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Age 93
18 South Douglass
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Ida Belle Hunter, Reporter
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Oklahoma Writers' Project
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I was bo'n in Green County, Alabama in January 1844.

My mother was a white woman and her name was Jane Jenkins. My father was a nigger. He was a coachman on my master's place. I was told this in 1880 by the white doctor, Lyth Smith, which brung me into the world to my mother. My mastah, who was my grandfather, brung me to Texas when I was jes' 7 or 8 yeahs old. A few yeahs later, he brung my mother down to Texas and she had wid her 3 boys, which was her chillun and my brothers. They was white chillun and name Jones. They fust names was Tom, Joe and Lije. They parted f'on me and I never heerd no mo' 'bout 'em. I diden even down know my mother when I seen her. All my life I done jes' knowed my white kinfolks and nothin' 'tall 'bout the other part of my color.

'Fo I was bo'n, my mother was tucken 'way f'om her playmates and kep' in the attic hid. They tuck me soon as I was born f'om her. When her time to be in bed was up, she'd ask the waitman whar I was at. The waitman was Dr. Lyth Smith. He'd tell her I was at Ann's house. I never got chance to nurse my mother. After she got up and come down, she wanted to see her baby. Now she goes to Ann's house and couldn't find me. After she couldn't find me there, she looked in all houses on the place for me, her baby.

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Then she commenced screaming, tearing her clothes off and tearing her hair out. They sонт her to the calaboose tell they could git her some clothes to put on. She went distracted. She tore out towards town. The way they got her to hush, they tole her I was with my grandma. They had me hid on the road to Texas. The doctor's wife said I was the first nigger she shed a tear over. It was a destruction thing. Well, that scandalized the family and they moved to Texas, and come by and got me an tuck me to Texas. When they crossed the big river, Tom Bigby River in Alabama, 3 miles wide on boat, this woman that had me in hand, was just churning me up and down in the river. They hollered at her, and I says that there's what God tuck me in his bosom. Now you may say, on an' on as I growed, then I was 7 or 8 yeahs old when the white folks tuck me in charge. They was gonna make a watchman outta me to watch for 'em at night. But when they begun this, I wasn't ole 'nuf to remember.

The fus' house I was sонт to, was the cook's house. The cook said, "Whut you come down heah fer?" I tole her I didn know. "Who sонт you?" I said, "Ole Mastah Jenkins." She knowed 'mediately whut I was sонт fer, don't you see? She says to me, "Set down little rascal wid her fis' drawed buck, I'll knock you in the head." Well, whut could I do but set, chile lak. 'Fo long I was sleep and they tuck me out doors. Next mawnin' I was tole to go to the big house. Ole Mastah axe me "Whut'd you see last night?" I tole him I didn seed nothin'. Now they got the cow hide

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an' hit me 3 or 4 licks and axe 'at same question agin. I tole 'em I didn't seed nothin'. This went on fer 'bout a hour. I had to take a whippin' ever mawnin', 'cause I had to go to ever house an' never seen nothin'. The last house I went to, well, in the mawnin' as I was gwine back to the big house, a voice come to me and said, "See nothin', tell nothin'." It meant fer me not to lie an' on and on as I growed fer yeahs to come, as I was big 'nuf to plow corn, I was out in the field and a voice, that same voice too, said, "Effen I was you, I'd leave this place, 'cause you'll come to want and won't have." All this was the causing of my conversion.

My fust job was scouring flo's and I mean I scoured 'em too. Next I scoured knives and forks. F'om 'at job I went into rail work, and no play.

My mastah and his family jes' lived in a log house. My mistress was my grandfather's wife and my grandmother, but I couldn't claim 'em. Her and her oldes' chile treated me some rough. I never had no good time tell that old white woman died, an' talkin' 'bout somebody glad she died, I sho' was. They tuck turns 'bout treatin' me bad.

There was 'bout 20 slaves on our place, chillen and all. Dewan, which was my uncle, was the overseer. He waked us up jes' 'fo' sunrise and we worked f'om sun to sun. I seen 'em tie niggers hand and foot to mill posts and whip 'em with bull whips. Them was neighbors, doe not our'n. They whipped the women by pullin' they dresses down to they hips and beat 'em till they was satisfied.

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For myself, my grandfather whipped me tell his dog tuck pity on me and tried to drag me 'way. This is the scar on my leg whar he pulled on me. He was beatin' me tell I said, "Oh! Pray Mastah." He didn't tell me tell after he was thoo' beatin' me doe.

I seen 'em sell people, whut wasn't able to work f'om the block jes' lak cattle. They would be chained togedder. They tuck mothers f'om chillun even jes' a week old and sell 'em. They stripped the slaves, women and all and let the bidders look at 'em to see effen they was scarred 'fo' they would buy 'em.

Them old white folks wouldn't learn us to read and write and wouldn't let they young'ns learn us. My younges' mistress, which is my antie 'mind you, was tryin' to learn me to read and write and was caught an' she got some whippin', almos' a killin'.

