

④ Page 42-43

"HAVE YOU..." to

"nap for me!"

couldn't find Allie anywhere. ...
iding place, up under the din-
seats of the chairs. She was
th the lace tablecloth. And I
ter's eyes ... that Allie already
ped to me. (Beat.)

o share with me? (Lights fade.)

JOY

A shaft of light comes up slowly on Charlayne as she sings:

CHARLAYNE.

HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO GIVE
TO THE MASTER? OOH, OOH, OOH.
HAVE YOU OFFERED YOUR BLESSINGS
TO THE LORD? OOH, OOH.

What makes a little girl want to grow up to be a performing artist? For me, it all started with a dying wish. (Lights up.) Way back in 1927, in Shibuta, Mississippi, my grandparents — Daddy's parents, Alfred Sr. and Leola — along with their brothers and sisters, took their life savings, plus the savings of generations of Woodards and McCanns before them, and with the help of a white interme- diary, they bought one hundred acres of prime, beautiful farmland, in upstate New York, about ten miles outside of Albany. My grand- mother likes to say:

GRANDMAMA. God delivered us ... from out of Shibuta, Mississippi ... and brought us to ... the promised land.
CHARLAYNE. (Singing.)

MY FATHER IS RICH,
IN HOUSES AND LAND.
HE HOLDETH THE POWER OF THE WORLD,
IN HIS HANDS ...

My grandparents lived a "saved, sanctified, filled-with-the- Holy-Ghost" kind of existence since they were children. Everything they knew, they shared with us. They taught us all

about love, life, tolerance, charity ... berry picking ...

When the women's lib movement came about, we were all very anxious to hear Grandmama's views on *that* subject. She gathered her granddaughters around her. She said:

GRANDMAMA. Generations and generations of Woodard women ... have always had ... the opportunity ... to work like a man, and at a man's job. Oh, we have all worked in the fields, chopped wood, driven trucks, and tractors, and buses. I myself, I worked on the railroad during the war. A woman must always be prepared to do whatever she has to do, for the sake of her family and her loved ones ... But if any of you should find a nice, young man ... he comes walking down the street, and this young man just happens to be offering you ... a pedestal ... I want you to climb up on it, and take a nap for me!

CHARLAYNE. (Singing.)

I'VE GOT JOY LIKE A RIVER,
THAT THE LORD GOD GAVE TO ME.

By the time I was eleven years old, Grandmama had eight chil- dren, twenty grands. Every Sunday after church, we'd all gather at Grandmama's house for the big Sunday dinner.

One such Sunday, Grandmama said:
GRANDMAMA. Lord ... before I die ... I sure would love to hear one of my grands ... sing with that Wilborn's Temple Church of God in Christ Junior Church Choir.

CHARLAYNE. And we thought "Oh my goodness! This is impor- tant. Grandmama's about to die. This is her dying wish."

Now, at the time, Grandmama had five grandchildren who qualified for the Wilborn's Temple Church of God in Christ Junior Church Choir: me and Allie, my cousins Mary and Lois, and my cousin Freddie.

We were all very anxious to make Grandmama's dying wish come true, so we found out that the Junior Church Choir met at six-thirty on Wednesday evenings. That very next Wednesday, we joined the Wilborn's Temple Church of God in Christ Junior Church Choir.

After three Wednesday rehearsals, it was "Junior Church Sunday." The Junior Church Choir would be singing all day long, morning service and evening service. (Moves bench up right.)

We five cousins waited excitedly, with the rest of the choir, at the back of the church, (Up center.) behind two huge double doors. There were forty-three of us — forty girls, three boys. We were all