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Mississippi Narratives

Prepared by

The Federal Writer's Project of

The Works Progress Administration

For the State of Mississippi

Victoria Randle Lawson

(Victoria Lawson, who as a slave was Victoria Randle, tells this story. She was perhaps 10 or 12 at the opening of the War, and has lived in Monroe County most of her life.)

Honey, I'se tell it to you as well as I remember, she said. My little mistress was named Emily Randle. Later she maied Captain Hodges. My master was Mr. Randle.

My father was fust a Hampton, 'cause he belonged to Mr. Hampton. Den Mr. Hampton, grandfather of Miss Gertrude Bumpson sold him to Mr. Randle.

My mistress named me Victoria. I was de house girl fo de war. I'se done anything she wanted me to do, sechas picking up de paper on de flow and keeping de things clean around de house. I'se had a good mistress and marster, honey.

Visitors would come and everything would go swell. But one day it warn't dat way. Me 'n another girl was playing in de yard and a boy was playing wid us too. He picked up a brick and throwed it at a window and broke it. De boy told my mistress I done it. So she promised me a whipping when company left. But poor thing, she didn't live to give me dat whipping. Fo she died before de boy told her he done it.

When dey declared war, dey took me from town and sent me to de field at Muldon, whar my marster's farm was at. Den, honey, I didn't know nothing 'cept go out dar and chop dat corn and cotton.

If'n I done anything they say I oughtn't a done, den things got rough, but I nebber got a whipping 'cept when I needed it 'cause our Marster wouldn't hab it.

Lots ob times, when de overseers what de Marster had on de farm, got after de slaves dey'd jump on a horse and run to town to de Marster. If'n dey got dar fo de overseer caught 'em dey'd tell de marster

what dey had done if'n he thought the overseer was too hard on us and didn't give us enuff to eat, he'd get a new'un.

(How did you live those days, Victoria?)

Well, honey, I'se tell you de overseer had his house up away from ours. We all had a house by ourselves, each family. Ebey week dey'd pass each family rashings, fer de old people in de house dey'd gib so much. Fer de chilen dey'd gib so much, and for de grown working boys and girls so much, and da gib us corn, meal, lasses, and all of it we needed too, honey. At night ebey fellow went to his own stall. Dar wan't no staying here and dar.

Lots ub times at night us chilen would go to sleep out on de ground while looking at de moon in de heavens. Dis was when we's waiting for our folks to come from de field.

(Victoria, what was your job?)

Honey, I'se chop cotton and corn and lots ub times toted water to de field.

I'se remember one day me and a boy was toting water and I had mine on my head. A Whirl wind come and took me plum off my feet, took de bucket off my head, turned my clothes up and whirled dem around me. Honey, I'se been scared of whirl wins eber since.

Den after awhile I'se had to go to de field. Lots ob times I'd run to my grandmother-thinking I'se all right, but she'd make me go to work jes de same cause she knowed what was good fer me.

Dar was four old ladies dat done de cooking and kept de real small chilen. At eaten time dey'd fix our dinner in separate baskets, and dey'd put every persons basket on a slide what was pulled by a mule, and tak'em to de field. If'n we was resten in de field at dinner and saw de marster comin or the overseer, honey, we was goin like bees, one here and one dar.

When on Sundays I got a chance I'd run off and wouldn't come back till dark. Causin dey had a bugle what dey called us to work by, and ebey Sunday dey'd blow dat bugle and dat ment go to de barn to shuck and shell corn fer to send to de Govment men fer de hands what was in de war. My father was dar too, honey.

(Did the slaves ever run off, Victoria?)

Yes, honey, dey run'd off. But most all ob de time dey'd be caught by another marster on another farm. If'n he caught or see'd 'em he'd hook'em to a tree wid a chain and send word to de marster dat he had'em. De overseer would come and get 'em and whup'em, and sen'em back to de field.

Dar was one negro man what couldn't run away so he dug him a hole down in de ground under de chimney fer to stay in. When dey'd make a fire in dair fireplace he'd make one in his and let de smoke all go out at de time. He'd slip out and get rashings and cook'em. Honey, when dey found him and brought him out he was fat as a hog, causen he hadn't been a working and had all he could eat.

(Victoria, did the Yankees ever come to your house?)

Honey, ebey morning sho as God sent sunlight we'd see de Yankees coming. I'se always knowed'em when I'se seen'm coming cause dey woe blue and our soldiers woe grey.

Dey would come dar whar my marster had a long barn with separate stalls, fer de horses. And dey come and took ebey mule cept de blind ones. Dey would make de negroes ride'em off.

Honey, dey took corn, meal, and salt pork and food, put it in a wagon and took'em to de field and set fire to 'em hand burned 'em.

(Victoria has in mind the Running Battle fought in the vicinity of Muldon. Dr. Evans tells that four persons were killed in this encounter.)

One day a white gentman come and told my people to take de chilen off. Dar was going to be a battle. So dey wouldn't let us come back till dey was caying de dead to be buried. I didn't see none of dem shot, but I'se saw'em take'm away. Dis was what dey call a Running Battle.<sup>1</sup>

(Did you all have Church, Victoria?)

Yes'm we had meetin at night at one house and next night at a nudder. Honey, we put a wash pot down in front ob de meeten house so's de overseer couldn't hear us a singing and a prayin. Dis wash pot caught de sound. De next monin when de bugle blowed we'd slip by and ask de preacher how he feel. De Marster didn't low us to hab no kind ob meetens if'n he knew it.

(What kind of weddings did they have then for the slaves?)

Well honey, if'n a negro saw a woman he wanted that lived on another man's place he'd tell his marster and the marster would go see about the woman. Sometimes he'd jes get permission and take her back wid him. Den dey'd be maied.

Den sometimes dey would hab a crowd together and dey would put a broom on de flo and he'd jump ober it, den de girl would jump ober it. Dey would do dis sebel times and den dey was called maied. Least I heard dat's de way 'bout de broom. But I ain't seen dat like I is de other.

(Do you remember when the war was over?)

Honey, I sho do. You know'd our mama didn't want us to hear bout it, but I remember when dey said, 'Surrender, stacked arms on de ate of May!

Honey chile, dem was sometimes. I stayed wid my marster for about four years adder de war. Lots ob us was better of under marster dan we's been since.

I'se told you jes as well as I remember ebey thing dat happened.