

CAREY VOSS

Emma Barr

Mama was grown
when she sold.
She was mother
of twenty-seven children.
She had twins three times.

During the Civil War
she was run from the Yankees
and had twins on the road.

They died
or was born dead
and she nearly died.
They was buried
between twin trees
close to Hernando, Mississippi.

Dr. Ware had a fine man
he bred his colored house women to.
He was a hostler,
looked after the stock
and got in wood.

The women hated him,
and the men done as well.



ABOUT THE POEM & AUTHOR

“Emma Barr” is crafted from Emma Barr’s interview with Irene Robertson recorded in the Arkansas volume of the Work Projects Administration/Federal Writers’ Project *Slave Narratives* collection (gathered 1936-1938, collated 1941).

About the poem and process of creating it, Carey says:

“The WPA *Slave Narratives* collection contains more than ten thousand typed pages and represents more than two thousand interviews with former slaves. Because of the nature of the interviews, I tried to limit the role of my own voice in their interpretation. My interest in working with this text is not to transform it, but to uncover and draw attention to powerful storylines in each narrative.”

Carey Voss is an artist and curator living in Little Rock, Arkansas. She earned an MFA in painting from American University.

