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My Story: From there to here
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Not having a rich culture has always been something I looked for in life. People that could date themselves back to the 1600s and some even further than that surrounded me when I was growing up. I could go to my Grandparents who were born right at the turn of the century and that was where the trail ended. It was a topic that was never talked about it was always my father talking about his mother and his father. In 2013 my grandmother passed away she was 104 year old.

That was when I started asking questions, questions on who were her parents, where did they live, where were they from. It was then that the clouds started to clear up some. My [paternal] grandmother Clara Sawyer Newby was born on November 22, 1909 in Edenton North Carolina as was her parents and their parents before them. Edenton is a small town on the Eastern shore of North Carolina. I can now accurately visualize a family tree that dates back to 1848 and that would have been the birth of my great great great grand father John Page Sawyer. This is where the story begins to get interesting.

His father [who would have been my great great great great grand father] was unnamed and was also born into slavery. In 1835 Samuel Treadwell Sawyer who was a lawyer there in Edenton purchased him at an auction. But where did this unnamed slave come from? The best guess that we were able to arrive at is, that he and his ancestors originated in the West Indies coming to the shores of Edenton between 1771 and 1775 on one of eighteen ships that carried nearly 200 blacks from Antigua and Jamaica. The blacks that were on board those ships originated

from the islands of Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Dominica, St. Croix, St. Eustatius and Tobago.

My father was not a well educated man, he grew up in the segregated south of North Carolina and he sacrificed formal schooling to seek work in order to support his parents and his other siblings. He knew that field and farm work would not generate enough income to maintain even a modest lifestyle. He left Edenton in the early 1970s to move to Washington, DC to seek that American dream and escape the impoverished conditions that he had come accustomed too. It was in Washington that he met my mother. He never lost his roots as he always made sure that he went back often to take care of what life was like, to share the new customs they he acquired. But not everyone was so quick to jump to the lifestyle that the big city had to offer, a perfect example my grandmother had only visited Washington once since my father arrived in 1970.

I have come to appreciate the city life, the hustle and bustle of constant movement of people the smog, the noise. I enjoy the rural south and the sacrifices that were made so that I could have a better life. As the old saying goes it's a great place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there. I'm infused with customs and traditions of a major metropolis that originated from the West Indies that were deeply rooted with rural southern values and morals.