

Nannie Bradfield

Interview with Nannie Bradfield

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

WHAT I KEER ABOUT BEIN' FREE?

Nannie Bradfield is a fat little old woman almost as broad as she is long, with a pleasant face and a broad smile which displays white teeth still good at the age of eighty-five. She lives alone in a dilapidated cabin which rests in a clump of trees by the side of the railroad. The sagging roof is patched with pieces of rusty tin of many shapes and sizes.

"Nannie," I said, "aren't you afraid to live here alone?"

"How come I be skeered? Ain't nobody gwine bother me lessen it be a spirit, and dey don't come 'roun' 'cep'n on rainy nights, den all you got to do is say 'Lawd have mercy! What you want here,' and dey go 'way and leave you 'lone.

"Any how I's gittin' pretty old and I won't be here sove'y much longer so I jes' as well start gittin' 'quainted wid de spirits."

"Tell me something about yourself and your family, Nannie," I said. "Dere ain't nothin' much to tell 'cep I was born in slav'y times and I was 'bout twelve year old in May when 'mancipation come. My Pa and Ma b'longed to Mars James and Miss Rebecca Chambers. Dey plantation was jes' on de aidge of town and dat's what I was born. Mars James' son William was in de war and old Miss would send me to town whar all de sojers tents was, to tote sompen good to eat to dem. I don't 'member much 'bout de war 'cep de tents and de bum shells shootin'. I was little and couldn't do much but I waited on Miss Liz'beth, my young Miss, and waited on table, totd battie cakes and sich like. No ma'am I don't know nothin' 'tall 'bout de patterollers or de Klu Kluxers but I know all 'bout de conjer doctors. Dey sho' kin fix you. Dey kin take yo' garter or yo stockin' top an drap it in runnin' water and make you run de res' of yo' life, you'll be in a hurry all de time, and if dey gits holt of a piece of de seat of yo' draw's dey sprinkles a little conjer powder on it and burns it den you can't never set down in no peace. You jes' like you settin' on a coal of fiah 'till you git somebody to take de spell offen you."

"Nannie, were you glad when the war was over and you were free?"

"What I keer 'bout bein' free? Didn't old Marster give us plenty good sompin to eat and clo's to wear? I stayed on de plantation 'til I mah'ied. My old Miss give me a brown dress and hat. Well dat dress put me in de country, if you mah'ie in brown you'll live in de country."

"Marry in brown you'll live out of town?" I quoted. "Dat's it—my remembrance ain't so good and I fergits.

"No ma'am, I ain't got no chillun, but Bradfield had plenty un um, I was his foug wife. He died 'bout three years ago and he done well to live dat long wid all dem wimmens to nag him. De Bible say it's better to climb on top of the house and set, den to live inside wid a naggin' 'oman."