

Congaree Swamp Stories

Featured Speaker Transcript

Ruby Rice Sligh - An Account of Baptism, How Things Were Different and What Still Remains, Including Conversations About Fishing, Drum Shouts and Cotton Gins

Ruby Rice Sligh: Hi. Good morning. How are you all? I'm Ruby Sligh and I grew up here, right off of 48, and I attend church right down below Cedar Creek, a place where I was baptized during the years that I baptized in the late '40's, we didn't have pools in the church. So, part of the river was a stream from the river - Cedar Creek River, and I had to walk from my church about a mile back down into the swamp - to the stream that runs from Cedar Creek to be baptized, and there, I was baptized in the river, Cedar Creek Spring from the River. There, I also attended elementary school, which was here, where the Congaree Swamp is really located. That was back in the late '40's too. And I went there from 5th to 6th grade, and things was much different than you kids have it today. You kids have modern things from what I had back in my days. I didn't even have a school bus. I had to walk to school. When I get ready to use the bathroom, I had to go outside, where they had bathrooms built on the outside. Even water - I couldn't stay in my building to get a drink of water. We had outdoors pump that we had to pump water from. And our heat wasn't as modern as what you have today. I had big coal heaters. You kids probably don't even know what coal looked like. But (laughing) it's a black, hard thing that looks like a rock, but it keeps you warm in big heaters, and it's just amazing, where I came from and where you all are today. It is so different, and probably back in my days, you kids probably wouldn't want to walk to school like I did. And I know you wouldn't want to walk down to a creek down in a swamp to be baptized, because I know you would be afraid, but I had no other choice. If I wanted to be baptized I had to baptize in the creek.

Off camera: Can you tell us about how it was when you were baptized? You said you walked down to the creek and then there was a white sheet...Can you tell us about that, so we can...

Ruby Rice Sligh: Yes. When we were baptized, the church wasn't near the creek. So, what we did, we had four people stand to each corner of that sheet, and they held that sheet up, and after my pastor baptized me, they opened that sheet, and my mother presented my clothes where I could get dressed in that sheet. Right between that sheet what the four is holding. Then I get dressed, and asked to put on all white. Then we marched back to the church, and the sing - the church choir would be singing the old songs about "We are marching, we are marching up to Zion," and we'd go back to the church singing that song. After I baptized - but see when you get baptized now, you have a fellowship hall back in the back with a dressing room, bathroom you can go get dressed too, but I had to get dressed right by that creek with the deaconesses. The deaconesses are the deacons of our church wives. They are deaconesses, and they would hold these sheets up so that I can get dressed.

Off camera: How old were you when you were baptized?

Ruby Rice Sligh: When I got baptized, I was eight. I had a sister two years older than me, and when she joined the church, I wanted to be baptized with my sister because we always was very close together. So, my mother told my pastor I was too young to be baptized - I was doing what my sister was doing and I wasn't ready, so he told my mother "If she comes up and joins, she's ready," saying I'm going to baptize her. So - and he did, and that was about during about 1948. I was only eight years old.

Off camera: So you did get to be baptized with your sister.

Ruby Rice Sligh: I got to be baptized. Uh-huh.

Off camera: And what kind of fish have you caught in the creek?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh, we would go to - the Cedar Creek's right down on the same road, which, as a matter of fact, the church I attend is right on this road. On down, here on the end here, you have Mount Mariah Baptist Church. On down is my church, Zion Pilgrim. We are two sister churches. And we used to fish to the river you see right down from here over on your right hand side. Sometimes, we think it on by the burned side. We used to go there and fish. Right to that river there. Then, that river - its springs run into my parents' land on further down Cedar Creek, because Cedar Creek goes all the way back to land that my parents owned right off 48, coming on down.

Off camera: And is that where the school was located?

