

## Parley Philip Johnson Jr. Remembers:

How many of us Johnson cousins do you know that were actually old enough to have spent time at Carol Villa during the lifetime of Papa and Grandmama Johnson? A lucky few I would say.

When I was born in 1956 they both had passed away, Papa in 1950 and Grandmama in 1952. So I was not privileged to know our grandparents. However I did listen to many stories that my Dad, Parley Philip, loved to tell of the life and times of his brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, and their friends during the wondrous years the family grew up at Carol Villa. In addition, I am sure that many of our cousins have fond memories of visiting Carol Villa when Uncle Mac and Aunt Gene lived there.

Daddy loved to travel the 100 miles from Lockhart, Alabama where we lived (he was an Alabama Department of Agriculture Field Inspector) to the state capitol in Montgomery. His trips gave him a chance to visit many of our aunts, uncles and cousins. When he said he was going to Montgomery, we all knew that meant time to visit some of our kinfolks on the Johnson side. For most of our family each trip was a big treat since our entertainment usually was riding bikes around in our small town of 500 people. We were taught to love and respect all of our kinfolks and be on our best behavior.

I remember the first time Daddy took us to visit the "Big House" when I was just a young boy. During the drive Daddy told us stories of his life growing up in Carol Villa. Uncle Mac and Aunt Gene lived there as did our cousins Charlie Mac and Gene Burt. Aunt Gene was always a gracious hostess; she made a point to always treat us to an ice cream sandwich or Eskimo Bar. But we didn't have to turn the handle on the ice cream freezer like our older cousins did in earlier days. Aunt Gene let us pick out what we wanted from the freezer. Daddy reminded us how lucky we were and later made a point of buying a manual ice cream freezer so my brothers and I could experience turning the handle at home.

It was getting late and we were not looking forward to the two-hour drive back to South Alabama, so Uncle Mac and Aunt Gene invited us to "SPEND THE NIGHT." Oh boy, what a treat! Aunt Gene said we could sleep upstairs in the first bedroom on the left. When it was time to go to bed we headed up the beautiful stairway with a landing and another set of stairs turning to the right and finally to our bedroom.

The upstairs had four bedrooms all twenty feet by twenty feet. Daddy told me that is where he, Mac, Wylie, Luke and Pete slept. They would get to bed early because about daylight Papa Johnson would go to the bottom of the stairs, bump his walking stick three times and announce it was time to get up. Most of the boys had to get dressed and go milk the cows while Uncle Luke cooked some cathead biscuits and got breakfast ready. Then, grabbing school books, they ran down the long road in front of the "BIG HOUSE" to catch the bus to Capitol Heights or Sidney Lanier Schools.

Daddy hated his shoes and loved to run. So he would leave his shoes in the mailbox and run down the Atlanta Highway to Capitol Heights while the others rode the bus. He bragged that he outran the bus to school because it had to make numerous stops on the five miles or so to the school.

That night as we were getting ready for bed in the big house, Daddy told of the many friends they invited on the weekends, but he didn't mention a fellow we knew well; his name was Mr. Fling Down. At home Daddy had told us numerous times especially around Halloween of a Ghost that used to live in the attic of the "BIG HOUSE" named FLING DOWN.

The story has been told many different ways, but they way we heard it is that Fling Down was a slave before and during the War Between the States. He used to try and run away, so the Plantation Owner would chain him in the "BIG HOUSE" attic at night to prevent his escape. If he did try they would hear the chains and stop him. After many years he died one night in the attic. But when they went up there to get him, "HE WAS GONE!"

For many years afterward, on nights when the moon was full, just around midnight the folks that lived there said they could hear scary moans and chains a' rattling'. We were skeptical at first but at our age we were intrigued and a bit frightened too. Well, that night in the bedroom upstairs I didn't sleep too soundly at first. Later that night I thought I could hear him too! You may think I am exaggerating, but I have never forgotten the sound I heard that night.

Years later, at one of our great Johnson Family reunions, I heard Uncle Wylie talking about Fling Down and how he used to tell our cousins about him. He described how they took a chain up in the attic and tied strings to each end of it and dropped the strings down the fireplace to the bottom floor. Late at night with one person on each string they would pull the chain back and forth across the attic. I can just imagine the wide eyes of all the awakened sleepers in the "BIG HOUSE" that night! And I bet there were discussions of Mr. Fling Down next morning at the breakfast table.

After our night in the Big House, we ate a wonderful breakfast with Aunt Gene and Uncle Mac and got to spend some more time just hanging out at Carol Villa. It was an awesome place and will be forever in my memory. As time goes by our memories fade, so I hope this little story will inspire others to recollect memories of their own times visiting Carol Villa and the "Big House." ©