

WILLIS WINN claims to be 116 years old. He was born in Louisiana, a slave of Bob Winn, who Willis says taught him from his youth that his birthday was March 10, 1822. When he was freed Willis and his father moved to Hope, Arkansas, where they lived sixteen years. Willis then moved to Texarkana and from there to Marshall, where he has lived fourteen years. Willis lives alone in a one-room log house in the rear of the Howard Vestal home on the Powder Mill Road, north of Marshall, and is supported by an \$11.00 per month old age pension.

"The onliest statement I can make 'bout my age is my old master, Bob Winn, allus told me if anyone ask me how old I is to say I's borney on March the tenth, in 1822. I's knowed my birthday since I's a shirt-tail boy, but can't figure in my head.

"My pappy was Daniel Winn and he come from Alabama, and I 'member him allus sayin' he'd like to go back there and get some chestnuts. Mammy was named Patsy and they was nine of us chillen. The five boys was me and Willie and Hesea and two Georges, and the gals was Car'lina and Dora and Anna and Ada, and all us lived to be grewed and have chillen.

"Massa Bob's heuse faced the quarters where he could hear us heller when he blewed the big horn fer us to git up. All the houses was made of logs and we slept on shuck and grass mattresses what was allus full of chinchies. I still sleep on a grass mattress, 'cause I can't rest on cotten and feather beds.

"We et yellow bread and greens and black-eyed peas and potlicker and sepped 'lasses. Us and the white felks all ceeked in fireplaces. A big iron pot hung out in the yard fer to bile greens and hog jowl and sich

CT 2 1937

like. We didn't know nothin' 'bout bakin' powder and made our soda from burnt cobs. That's jes' as good soda as this Arm and Hammer you get in the store. We et flour bread Sundays, but you darsn't git catch with flour dough 'cept on that day. Mammy stole lots of it, though. She rolled it up and put it round her head and covered it with her head-rag. Wild game was a ll over the country, buffale and bears and panthers and deer and possum and coon. The squirrels 'most run over you in the woods. We et at a long, wooden trough and it was allus clean and full of plenty grub. We used buffale and fish bones for speens, and some et with they hands. The grub I liked best was whatever I could git.

"Us slaves didn't wear nothin but white lewell cloth. They give us pants fer Sunday what had a black stripe down the leg. The chillen were wool clothes in winter, but the big folks were the same outfit the year round. They didn't care if you froze.

"I can show you right where I was when the stars fell. Some say they covered the ground like snow, but nary one ever hit the ground. They fell in 'bout twelve feet of the ground. The chillen jumped up and tried to catch them. I don't 'member how long they fell, but they was shetin' through the air like sky-rockets fer quite a spell.

"Missy Callie had one gal and two boys and Massa Bob had three overseers. He didn't have nigger drivers, but had his pets. We called them pimps, 'cause they was allus tattlin' when we done anything. His place was jes' as far as you could let your eyes see, 'bout 1,800 or 1,900 acres, and he owned more'n 500 niggers.

"I still got the bugle he weke us with at four in the mornin'.

When the bugle blowed you'd better go to hellerin', so the overseer could hear you. If he had to call you, it was too bad. The first thing in the mornin' we'd go to the lot and feed, then to the woodpile till breakfast. They put our grub in the trough and give us so long to eat. Massa hollered if we was slow eatin', 'Swallow that grub now and chaw it tonight. Better be in that field by daybreak.' We worked from see to can't.

"I's seed many a nigger whipped on a 'buck and gag' bench. They buckled 'em down hard and fast on a long bench, gagged they mouth with cotten and when massa got through layin' on that cowhide, the bleed was runnin' off on the ground. Next mornin' after he whip you, he'd come to the quarters when you git up and say, 'Boy, how is you feelin' ? No matter how sere you is, you'd better jump and kick you heels and shew how lively you is.' Massa hated me to he dying day, 'cause I told missy 'bout him whippin' a gal scandously in the field, 'cause she want to go to the house to her sick baby. Missy Callie didn't whip us, but she'd twist our nose and ears nearly off. Them fingers felt like a pair of pinchers. She stropped on her guns and rode a big bay horse to the field.

"Massa had a gin and I hauled cotten to Port Cadde, on Cadde Lake.

I druv eight mules and hauled eight bales of cotten. Massa fellewed me with two mules and two bales of cotten. I usually had a geed start of him. The patterrellers has cetched me and unhitched my mules and druv 'em off, leavin' me in the middle of the road. They'd start back home, but when they overtook massa they stopped, 'cause he druv the lead mules. He fetched 'em back and say, 'Willis, what happen?' He sho' cussed them patterrellers and said he'll fit even yet.

