

Gabe Hines

Interview with Gabe Hines

—*Gertha Couric*

GABE WAS KIDNAPPED BY CARPETBAGGERS

Old Gabe had been long in this world—close to one hundred years. He had experienced much but one incident had out-lasted all the others—even the stroke that made him older and more feeble. That experience had caused Gabe and his "ole woman" to stray far from the fold and to walk all the way back to its shelter.

That was back in Reconstruction days, when he was not "bandy in his knees" and long before Anna left him alone in his cabin with just memories of earlier and happier days.

Gabe was "birthed in Cusseta, Georgia," the son of two faithful old slaves, Hetty and Gabe Hines, and they "all 'longed to Marsa William Shipp an' Miss Ma'y. He told his story thus:

"Endurin' of de Wah, I was big enough to be water toter on de plantation. No, Li'l Missy, I doan' 'zactly know how old I is 'ceptin' by de squeakin' an' achin' of my bones. I 'members lots 'bout doze days. Dem was happy times, Li'l Missy. Arter we all was freed, I went to Silver Run to live and dar I mahied Anna. She lef' me nine yeahs ago an' that broke the happiness. I miss her ev'whar, jes' keep a-missin' her though nine yeahs hev gone since dey tuk her from de cabin an' lef' her up thar on de hill. Dere's nights when de mis'ry in dese ol' bones jist gits past standin' an' on sich nights she come ter me and holp me wid de linnymint jes' as she useter do. But she caint stay long when she come.

"I was a-tellin' 'bout Silver Run. Arter we was mahied and was gittin' use to bein' free niggahs, an' happy in our cabin, one night a gen'ulman from de no'th was to see us an' he tol' us if we'd go wid him he'd pay us big wages an' gin us a fine house to boot.

"Fer two nights we sot dere by dat chimby a-thinkin' a sight to do or to don't and ponderin' this way and t'other one. Den we 'cided to go. We lef ev'y thing dar 'ceptin' whut we tied up in a bandana han'chief, and we tied that onto a stick for de gen'ulman from de no'th wouldn't let us take no baggage. We was goin' to Columbus, Georgia, but we didn't know dat.

"Li'l Missy, when we got dar, whar he was a-takin' us, we foun' the big wages to be fifty cents a month, and dat fine house tu'ned out to be mo' like a stable. Instid of our cabin and gyarden and chickens and our trees, we had a turrible place, right out under the hot sun wid watah miles away down a hill. And he wan't no gent'man from de no'th!

"Missy, I nebber will be able to tell myself whut made us do hit no mo' den I'll ebber be able to tell how skeered I was one night when de wind howled an' de lightnin' was sprayin' ober de place an' de rain was so turrible hit was a-sobbin' in de fire. We knowed de debbil was ridin' de win' dat night.

"We was a-sittin' dar befo' de fire, me an' my ol' woman, when we heard a stompin' like a million horses had stopped outside de do'. We tipped to de do' an' peeked out an', li'l Missy, whut we seed was so turrible our eyes jes' mos' popped out our haid. Dere was a million hosses all kivered in white, wid dey eyes pokin' out and a-settin' on de hosses was men kivered in white too, tall as giants, an' dey eyes was a-pokin' out too. Dere was a leader an' he heldt a bu'nin' cross in his hand.

"When we seed dat, we fell on our po' knees, skeered mos' to def an' we axed de Great Marster to holp two po' ol' niggers an' holp 'em quick.

"De fust thing we knowed dem Ku Kluxes had de gen'man from de no'th out of his hidin' place 'hind our house an' a-settin' on one of dem hosses. Dey nebber spoke wid him. Dey jes' tuk him off somewhar, we nebber knowed whar, but he di'n't come back no mo'.

"Li'l Missy, we heard arterwards dat dis gen'lman from de no'th was no qual'ty a-tall. Dat he was de wu'st leadah of all de debilment bein' done; one of dem carpet-baggin' men.

"Nex' day arter de Ku Kluxes cotched dis man, his wife lef' Columbus in a hurry, sayin' she couldn't sociate wid de Columbus ladies 'caze dey was so po'. Dey wa po'! Dey is no denyin' that. We was all po' caze the Yankees done ruint Columbus. But, li'l Missy, dey's a big dif'ence in bein' po' an' qual'ty and' bein' jes po' white trash.



Gabe Hines, Eufaula, Alabama

"What did I do then? Well, li'l Missy, we lef' Columbus arter whut happen'd an' we walked to Eufaula, whar twas safe to be. For forty yeahs I w'uked for de city and Anna, she tuk in washin'. Endurin' dat time we was gettin' along pretty likely, when one day Gabriel blew his horn for Anna, and Gabe was lef' alone.

"My ol' woman's gone. Li'l Missy, mos' ev'y one I knowed is daid. Dis heah cabin ain' home to me no mo'. Hits lonely ev'y whar. Maybe I'd orter be thinkin' 'bout Canaan, but hits ol' times crowds dis ol' darkey's heart. Li'l Missy, may be whin I gits to whar Anna is hit will be ol' times all ovah ag'in.