

Lulu Wilson

1108 Good Street, Dallas, Texas

Lulu Wilson, blind, bedridden Negro, does not know her age, but believes that she is ninety-seven. She was born near the Mammoth Cave, in Kentucky. Lulu owns a little home at 1108 Good Street, Dallas, Texas.

“Of course I was born into slavery, ageable as I am. I’m a old time slavery woman, and the way I’ve been through the hackles, I got plenty to say about slavery”.

Lulu Wilson says she knows they ain’t no good in it and they better not bring it back.

My paw wasn't a slave. He was a free man, because his mammy was a full blood Creek Indian. But my maw was born in slavery, down on Wash Hodges' paw's place, and he gave her to Wash when he married. That was the only woman slave he had, and one man slave, a young buck. My maw said she took with my paw and I was born, but a long time passed and no more young'uns came, so they said my paw was too old and wore out for breeding and they wanted her to take with this here young buck. So, the Hodges sought the nigger hounds on my paw and ran him away from the place, and Maw always said he went to the free state. So she took with my step-paw and they must have pleased the white folks who wanted niggers to breed like livestock, because she birthed nineteen children.

When I was little I used to play in that big cave they call Mammoth, and I was so used to that cave it didn't seem like anything to me. But I was real little then, for as soon as they could they put me to spinning cloth. I remember plain; when I was little there was talk of war in them parts, and they put me to spinning and I heard them say it was for soldiers. They marched around in a little small drove and practiced shooting.

Now, when I was little they were the hardest times. They'd nearly beat us to death. They'd taken me from my mammy, out of the little house built onto their house, and I had to sleep in a bed by Missus Hodges. I cried for my maw, but I had to work and wash and iron and clean and milk cows when I was mostly too little to do it.

The Hodges had three children and the oldest one was mean too, because she was so thick headed. She couldn't learn anything out of a book, but was kinder and more friendly like than the rest of the lot. Wash Hodges was just mean, poor trash and he was a bad actor and a bad manager. He never could make any money and he starved it out in the niggers. For years all I could get was one little slice of sowbelly and a puny, little piece of bread and a potato. I never had enough to stave the hungriness out of my belly.

My maw was cooking in the house and she was a clink, that is the best of its kind. She could cuss and she wasn't afraid. Wash Hodges tried to whop her with a cowhide and she'd knock him down and bloody him up. Then he'd go down to some of his neighbor kin and try to get them to come help him whop her. But they'd say, 'I don't want to go up there and let Chloe Ann beat me up.' I heard Wash tell his wife they said that.

When maw was in a tantrum, my step-paw wouldn't partialise with her. But she was a religious woman and believed time was coming when niggers wouldn't be slaves. She told me to pray for it. She saw an old man that the nigger dogs chased and ate the legs near off him. She said she was chased by them bloody hounds and she just picked up a club and laid their skulls open. She said they hired her out and sold her twice, but they always brought her back to Wash Hodges.

Now, Missus Hodges studied meanness more than Wash. She was mean to anybody she could lay her hands to, but especially mean to me. She beat me and used to tie my hands and make me lay flat on the floor and she put snuff in my eyes. I ain't lying, before God when I say I know that's why I went blind.

I did see white folks sometimes who spoke right friendly and kindly to me. I get to thinking now how Wash Hodges sold off Maw's children. He'd sell them and have the folks come for them when my maw was in the fields. When she'd come back, she'd raise a ruckus. Then many times I'd see her plop right down to sit and cry about it. But she allowed they wasn't anything that could be done, because it's the slavery law. She said, 'Oh Lord, let me see the end of it before I die, and I'll quit my cussing and fighting and raring.'

My maw said she's part Indian and that's accountable for her ways. One day they trucked us all down in a covered wagon and started out with the family, and my maw and step-paw and five of us children. I know I was past twelve years old. We went a long way and passed through a free State. Some places we drove for miles in the woods instead of the big road, and when we came to folks they hid us down in the bed of the wagon. We passed through a little place and my maw said to look, and I saw a man going up some steps, toting a bucket of water. She said, 'Lulu, that man's your paw.' I never thought she considered my step-paw as well as my paw, and she gave me to think as much. My step-paw never did like me, but he was a fool for his own young'uns, brcause at the end of the war when they set the niggers free, he tramped over half the country, gathering up them young'uns they had sold away.

We went to a place called Wadefield, in Texas, and settled for some short passing of time. There was a Baptist church next to our house and they let me go twice. I was fancified with the singing and preaching. Then we went on to Chatfield Point and Wash Hodges built a log house and covered it with weatherboarding and built my maw and paw quarters to live in. They turned to raising corn and potatoes and hogs. I had to work like a dog. I hoed and milked ten cows a day.

Missus told me I ought to marry. She said if I'd marry she'd togger me up in a white dress and give me a wedding supper. She made the dress and Wash Hodges married me out of the Bible to a nigger belonging to a nephew of his. I was about thirteen or fourteen. I know it wasn't long after that when Missus Hodges got a doctor for me. The doctor told me unless I had a baby, old as I was and married, I'd start in on spasms. So it wasn't long till I had a baby.

At about that time, Wash Hodges starts laying out in the woods and swamps all the time. I heard he was hiding out from the war and was supposed to go, because he had been a volunteer in the first war and they didn't have any luck in Kentucky. One night when we were all asleep, some folks whooped and woke us up. Two soldiers came in and they left more outside. They found Wash Hodges and said it was midnight and to get them something to eat. They ate and some more came in and ate. They tied Wash's hands and made me hold a lamp in the door for them to see by. They had some more men in the wagon, with they hands tied. They drove away and in a minute I heard the reports of the guns three or four times. Next day I heard they were soldiers and had shot some conscripts in the bottoms at the back of our place.

Wash Hodges was gone for four years and Missus Hodges was meaner than the devil all the time. Seems like she just hated us worse than ever. She said 'Blobber-mouth niggers done caused a war'.

Well now, things just kind of drift along for a spell and then Wash Hodges came back and he said, 'Well, now, we whopped the hell out them blue bellies and that'll learn them a lesson to leave us alone.' Then my step-paw saw some Federal soldiers, I saw them, too. They drifted by in droves of fifty and a hundred. My step-paw allowed as how the Feds told him there ain't no more slavery, and he tried to point it out to Wash Hodges. Wash says there's a new ruling, and it was that grownup niggers are free but children have to stay with their masters till they're of age.

My maw was in her cabin with a week old baby and one night twelve Ku Kluxses came to the place. They came in by ones and she whopped them one at a time.

I don't recall just like, the passing of time. I know I had my little boy young'un and he grew up, but right after he was born I left the Hodges and felt like it's a fine, good riddance. My boy died, but he left me a grandson. He grew up and went to another war, and they did something to him and he ain't got but one lung. He ain't peart no more. He's got four children and he makes fifty dollars a month. I'm crazy about that boy and he comes to see me, but he can't help me in a money way. So I'm right grateful to the president for getting my little pension. I studied it out in my mind for three years, tell him Lulu says if he will see that there isn't any more slavery, and if they'll pay folks liveable wages, there will be less stealing and slumming and goings on. I worked so hard. For more than fifty years I waited as a nurse on sick folks. I've been through the hackles if any mortal soul has, but it seems like the president thinks right kindly of me, and I want him to know Lulu Wilson thinks right kindly of him.