

Charity Grigsby

Interview with Charity Grigsby

—R.P. Tarrt, [HW: Livingston?]

I KNOWS I'S EIGHTY FIVE BUT 'SPECTS I'S MORE DEN DAT

Charity Grigsby lives in a tumbledown shanty about nine miles from Livingston on the old Epes road. She was sewing on a quilt when I arrived; humming an old plantation song that ran:

Angels in de water, walkin' by de light;

Po' sinners stand in darkness an' cannot see de light!

A broad smile flowed across her black face as I entered the cabin. She placed her needle aside, exclaimed: "Law me, honey, I's always proud when de white folks drap aroun'; an' dat's directly so."

"Charity," I said, "I want you to tell me about slavery times."

She lowered her head in thought a moment, said:

"Honey, what would I tell?"

"Just all you remember, Charity."

And this is what she told:

"Honey, I was borned Charity Grigsby, but I married Nelson Grigory; ain't much 'stinguish in de names; but 'twas a little. My pappy was Dan'l Grigsby an' my mammy was Mary Moore. See,

us belonged to Ol' Mister Jim Moore right up yonder 'bove
Sumterville near Ramsey Station.



Charity Grigsby, Livingston, Alabama

"You goes up de Gainesville an' Livingston Road an' turns off at de cross road 'bout nine miles from Livingston. Den you goes due west. It ain't far from dere; bout six miles, I reckons. 'Twan't no big plantation; 'bout a dozen of us dere; an' Marse Jim didn't have no overseer lak de rest. He had dem boys of his'n what seed to us. Dey was John an' William an' Jim. Dey was all tol'able good to us; but dey would whoop us if we wasn't 'bedient; jes' like a mother raisin' a chile.

"I can't say how old I is; it's done got away from me; but I was a stroppin' gal durin' de war. I knows I's eighty-five an' I 'spects I's more dan dat. I's de mammy of 'leven chilluns; I knows dat; but ain't but five of dem a-livin'. As you knows, I lives wid two of dem; Mattie an' Evie. Dey treats me good. Hattie an' Ellen an' my boy lives in Bessemer. Dat is all my individual chilluns, but I's got a few others. I can't recollect much to tell; been a good while since de war; but when you calls it to my 'memberance I can think it up.

"Honey, dem nigger dogs; dey sho' did run. Sometimes dey kotched a nigger, but dey didn't never run me. I was in de house weavin' an' spinnin' lak mistus showed me; an' I didn't never get in no trouble wid nobody.

"An' den again, Marse Jim was purty tol'able good to us, but Mr. Ervin Lavendar was sho' mean to his niggers, an' his plantation warn't far from our'n. He had a pack of dogs what run de niggers; an' dem was skeery times, I tell you. Us didn't l'arn no schoolin' nor go nowhere nor have no corn shuckin' nor nothin'; jes' 'quired to stay in de cabins. I hyared 'bout Bre'r Rabbit an' hoodoo; but I never takes up no time wid dat foolishness; never seed no sense in it. Us got on all right 'thout dat.

"Some of de other niggers 'sides me was all de time in trouble, dough. Mr. Fulton, who lived clost to Mr. Lavendar, had a nigger-driver an' overseer name Sanders, an' I bet he was de meanest one of dem all. You know, honey, dey planted wheat fields in de fall in dem days an' cut it in de spring. It would come off in time 'nuff to make corn.

"Dere was a flock of birds lak blackbirds; only dey was wheat birds; an' dey went in droves an' fly way up yonder. Us had planks to slap together to keep de birds out er de wheat, because dey et it up.

"Well'm, one day Mr. Sanders tol' one of de women what was one of de sucklers on de place, dat if she wouldn't do what he axed her to dey was a black coffin over her haid. She 'fused him; so when he was loadin' his gun dere in de wheat fiel', he was holdin' de gun barrel propped under his chin, jes' so, an de other end settin' on de ground. Well sir, it went off an' he killed hisse'f stid of dat sucklin' woman; an' dat was a awful time, 'ca'se de niggers got skeered an' run, an' dey sot Mr. Lavendar's pack of nigger dogs on 'em. De dogs kotched some an' chewed 'em nigh 'bout to death. It warn' none of us, but it were close.

"Us laid low, didn't go out nowhere. Us wasn't 'lowed to; couldn't go to prayer meetin' or nothin'.



Charity Grigsby's House, Livingston, Alabama

"You ax what dat song I singin' when you come? Dat was all of it, an' dat's 'nuff fer me, 'ca'se it's true. What dey gwine to be no mo' fer? Jes':

Angels in de water, walkin' by de light;

Po' sinners stan' in darkness an' cannot se de light.

"I don' want no mo' myse'f; jes' dat; dat's all. How come you wants some mo'? Don't dat much satisfy you? But honey, de sun gettin' low an' my chilluns will soon be comin' from de swamps. Ain't no bread cooked fer 'em. I'll tell you some mo' when I gets my mind on it, 'ca'se it's been a good while since de war.

"Yas'm, us has 'nuff to eat; but if us could get anymore, us would lak it. You know how 'tis; can make out wid mighty little. Us eats greens; lookin' forward to roas' in years comin' in."