"They was sellin' slaves all the time, puttin' 'em on the block and sellin' 'em, 'cordin' to how much work they could do in a-day and how strong they was. I's seed lots of 'em in chains like cows and mules. If a owner have more'n he needed, he hit the road with 'em and sold 'em off to 'joinin' farms. None of 'em ever run off. They couldn't git away. I's seed too many try it. If the patterrollers didn't catch you, some white folks would put you up and call your massa. They had a 'greement to be on the watch for runaway niggers. When the massa git you back home and git through with you, you'd sho' stay home.

"In slavery time the niggers wasn't 'lowed to look at a book. I larned to read and write after surrender in the jail at Hot Springs, in Arkansas.

"They give us cake at Christmas and eggnog and 'silly-bug'. Eggnog is made from whites of eggs and 'silly-bug' from yallers. You have to churn the whiskey and yallers to make 'silly-bug.'

"Cern shuckin's was the things them days. I liked to see 'em come. They cooked up guineas and ducks and chickens and sometimes roast a pig. Massa kept twenty, thirty barrels whiskey round ever the place all the time, with tin cups hangin' on the barrels. You could drink when you want to, but sho' better not git drunk. Massa have to watch he corners when cern shuckin' an ever, or us niggers grab him and walk him round in the air on their hands.

"When some of the white folks died every nigger on the place had to go to the grave and walk round and drap in some dirt on him. They buried the niggers anyway. Dig a ditch and cover 'em up. I can show you right now down in Louisiana where I was raised, forty acres with nethin' but niggers buried

on 'em.

"I 'member lets 'bout the war but can't tell you all, 'cause every war have its secrets. That war had four salutes, and you'd better give the right one when you meet the captain. I's heard the niggers sing, 'Gonna hang Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree.' My pappy fought in the last battle, at Mansfield, and so did Massa Bob.

"When the 'Federates come in sight of Mansfield they was carryin' a red flag, and kept it raised till surrender. When the Yanks come in sight they raised white flag and wanted the 'Federates to surrender, but they wouldn't answer. It wasn't long till the whole world round there smelt like powder. Guns newadays jus' goes 'pop-pop', but them guns sounded like thunder.

"After surrender, massa freed the men and missy freed the women, but he didn't let us leese when he ought. They wasn't no places 'vided with niggers as I heard 'bout. Niggers in Louisiana say Queen Elizabeth sent a boatload of gold to America to give the free men, but we never seed any of it. Massa give us each a barrel meal, a barrel flour, a side of meat and ten gallons 'lasses and tell us we can work fer who we pleases. Daddy bought two cows and a horse and eight hawgs and a goat from massa on credit and we moved and made three crops.

"The Yanks stayed round Louisiana a long time after surrender. They come to white folks houses what hadn't freed they slaves and busted they meal and flour barrels and burn they meat and say, 'If we have to face you 'gain, we'll sweep you from the cradle up.'

"I's been cetched by them Ku Kluxers. They didn't hurt me, but have lots of fun makin' me cut capers. They pulls my clothes off once and make me run 'bout four hunerd yards and stand on my head in the middle the road.

"They is plenty niggers in Louisiana that is still slaves. A spell back I made a trip to where I was raised, to see my old missy 'fore she died, and there was niggers in twelve or fourteen miles of that place that they didn't know they is free. They is plenty niggers round here what is same as slaves, and has worked for white folks twenty and twenty-five years and ain't drawed a five cent piece, jus' old clothes and semethin' to eat. That's the way we was in slavery.

"Bout four years after surrender Pappy say he heard folks say gold was covering the ground at Hope, Arkansas, so we pulled up and moved there. We found lots of money where they'd been a big camp, but no gold. We lived there sixteen years, then I come to Texarkana and worked twelve years for G. W. George Fawcett's sawmill. I never married till I was old, in Little Washington, Arkansas, and lived with my wife thirty-six years 'fore she died. We raised eighteen chillen to be grewed and nary one of 'em was ever arrested.

"I was allus wild and played for dances, but my wife was 'ligious and after I married I quieted down. When I jined the church, I burned my fiddle up. I allus made a livin' from public road work since I left Texarkana, till I got no count for work. The only time I voted was in Hope, and I voted the 'publican ticket and all my folks got mad.

"If it wasn't for the good white folks, I'd starved to death. 'Fore I come here to the Vestals, I was livin' in a shack on the T. & P. tracks and I couldn't pay no rent. I was sick and the woman made me git out. Master Vestal found me down by the tracks, eatin' red clay. I'd lived for three days on six

tomatoes. I et two a day. Master Vestal went home and his wife cooked a big pot of stew, with meat and potatoes, and fetched it to me. Then they built a house down behind their back yard and I's lived with 'em ever since.

"I allus say the cullud race started off wrong when they was freed and is still wrong today. They had a shot to be well off, but they can't keep money. You give one a bank of money and he'll be busted tomorrow. I tells young niggers every day they ought to come down where they'll have some sense. I serves the Lord at home and den't meddle with 'em.
