

**EASTER HUFF**  
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**Athens, Georgia.**

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**EASTER HUFF**  
**Ex-Slave—Age 80**

Easter eagerly complied with the request for the story of her life, "I done forgot a heap I knowed, but I allus loves to talk 'bout de old times." She declared solemnly. "Dis young race lives so fas' dey needs to know what a hard time us had."

"I was borned in Oglethorpe County on Marse Jabe Smith's plantation. I don't 'zactly know how old I is, but I was jus' a chap when de war ended. Easter is my right name, but white folkses calls me Esther. Mammy was Louisa Smith, but I don't know nothin' 'bout my gram'ma, 'cause she died 'fore I was born, and she done de cookin' in de white folkses house. I can't tell you nothin' 'bout neither one of my gram'pas.

"Us slep' on corded beds what had high postes and ruffled curtains 'round de foot. De beds what had curtains all 'round de top of dem high postes was called teester beds. When all dem curtains was fresh washed and starched, de beds sho' did look grand. Chilluns slep' on pallets on de flo'.

"Mammy was a plow hand, but us chillun didn't do nothin' much 'cept eat and play and sleep in de grass 'til she got in from de fiel' evvy night. De big old cook house had a partition 'crost it, and on one side Aunt Peggy done all de cookin' for Old Marster's household and for de slaves too. On de udder side of de partition was de loom room whar Aunt Peggy weaved all de cloth and Mrs. Lacy Hines, what lived on another plantation not far f'um us, made all our[Pg 246] clothes.

"Chilluns didn't know nothin' 'bout gittin' no money of dey own 'til atter de war. Mammy, she made her little money knittin' socks, and patchin' clothes at night, and she

had done saved up nigh \$40.00 in Confederate money. Dey called it Confederate shucks atter de war 'cause it warn't no good no more den, and she let us chillun play wid it. De shin plasters was Confederate money for as low as 25 cents.

"Victuals dem days warn't fancy lak day is now, but Marstar allus seed dat us had plenty of milk and butter, all kinds of greens for bilein', 'tatoes and peas and sich lak. Chilluns et cornbread soaked in de pot liquor what de greens or peas done been biled in. Slaves never got much meat. Dey mixed butter wid home-made syrup and sopped it up wid cornbread. Dare warn't much wheat bread for slaves.

"Dere was a good 'possum hound on de plantation what was a fine rabbit dog too, and Marster let us use him to ketch us lots of 'possums and rabbits. De mens went seinin' at night in Buffalo Crick what run thoo' Marse Jabe's place. Dey used to put back all de little fishes and de turkles and tarrepins. 'Possums was baked wid sweet 'tatoes and rabbits was parbiled in a big old open fireplace in big pots and skillets. Marster had one big gyarden whar enough was growed for evvybody on de whole plantation, but some of de slaves was 'lowed to have deir own little gyardens and cotton patches what dey wukked on moonlight nights.[Pg 247]

"De gal chillun in dem days wore little slips, and de boys had shirts split up de sides. Dey jus' wore one piece in summer, no drawers or nothin'. In de winter us had good warm clothes, made out of coarse ausenburg (osnaburg) cloth. Us wore de same clothes Sundays as evvyday, only us was s'posed to put 'em on clean on Sunday mornin'. A colored man named Clark Dogget made our shoes out of rough red leather what never had been dyed or colored up none. Sometimes Manuel would have to help him wid de shoemakin'.

"On Sundays Mammy would comb my hair and put a clean dress on me, and den take me to de white folkses' church at Salem, whar dere was two rows of benches in de back for slaves. Rev. Brantley Calloway was de pastor, and Rev. Patrick Butler preached too.

"I never seed no baptizin's or fun'als in slavery days, but atter anybody was buried Mammy tuk us to de graveyard and let us look at de grave. Dey allus put a fence made wid pine poles 'round de grave. Some few of de slaves might have read de Bible a little, but dar warn't none what could write.

"I jined church 'cause I was converted and had done changed my way of livin'. I think folkses ought to be 'ligious so dey can help others to live lak de Bible says.

"Marse Jabe Smith was a good white man. He was a grand fiddler and he used to call us to de big house at night to dance for him. I couldn't do nothin' 'cept jump up and down and I sho' did git tired. Marse Jabe warn't married. He raised his brother's chillun, but dey was all grown when de war come on.[Pg 248]

"I done clean forgot de name of Marster's overseer and I don't ricollec' how many acres was in dat plantation, but it sho' was a big one. Dere was 'bout 25 grown slaves, and a lot of Nigger chillun rompin' round. De overseer got 'em up 'bout three 'clock and dey stayed in de field 'til sundown 'fore dey started for de house.

