

I Wouldn't Take Nothin For My Journey. The title in itself catches the eye. It is a line from a song in the rich heritage of Negro spirituals.

The general theme of this book is the unfolding of six generations of the Jenifer-Berry-Harris-Jordan family. Two things very important to the author are emphasized: One is the impact of the Black church on the Black family and he points out that he means not just the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church alone, but the black church as a composite body.

The second thing is family togetherness or love as an ideal to be cherished, to be striven for, and to be actualized in the life of those who share common blood, common circumstance, common traditions, and a common faith. This has been a technique of Black survival across the generations.

There are eight sections in the book, corresponding primarily to the major epochs in the lives of John, Llewellyn and Leonidas Berry.

At the beginning of each of the eight sections, there are numerous pictures of persons, places, documents, and so on, all of which highlight and bring alive the narrative which is unfolding. Then there is a bibliographical section, including the books consulted, the persons interviewed (some 135), and places visited in the preparation of this work, a work which took some twenty-five years to bring to its fruition. And as you read through it one can understand why it would take that long. It is a massive undertaking to pull together the lives of so many people with the kind of intimate and intricate and vivid detail that Dr. Berry has provided. One does not do this overnight.

This is a book which contains many things. On the surface, it's the story of the generations of a multinuclear family clan. It begins with Johnny Miles, a slave in St. Marys County, Maryland who decided one day that he wasn't going to be a slave anymore. And drawing upon his ingenuity, courage, and faith in God, he devised a plan whereby he could change his condition and, hopefully, bring about a change in the condition of his family and many other persons of color. Using a change of name to John Berry and a horse's bridle as a decoy, he escaped from his enslavement.

The story of his escape and that of two others recounted in the book brings into the picture Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad, and the drama that surrounded their liberation from slavery.

John Berry did not want just to run away; he wanted to run away and become a part of the Union army. He didn't want to flee only for himself but flee so that he might become a part of that force which could bring liberation to others as well. Of course when he got to the Union army camp he found that there, too, his blackness was the occasion of barriers that had to be overcome. But he overcame those barriers, became a soldier in the army, and served honorably in the war effort.

Returning home from the war John Berry thought to continue in the farming life, taking up residence on the confiscated Taylor's plantation near Norfolk's Ocean View. Once there he met and married Nancy Jenifer, the sister of an army buddy, Sam Jenifer. And from that union was born the one who came to be the Reverend L.L. Berry, the principal figure in this history, and the father of the author.

The Reverend Berry (reared on Butler's farm near Hampton, Virginia) was a spunky type of individual, who believed in standing for those things which he felt were right. He said he "never picked a fight

but was never known to run from one either." And that's the kind of posture which he carried throughout his life.

Berry began his ministerial career in little mission circuit churches. Later he came to pastor some of the outstanding churches in Virginia and North Carolina. He went on to become a presiding elder and eventually a general officer in the AME church, serving for some twenty-one years as Secretary of Missions, stationed at New York city.

One thing which was representative of the conscientiousness, the seriousness, the faithfulness of his call to the ministry was the fact that though he had become a popular Secretary of Missions, popular across the length and breadth of African Methodism, and was constantly encouraged to seek the episcopacy, his reply was always "No, being a bishop is nice, but I want to be where I can render the widest service. I don't want to be confined to just one district, but I want to have the whole world available for the kinds of things which I feel God has laid on my heart and placed within the scope of my abilities to do on his behalf." He did finally agree at one point to a draft, in 1948, but even then it was not an active attempt, and the author records that Rev. Berry heaved a sigh of relief when he discovered that he had not been elected.

The author of this volume, Dr. Leonidas H. Berry, was the first of six children born to the Rev. Berry and his wife. As early as age five he declared his intention to become a medical doctor. This intention never wavered. He not only established a successful practice but became a medical educator and a pioneer in the area of gastrointestinal disorders and endoscopy.

The story tells also of the lives of Dr. Berry's siblings as they become adults and moved into professional careers of their own.

