08

AE: Now how long have you been helping out here on Saturday mornings?

00:11:11

NC: Lord, how long have I been helping you, Rita? Ever since Janette [Carter, Rita's mother and Nancy's sister-in-law] got sick we've been—yeah, something like that. After Janette—after Janette got down and couldn't do, why I started helping her out here, but I'd go to the house up there and Mary would, too, and help Janette a lot.

00:11:34

AE: And whose egg salad is this that y'all are making sandwiches with?

00:11:37

NC: Janette's.

00:11:38

AE: It's Janette's recipe, okay.

00:11:41

NC: I don't know. That comes from Bristol, so I—years ago and I don't know—.

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AE: The chicken salad recipe comes from your family in Bristol, you're saying?

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NC: My family brought it to me. I don't know where they got it but anyhow, I've made it up. They still like it; they still holler for it, so that's about it. Oh Papaw, he—he'd eat anything wouldn't he? He did. I guess that's about everything I know about that. Rita can tell you more

about them than I can. What, honey? Yeah, Rita can write it. Janette used to come out the house and sit down there at the—at the snack bar and eat—and write down recipes and everything.

[Laughs] She'd come out the house and get them. Yeah. **[Background Conversation]** If I wasn't afraid Rita would kill me, I'd tell one on her. **[Laughs]** You don't want me—you don't want me to tell her about the snake? **[Laughs]** Okay.

00:13:03

AE: All right. Well, Nancy, thank you.

00:13:05

NC: Yeah, yeah.

00:13:07

[End Nancy Carter Interview]