Ruby Rice Sligh: The school was located along in here on this same road that I used to attend. And there was a little store right next to that school. And this old man, named Mr. Phillip Sumter - which he has family live here now, by the Congaree Swamp. And he used to run a little store there. And when we'd get out of sch... - have our school break or recess, this is where we'd go get candy like - you remember the Mary Jane candy? The kisses? BB Bats? Those was our favorite candy back in those days. You remembered? Uh-huh. They were our favorite candy. Uh-huh.

Off camera: What kind of bait did you use when you were fishing?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh, we used those old long - what the red baits, ooh, the crawly one. I'm afraid - I never bait my hook.

Off camera: Do you use worms?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Yes.

Off camera: No dough balls?

Ruby Rice Sligh: No.

Off camera: Okay.

Ruby Rice Sligh: Just the worms.

Off camera: Regular poles, or...What did you use for fishing poles?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Just the regular poles - fishing cane - the regular poles. We didn't have reel and rods. Sometimes, we'd make our own cane - get long sticks and put the hook - cord and thing on it. My brothers was good fishermen. And sometimes, we'd get a little long branch, and they'd cut it down, and make our own poles. Back then we - we really didn't buy poles and things. We'd just go in the woods and find one. And fishing, because it always was a spring on my parent's land - my father's land, and we were fishing a lot on the pond that was in his la - well, it was part of Cedar Creek - the springs that run, and we would go down to my father's land and fishing on it...

Off camera: Campers, do you have any questions?

Camper: Was it fun fishing?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Ooh, yes. Which I loved doing in back there, but now, no. (laughing) Yes?

Camper: Was life really hard?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Well, it was no harder, I guess, than what these children have today, because my father was a farmer, and he raised everything we ate, from vegetables, from hogs, cows. My father was a big farmer here, right off 48. Right on the corner of 48 and Martin Luther Kind Boulevard. He owned several acres of land. I think she was next.

Camper: how did you survive in the wilderness?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh, really I never lived in the wilderness, but it was easy. My parents had eight (unintelligible). Eight of us. And they made a pretty good living for us. We never struggled for food, clothes or anything, because he was in the logging business. As a matter of fact, that's where he got killed with the logging - log tree fell on him, but that's what he loved doing, and he got killed doing what he loved best. Uh-huh. Yes?

Camper: (unintelligible) interesting thing when you go fishing?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Yes. I loved to go fishing, and the only thing that bothered me, when I stopped fishing, I saw a snake. And when I saw that snake, he was near me, and I haven't been back fishing since (laughing). Don't like snakes.

Camper: Where was the last place do you remember being fishing?

Ruby Rice Sligh: The last place I went fishing - Do you know where you go on around this church, and the Zion Damascus Church, which is an old church too, and it has a little spring there part of Cedar Creek too, and it's a bridge. That's the last place I (went) fishing - right off the bridge, part of Cedar Creek.

Camper: Did you have any picnics out there by Cedar Creek?

Ruby Rice Sligh: No, we didn't have picnics. As a matter of fact, we didn't have picnics during that time, back in the early '50's. We had drum shouts at our church. I imagine you kids never heard of drum shouts, where you beat the drum, blow the flute, and we would have it on a Saturday - one Saturday out of the year, during the summer. And we'd all go down the road. These two guys would beat the drum, blow the flute, and all the people do what they called a drum shout. And we would

dance and have a good time right on the church yard, but they don't do these things anymore. It was a lot of fun, and every year, we looked forward for that drum shout.

Camper: What was the best kind of fish that you ever caught?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Back there, I didn't know the name of them. I guess they call them little brims.

Off camera: Jeffery has a question. Go ahead, Jeffery.

Camper: Have you been in the woods hunting?

Ruby Rice Sligh: No, I never hunt.

Off camera: Did your dad used to hunt?

Ruby Rice Sligh: He never hunted, but he was more of a fisherman than he did hunted.

Camper: Did you spend most of your time when you was a little girl fishing?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Yes, because my mother did love to fish, and she's the one taught us. And most of my brothers - all my brothers loved the fishing. And as a matter of fact, my kids love the fishing now. My sons out here - I have three, and they go to Charleston deep sea fishing. It's just something in my family that they just love doing.