This is a fascinating unfolding of a family's life. It's a story of drama and suspense, it's a story of real touching pathos, as in the incident when Rev. Berry's uncle, escaped slave, Sam Jenifer returned from the war to present himself proudly before his mother only to discover that she had died two months earlier. Another very poignant and striking incident is that in which the Reverend L.L. Berry is now the Secretary of Missions and travelling on a long-awaited voyage to Africa. And as he stood there on board the grand sailing vessel Queen Mary, wafting his way across the waters to England, enroute to Africa the land of his fathers and mothers looking at all the opulence around him, his mind wandered back to those years a century and more before when other Black folk were going not from the U.S.A. to Africa, but in the other direction, and on a much different ship. On those ships they couldn't stand freely on top of the clean decks or recline in comfortable lounge chairs or sit at tables bountifully spread. Rather, they were packed together, laid side by side in chains, with no rest facilities or amenities. And their destination was more devastating in reality than in their tortured anticipation. The juxtaposition in Rev. Berry's mind of these two images, of one black man sailing on the Queen Mary and other black men and women so recently sailing from Africa on the schooners of bondage, cut to the very quick of his spirit.

This, too, is a story of great human interest, as in the excerpt about "Doc" Henry, Jenifer's great uncle of Rev. L.L. Berry:

"On one occasion Dr. William Thomas (a white medical doctor) sent his slave apprentice, Henry, affectionately known as Doc Henry, to carry out the daily mopping of a large open wound on the foot of a white farmer. The same mop was used each day and the solution was carbolic acid and water. When the wound did not heal in several weeks, the patient complained that it was getting worse. Doc Henry agreed, and told the patient that he had a better treatment if he could keep a secret. The patient requested a trial of the slave doctor's remedy. Doc Henry soaked a hunk of bread in water and left it in the open air until it was covered with a heavy growth of mold. He applied the molded bread and cured the open wound. Dr. Thomas never knew that his carbolic acid washings did not cure the infection. This crude application of penicillin was a hundred years ahead of its time."

There is humor in the telling of this story. For instance one chuckles as the author tells of the kids on the farm who played "church," practicing preaching as they preached the funerals of chickens and other farm animals.

And it's a story of history. One learns a great deal about black history, about American history, and about African Methodist history in the pages of this volume.

Finally, the story relates much of the disabilities and disappointments faced by Black people in this country. One incident will illustrate. Leonidas Berry is nearing the end of his medical studies at the University of Chicago and looking for a place to take up the practical training required of doctors. He has an appointment with the Dean, and I quote:

"He had an unsavory racial attitude by reputation with Negro students, present and past. Having been admitted to his private office, which was not the easiest accomplishment, I was allowed to stand in front of his desk, cooling my heels, for about two minutes, before he decided even to look up. His greeting was a firm "Name please." I answered "Leonidas Berry." He then pulled the pad in front of him and wrote 'Berry,-negro,' (with a small, N, of course). "You may proceed," the Dean continued.

Well, I stated that I had come in to see about arranging for a hospital and the schedule for the required clerkship. "Negroes don't get clerkships," he replied. "Yes," I answered, "I had heard that by the grapevine, but no one has told me this officially, and I didn't think it was a closed matter. I came to suggest that perhaps the tax-supported public hospital, Cook County, across the street, could be a place where the clerkship might be provided." The Dean answered, "No, that cannot be arranged and yes, it is a closed issue." He appeared to dismiss me. But I was not quite ready to go. I continued, "Dean, there is a course in intravenous medications, which I understand is quite popular and is assigned to applicants alphabetically. Since my name begins with a 'B', and since I cannot have a clerkship, could I be registered for this course?" The Dean replied in a stern voice, "Of course not. That course is in great demand and if I registered you over everybody else, that would be giving you special privileges." At that point, I thanked the Dean, did an "about face," and went out to look for my own clerkship."

This was not a unique incident in the lives of Black Americans, but because of its very representativeness, it stands out. These kinds of incidents are woven all through the story because they're woven all through our lives as Black men and women in this country. One would hope that in 1981 these would be stories that we only remember from the past, but such is not the case. They can still be heard and told with new freshness today and new incidences of them are emerging each day.

I Wouldn't Take Nothin' For My Journey is a story of heroism, a story of pride, a story of celebration of one man's life and family and forebearers. As the author points out, thousands of others could tell a similar story about their own "multi-nuclear" organized rather than disorganized families, and he encourages others to do so.