I never seen but one nigger man hung. He was crippled and had run 'way. I seen dis honey wid my own eyes, no guess work. He had caught a little white girl, school girl too, ravaged her and cut her tongue off. Oh, that was barbous. He oughta been burnt. He didn't git his jes' due at hangin'.

Patterollers was sho' thoo' the country. They was out to keep down nigger and white mixin' an' to keep niggers f'om havin' liberty to go out 'specially at night. They didn't 'low you to come to see a gall 'less she was 18 and you was 21. The cause of this was to raise good stock. The gals couldn't mare (marry) tell they was 18 neither, doe they could have chillun. You had to have a pass to go see your gal eben. Now you got yo' pass f'om yo'

mastah. Effen you was under 15, you could go play and didn't need no pass, but all over 15 jes' had to have a pass.

They would go right to bed after they et. No Saddy off, jes' washday off. On Sunday, old mistress let us have sugar, flour and lard, but jes' some Sundays. No other day doe.

We was in a great game country an' sho' et our fill of coons, 'possums, rabbits, deer, turkeys and the sich and things people wouldn't notice now. Cawnbread and sweet potatoes was my fav-rite foods. Milk and butter was bes' eatin'.

We jes' wo' whut you call slips wid jes' two sleeves slipped over our head. No buttons. We wo' the same thing in winter jes' heavier. Never wo' no shoes tell I was old 'nuf to chop cotton.

At weddin's they wo' stripes all the time. They made 'em on hand looms. They was mos'ly white and red stripes.

We played marbles and ring plays. We usta sing this ditty doing playin':

So many pretty gals
So they say
So many pretty gals
So they say.
Jes' peep thoo' the window Susie gal.

They usta scare me to death talkin' 'bout ole raw head and bloody bones out in the yard. For me, that meant stayin' in a mighty long time and havin' a fit to hoot.

We used onions to keep off consumption. They was a family taken the black disease an' they all died but one an' he was ready to die. They tuck him out to burn the house up to keep that disease

f'om spreadin'. They put the nigger in a house full of onions an' he got sho' 'nuf well. The doctor said the onions had cured him. We sho' b'lieved in our onions and do tell today. Eben the next mawnin' after he was put in the house an' couldnen talk, he axe for some milk.

That war that freed the niggers stahted in 1861. I had two young mastahs to go. It lasted 4 years. They was figuring on takin' me that very next yeah, and it was so fixed that the war ended. We had a big drought doing the war, which made it bad on the so'jers. I never seen the Yankees only when they was passin' 'long the road. One day whilst we was eatin' our dinner, our mastah said, "All you'll, young and old, when you git thoo' come out on the gallery, we call 'em po'ches now, I got sompin' to tell you." When we got thoo' we all trooped out an' he said, "This is military law, but I am forsted to tell you." He says, "This law says free the "nigger", so now you is jes' as free as me by this law. I can't make you'all stay wid me 'less you wanta, therefo' you kin go any place you wanta." That was 'bout layin'-by crop time in June. It was on June 19th an' we still celebrates 'at day in Texas, 'at is "Nigger Day" down there. He said, "I'd lak for you to stay tell the crops is laid by effen you will. Effen it hadner been for his wife maybe we 'udder stayed on, but she jes' kep' bossin' the nigger women an' we jes' didnen lake it an' that's whut brung on the scatter. I left my old mastah an' went wid one of my young mastahs, which was my uncle.

I was sho' once tickled at my young mastah. I done broke in a mule for him and he got on him one night to go jine the Ku Klux band. He had to go 'bout 4 miles. He got jes' 'bout one mile an' they come to two trees wid a rail white stone in 'twixt the trees. The mule seen this and throwed my mastah off an' hurt him sompin' terrible. He come back and tole his wife whut done happened. He said, "Damn the Ku Klux." He never went to jine 'em no mo'.

I never went to school in my life. Never had the opportunity, 'cause I never had no kinfolks to own me or give me advice or help me. White kinfolks jes' bossed me. I was jes' lak a orphan. White folks will mess you up an' be so treach'ous.

I mared (married) Jane Deckers. The white man jes' read outta the Bible and put our names and ages in the Bible an' 'at was all the ceremony we had. I got three chillun and four grand-chillun. One do stone work, annuder brick work and my daughter, housework.

I think Abe Lincoln was next to Jesus Christ. The best human man ever lived. He died helpin' the poor nigger man. Old Jeff Davis was right in his place. He was tryin' to help his race. He wasn't nothin' lak right. It was God's plan that ever man be free sho'. I don't b'lieve Davis b'lieved in right.

I am sho' glad slavery is over. I glory in it. I trust an' pray it'll never be agin.

I think the church is the gospel way an' ever body oughta be on it. The Baptist is my deah belief, 'cause I was baptized by

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the spirit an' then by the water, nothin' but the Baptist. I
b'longs to the Shiloh Baptist Church, an' heah on the West Side.