Off camera: That's a lot different than fishing in Cedar Creek, huh?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Yes. Oh I have my family members here, and some of them never heard of - never been back here before.

Off camera: Oh, welcome.

Ruby Rice Sligh: Their first time here.

Off camera: You'll have to show them the good fishing spots along the creek.

Ruby Rice Sligh: Yes. I doubt it, I doubt whether they would come back here (laughing). They were afraid coming back down here, they were....

Off camera: Aw....Go ahead Emanuel...

Camper: Is your favorite candy still around?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I went to the flea market and I found a bag of Mary Jane's and I bought them. That was my favorite, Mary Jane's. Uh-huh, some of them (are) still around.

Off camera: Ricardo, go ahead...

Camper: When you said that your favorite treat was Mary Jane's, did they have like - did you like sugar canes?

Ruby Rice Sligh: Sugar cane? We had sugar canes, but I never cared for the sugar canes. The things that look like a corn - cornstalk? I remember that.

Off camera: You like those Ricardo?

Ruby Rice Sligh: I'm surprised you remember that - sugar cane. That was back in my day...

Camper: Um, sugar canes, they use that in wine.

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh, they do? I didn't know that (laughing).

Camper: I went to the rum factory in Jamaica, and um, they used to use a donkey, and they had sugar cane and they put it in this thing, and all the sugar would come out, and then they would put it in this process that takes the crystals from the sugar, and then they'll heat it and let it sit for a while, and then they pack it and send it across the world. And then they let us try some wine, and I liked it.

Ruby Rice Sligh: Really? I do know you make syrup out of it, don't you? You make syrup.

Off camera: Alright campers. Any other questions?

Off camera: I have a comment. Charity and a couple of others have asked the question of many of the speakers about "Was it hard or difficult to survive you know, in the swamp or in the wilderness or in the swamp area, and Mrs. Ruby here, she talked about things being different in her time period, having things you know, you guys today may have things a little better, in certain ways, than maybe she did, but I think what's really interesting, is that - I think what John Paul said, is that some things you don't miss if you've never had them - or never experienced them. It seems to me that, you know, she really enjoyed her life growing up. You guys have all asked - most of the people, you know - "Was is fun? Did you have fun?" And it seems like adapting what they had at the time period when they were younger - (frame cuts out)

Ruby Rice Sligh: ...cotton gin. When my father - we picked cotton, and we'd take it to the Clarkson, the gin house, they owned the gin house about a block away from my father and - right here in Hopkins. And part of that old gin house is still sitting there - right there on the corner of, is it Clarkson Road? And 48, Bluff road.

Off camera: Is that near where Jimmie Dinkins lives?

Ruby Rice Sligh: No, its coming down near - its about two blocks up from Martin Luther King Boulevard. Part of that old gin house is still remaining there. Mmm-hmm, and that was owned by members of my family. Mmm-hmm.

Camper: I wanted to ask if you were talking about - it looks just like a building made out of bricks, but it kind of looks like half of it might have been burned down.

Ruby Rice Sligh: What is it?

Camper: I wanted to know what that was...

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh the gin house?

Camper: Its right across from the (unintelligible)...

Ruby Rice Sligh: No, its made out of tin. It's still tin. It wasn't made out of bricks. You ever seen a - they used to call it a gin house because they do - make bails of cotton like - they separate the cotton from the seeds...

Off camera: We saw one of those at the Harriet Barber House yesterday...

Ruby Rice Sligh: Oh, really? Oh, it's so long ago. Cotton gin. They called it (a) cotton gin. And it makes the bail and everything. The bail - Have you ever see a bail of cotton? Well, it bails it and everything, but it separates the seeds from the cotton. Mmm-hmm.

Off camera: Any other questions? Alright. Thank you, Mrs. Sligh. (clapping) [end].