"When dey got f'um de fields at night, de 'omans spun, mended, and knit, and de mens wukked in deir gyardens and cotton patches. Winter nights dey plaited baskets and made hoss collars. All de slaves knocked off at twelve o'clock Sadday. Dere was allus somepin' to do on Sadday night—frolics, dances, and sich lak. Dey picked de banjo and knocked on tin pans for music to dance by. Sunday was a rest day. Slaves visited each other or went to church if dey wanted to, but dey had to git a pass.

"I seed dem patterollers on hosses jus' goin' it down de big road. I seed 'em axin' Niggers dey met if dey had passes. Attar dey looked at de passes, dey would let 'em go on. But if a slave was cotched widout no pass dey would beat him mos' nigh to death. If us had patterollers to keep Niggers f'um gallivantin' 'round so much now days, dar wouldn't be so much devilment done.

"Some of de slaves jus' had to be whupped 'cause dey wouldn't behave. On our plantation, de overseer done de whuppin'; Marse Jabe never totched 'em. Mammy told us 'bout seein' slaves put on de block in Virginny and sold off in droves lak hosses.

"Didn't none of Marse Jabe's Niggers run off to de North dat I knowed 'bout. One Nigger named Barlow what was too lazy to wuk in[Pg 249] de field slipped off to de woods and made hissself a den to live in. He made baskets, footmats, and brooms, and used to come out at night and sell 'em. Dey said he would steal de white folkses' hogs, chickens, and jus' anythin' he could put his hands on. If dey ever cotched him, I don't know nothin' 'bout it. Mammy used to skeer us pretty nigh to death at night when she wanted us to go on to bed. She said if us didn't go to sleep Barlow sho' would git us.

"Oh! us did have a time at Chris'mas. Dey would have plenty to eat; eggnog and all sorts of good things, and sometimes mens and 'omans got drunk and cut up. Marse Jabe allus give us a little cheese to eat Christmas time. On New Year's Day all de slaves went to de big house for a council. Marse Jabe would talk to 'em and counsel 'em for de New Year and tell 'em how to live.

"Cornshuckin's! Yassum, I ricollects cornshuckin's. De folkses comed f'um all de plantations close 'round. Atter dey was thoo' wid shuckin' de corn, dey gathered 'round a long table in de yard. Marse Jabe had de prettiest level yard you ever seed; it was swept so nice and clean. De victuals was piled on dat table, and dey give us great kegs of apple and peach brandy.

"Mammy used to tell us 'bout Raw-head an' Bloody-bones if us didn't go to bed when she wanted to go out. Us sho' would pile in in a hurry den, and duck under dat kivver and most nigh die 'cause us was skeered to look out lessen he mought be dar atter us.

"Marse Jabe was mighty good to his slaves when dey got sick. I seed Mammy sick once. Dr. Lumpkin Landon was sont atter. De[Pg 250] slaves would git fever weeds and sweetgum bark, bile 'em together, and take de tea for colds, coughs, and fever. Dey wore little sacks of assfidity (assafoetida) 'round dey necks to keep off disease, and strung hollow treadsass (treadsalve) roots on strings lak necklaces and hung 'em 'round de babies' necks to make 'em teethe easy.

"Soon atter de surrender, Marse Jabe told his Niggers dey was free as he was, but dat he didn't want nary one to leave him. He wanted 'em to stay wid him he said, and he offered to pay 'em wages. Dere warn't nary one what left. Mammy wukked and plowed right on lak she done before. Atter I was big enough, I went to Lexin'ton to wuk for Mrs. McWhorter.

"When I married Bob Willin'ham, I sho' had a nice weddin'. I was married in a blue merino dress. My underskirt was white as snow wid trimmin's on it. I wore long drawers what was trimmed fancy at de bottom. Our white folkses give us lots of cake, turkey, ham, and sich lak for de weddin' feast. Our only child was named Minnie, and dere was five of our grandchillun, but dey's all dead now but two. One lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, and I lives wid de udder one what wuks at de chapter house here. Atter Bob died, I married Lumpkin Huff, but us didn't have no weddin' dat time. De preacher jus' come to my house and married us. I went to Elberton wid 'im, but he was so mean I didn't live wid 'im but eight months before I come back to Athens.

"Dey used to have a song 'bout Mr. Lincoln when I was a little chap, but I done forgot it. No Ma'am, I don't know nothin' 'bout Mr.[Pg 251] Davis and Booker Washin'ton. Dem days I never heard much 'bout folkses away off f'um here.

"I b'lieve I'se done told you all I knows 'bout back days. I don't know nothin' 'bout dese fas' present-day ways o' livin'. When I was a chap and got a whuppin' and Mammy heerd 'bout it I got another one. Now dey takes you to de law. Yes Ma'am, for myself I'd rather have de old days wid good Old Marster to take keer of me."