

# Agnes James

## Interview with Mom Agnes James, 80 years old

### Claussens, S.C.

—*Annie Ruth Davis*

"Yes'um, I used to live in slavery time, but de Lord above know, I sho don' really recollect nothin much to tell you 'bout slavery time. I don' know exactly how old I is. Think I 'bout 80 some odd. Think dat 'bout de age Bubba Gregg say I is. I tell you, I was so chillunfied in slavery time, I ain' had no time to study 'bout no age. I say, I was so chillunfied. Yes'um, dat it. Dat somethin dat I ought to had ax my grandmammy 'bout how old I is, so den I might could call it up to you right sharp. Oh, I wishes now I had ax my grandmammy dat word fore she die.

"Us belong to Mr. Hector Cameron fore freedom come here. Right down dere to Salem Church, dat whe' I was born. You hear talk of Miss Janie Little over dere to Marion, ain' you? Dat who used to be my mittie in dem days. Yes, mam, boss had pick me out to tend to Miss Janie. You see, he give all his daughters one of us to have a care for dem.

"My white folks, dey had a right smart of colored people dey own en far as I can reckon, dey been spend mighty good treatment to dem all de time. I know 'bout old Miss used to love to feed us, my mercy! White folks would send for all us chillun to go up to de big house en get somethin to eat twixt meals. Yes'um, dey had a colored people quarter dat been settin way back up on de hill. Had to have a quarter 'cause dat whe' us been stay all de time old Miss won' stufin' somethin down we mouth. I remember, dere used to was de most pretty flowers in de lane gwine through dem woods from us house right up to old Massa's yard en my Lord, honey, I did love to be de first one long dere on a mornin to see could I find a blossom to fetch to old Miss. Look like old Miss would be so please to see my granny marchin all we chillun up dat path 'cause when we would go dere on a mornin, she would set right down on de steps en talk wid us. Would set dere in listen to see could all us say dat prayin blessin she had learned us to speak fore she would hand us anything to eat. Den she would give us everyone a spoonful of dis here worm cure. Great Jerusalem! Miss would make dat herself out dese black lookin seed mixed up in molasses. I remember, she would bring a big bowl of dat out dere en would make Pickle tote it round for

her while she put it in us mouth. Yes, mam, Miss would give us all a spoonful of dat every mornin en den she would ax us de next mornin if any us had any worms. No, mam, she never didn' give us any other kind of medicine as I can remember. Just give us dat en den feed us some milk en bread. Dat all she give us, but I tell you, I was as proud of dat milk en bread as I is of de rations I get dese days 'cause I never know no different den. No'um, didn' nobody eat den like dey do now. All de people would make dey own gardens in dem days en would fix soup en fry meat. I used to been so glad to get me a 'tatoe en a piece of bread. I thought I was eatin cake.

"I never didn' work in no field or nothin like dat no time. When I was a little small girl, I would stay dere home en play 'bout de yard en nurse my mammy's baby while she was workin in de field. Yes'um, old Massa would give her task to pick cotton en hoe cotton en pick peas or somethin another like dat 'bout all de time. Don' know whe' she work all day or no, but I know she would always let up at 12 o'clock en come to de house to get her somethin to eat. Can remember dat good as anything. Oh, she would have to cook herself when she come home bein' dere wasn' none of we chillun big enough to cook nothin. I recollects, I used to get chips en pile dem up for her 'cause she always been tell me, if de baby go to sleep, to get up some chips en put dem on de steps for her to hurry en start fire wid. She would cook us meat en bread like corn hoecake en fry meat de most of de time. Den another time, she would bake a big round loaf like dat en break it in two en give me half en my brother Charlie de other part. Would lay a piece of meat on de top of it. No'um, I reckon 'bout all de people used to cook in de chimney. I know my mammy used to cook in de chimney en I don' think she thought nothin 'bout no stove in dem days. Cose if she did, I know we chillun didn' get it.

"Yes, Lord, I been married 'bout 16 years fore my husband died. Yes'um, I had a tolerable good size weddin over dere to Mr. Elija Gregg's house. Been married in a white dress trimmed wid blue ribbon. You is hear talk of a cream of tartar dress, ain' you? Oh, my Lord of mercy, dere was a crowd of people dere dat night to get dey eye full en deyself full, too, I say. Yes'um, I had four waiters in my ceremony. En had cake en rice en 'tatoe custard en a yearlin pig wid a red apple stuck in he mouth, so dey tell me. Dat what was for de refreshments. De old man Charles Reynolds, he was de preacher dere dat night en, say, he eat so much pig till you could see pig in he face, so dey tell me. Cose I never had no mind to know nothin 'bout it. Oh, yes Lord, I got seven chillun dat come here fore my old man die, but dey all done gone en get married en left me by myself. Dat how-come I stays over here wid Miss Bertie 'cause she ain' have nobody to stay wid her neither en I tries to help her out somehow. Yes'um, me en Miss Bertie does rest right well together, I say.

"Oh, great jumpin mercy, de shake! I sho knows all 'bout dat 'cause I was stayin right up dere to old man Elija Gregg's place den. I tellin you, it was a time, honey. I was gwine down side de road to prayer meetin dat night wid my baby in my arms en dere come such a roarin' en a rockin' in de elements till I thought my baby had got out my arms en I was just a hollerin for somebody to come en help me get my baby back. Been so crazy dat I was lookin in all de ditches for my baby. My husband, he come a runnin to see what ailed me en say, 'Agnes, what de matter wid you?' I say, 'My baby lost. Do Lord, whe' my baby gone?' He say, 'Agnes, you must be ailin in de head. Dere de baby on your arm.' Yes'um, I was crazy 'cause I had my baby in my arms en didn' know it. Oh, de people done a piece of hollerin dat night. Everybody was a hollerin en a prayin. I hear talk three or four of dem got converted in de spirit dat night. I tellin you, it been a long time fore I got over dat thing, too, 'cause I was scared most to death.

"No'um, I never didn' believe in nothin like dat. Never didn' believe in no conjurin. Don' care what dey say 'bout it, I never didn' believe in it. Yes'um, I hear people talk 'bout somebody had hurt dem, but dey make a wrong mistake to say somebody do somethin to dem. Ain' nobody but de Lord do nothin, I say. I know dere ain' nobody never do nothin to me. Hear people say dey wear money round dey ankle to keep folks from hurtin dem, but ain' nobody never bother me, I tell dem. If dey live right, ain' nobody gwine trouble dem neither. No, Lord, ain' nobody never speak no harm word to me en I ain' got no mind to harness up myself.

"Well, it just seems like de world growin wilder for de young folks. Dey don' never think 'bout nothin 'cept gwine right head first all de time. I know when I been comin up, I never see no such livin like de people makin dese days. Dey just gwine head over heels to de worsen. Don' never think near a day dey got to stop some of dese days.

"I tell de truth, it ain' make no difference which time I think de best time to live in. Everything went well en good wid me in de old days en everything still gwine dat way, Thank de Lord, too."