

## **Lula Chambers**

**St. Louis, Missouri**

**Interviewed by Grace E. White.**

The subject of this sketch is Lula Chambers who is not certain of her age. However she knows she is past ninety and that she was born in Gallatin County, Kentucky near Virginia. She lives with a granddaughter, Genevieve Holden, 2627 Thomas Street, St. Louis.

Lying ill in a three-quarter metal bed in the front hall room of her granddaughter's 4-room brick apartment, the old lady is a very cheerful person, with an exceptionally fair complexion. Her brown hair is mixed with gray and she wears it quite long. Her room is neatly furnished.

I was born in Gallatin County, Kentucky, more than ninety years ago, slaves didn't know their age in those days when I came along. I do know I was born in July and my mammy's name was Patsy Lillard. I don't know anything at all about no kind of father. Course, I had one but who he was I never knew. I ain't never even seen my mother enough to really know her, 'cause she was sold off the plantation where I was raised, when I was too young to remember her, and I just grew up in the house with the white folks that owned me. His name was Dave Lillard.

He owned more than one hundred slaves. He told me that my mother had seven children and I was the baby of them all and the onliest one living that I know anything about. They sold my mother down the river when I was too young to recollect a mother. I fared right well with my white masters. I did all the sewing in the house, waited on the table, cleaned up the house, knitted and picked wool, and my old miss used to carry me to church with her whenever she went. She liked lots of water, and I had to bring her water to her in church.

I had so much temper they never bothered me about nursing the children. But I did have a heap of nursing to do with the grown ups. I used to get a whipping now and then but nothing like the other slaves got.

I used to be scared to death of those old Ku Klux folks with all their hoods on their heads and faces. I never will forget, I saw a real old darkey woman slave down on her knees praying to

God for his help. She had a Bible in front of her. Course she couldn't read it, but she did know what it was, and she was praying out of her very heart, until she had drawn the attention of the old Ku Klux and one of them just walked in her cabin and lashed her unmerciful. He made her get up off her knees and dance, old as she was. Of course the old soul couldn't dance but he just made her hop around anyhow.

The slave owners in the county where I was raised—the well-to-do ones I mean, did not abuse the slaves like the poor trash and other slaveholders did. Of course they whipped them plenty when they didn't suit. But they kind of took care of them to sell. They had a great slave market there that didn't do anything but sell slaves, and if they wanted a good price for them, the slave would have to be in a pretty good condition. That's what saved their hides.

My owners had a stock farm and raised the finest stock in Kentucky. They didn't raise any cotton at all, but they sure did raise fine wheat, barley and corn, just acres and acres of it. The worst lashing our slaves ever got was when they got caught away from home without a pass. They got whipped hot and heavy then. In Arkansas many of the slave owners would tie their slaves to a wagon and gallop them all over town and they would be banged up.

I saw a strange niggah come to town once and didn't know where he was going and stepped in the door of a white hotel. When he saw all white faces, he was scared most to death. He didn't even turn around he just backed out and don't you know them white folks killed him for stepping inside a white man's hotel by mistake, yes they did.

I can't tell you any pleasure I had in my early days, honey, 'cause I didn't have any. If I had my studying cap on, and hadn't just got over this terrible sick spell, I could think of lots of things to tell you, but I can't now. Right after the war they sent colored teachers through the South to teach colored people. And child, do you know them white folks just crucified most of them. I don't know how to read or write. Never did know.

I am the mother of five children, but they are all dead now. I have two grandchildren living, and have been in St. Louis seven years. I come here from Helena, Arkansas. My husband was a saloon keeper and a barber. He died in 1880 in Brinkley, Arkansas. I nursed and cooked in Brinkley after he died for fifteen years for one family. I wear glasses sometimes.

I have been a member of the church for over fifty years. My membership is in Prince of Peace Baptist Church now and has been ever since I was in St. Louis. God has been so good to me, to let me live all these years. I just want to be ready to meet him when he is ready for me. My only trouble will be to love white folks, they have treated my race so bad. My pastor, Rev. Fred McDonald always tells me I will have to forgive them and love them if I want to go to heaven. But honey, that's going to be a lifetime job. I don't care how long God lets me live, it will still be a hard job.

I get an old age pension. It is very little, but I thank God for that. I have nothing left to do now in this world but to pray. Thank God for his goodness to me and be ready when He comes. This rheumatism serves me so bad I can't be happy much. Wish I could remember more to tell you but I can't.

The old woman is well preserved for her years.