

## Heywood Ford

### Interview with Heywood Ford

—*Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama*

#### HEYWOOD FORD TELLS A STORY

"White folks," said Heywood Ford, "I'se gonna tell you a story 'bout a mean oberseer an' whut happened to him durin' de slabery days. It all commenced when a nigger named Jake Williams got a whuppin' for stayin' out atter de time on his pass done gib out. All de niggers on de place hated de oberseer wuss dan pizen, 'caze he was so mean an' useta try to think up things to whup us for.

"One mornin' de slaves was lined up ready to eat dere breakfas' an' Jake Williams was a pettin' his ole red-bone houn'. 'Bout dat time de oberseer come up an' seed Jake a pettin' his houn' an' he say: 'Nigger you ain't got time to be a-foolin' 'long dat dog. Now make him git.' Jake tried to make de dog go home, but de dog didn't want to leave Jake. Den de oberseer pick up a rock an' slam de dog in de back. De dog he den went a-howlin' off.

"Dat night Jake he come to my cabin an' he say to me: 'Heywood, I is gonna run away to a free State. I ain't a-gonna put up wid dis treatment no longer. I can't stand much mo'. I gibs him my han' an' I say: 'Jake, I hopes you gits dere. Maybe I'll see you ag'in sometime.'

"'Heywood,' he says, 'I wish you'd look atter my houn', Belle. Feed her an' keep her de bes' you kin. She a mighty good possum an' coon dog. I hates to part wid her, but I knows dat you is de bes' pusson I could leave her wid.' An' wid dat Jake slip out de do' an' I seed him a-walkin' toward de swamp down de long furrows of cawn.

"It didn't take dat oberseer long to fin' out dat Jake done run away, an', when he did, he got out de blood houn's an' started off atter him. It warn't long afore Jake heered dem houn's a-howlin' in de distance. Jake he was too tired to go any further. He circled 'roun' an' doubled on his tracks so as to confuse de houn's an' den he clumb a tree. T'warn't long afore he seed de light of de oberseer comin' th'ough de woods and de dogs was a-gittin' closer an' closer. Finally dey smelled de tree dat Jake was in an' dey started barkin' 'roun' it. De oberseer lif' his lighted pine knot in de air so's he could see Jake. He say: 'Nigger, come on down fum dere. You done wasted 'nuff of our time.' But Jake, he neber move nor make a sound an' all de time de dogs keppa howlin' an' de oberseer keppa swearin'. 'Come on down,' he say ag'in; 'iffen you don't I'se comin' up an' knock you outen de tree wid a stick.' Jake still he neber moved an' de oberseer den began to climb de tree. When he got where he could almos' reach Jake he swung dat stick an' it come down on Jake's leg an' hurt him tur'ble. Jake, he raised his foot an' kicked de oberseer raght in de mouf, an' dat white man went a tumblin' to de groun'. When he hit de earth dem houn's pounced on him. Jake he den lowered hisselt to de bottom limbs so's he could see what had happened. He saw de dogs a-tearin' at de man an' he holla: 'Hol' 'im, Belle! Hol' 'im, gall! De leader of

dat pack of houn's, white folks, warn't no blood houn'. She was a plain old red-bone possum an' coon dog, an' de res' done jus' lak she done, tearin' at de oberseer's th'oat. All de while, Jake he a-hollerin' f'um de tree fer dem dogs to git 'im. 'Twarn't long afore dem dogs to' dat man all to pieces. He died raght under dat maple tree dat he run Jake up. Jake he an' dat coon houn' struck off through de woods. De res' of de pack come home.

"I seed Jake atter us niggers was freed. Dat's how come I knowed all 'bout it. It musta been six years atter dey killed de oberseer. It was in Kentucky dat I run across Jake. He was a-sittin' on some steps of a nigger cabin. A houn' dog was a-sittin' at his side. I tells him how glad I is to see him, an' den I look at de dog. 'Dat ain't Belle,' I says. 'Naw,' Jake answers, 'Dis her puppy.' Den he tol' me de whole story. I always did want to know what happen to 'em