

**ELVIRA BOLES, 94, has outlived nine of her ten children. She lives at 3109 Manzana St., El Paso, Texas, with her daughter, Minnie. She was born a slave of the Levi Ray family near Lexington, Mississippi, and was sold as a child to Elihn Boles, a neighboring plantation owner. During the last year of the Civil War she was brought to Texas, with other refugee slaves.**

"I jus' 'member my first marster and missus, 'cause she don' want me there. I'se a child of the marster. Dey didn' tell me how old I was when dey sold me to Boles. My missus sold me to Boles. Dey tuk us to where dere was a heap of white folks down by the court house and we'd be there in lots and den de whites 'ud bid for us. I don' know how old I was, but I washed dishes and den dey put me to work in de fields. We don' git a nickel in slavery.

"Marster Boles didn' have many slaves on de farm, but lots in brickyard. I toted brick back and put 'em down where dey had to be. Six bricks each load all day. That's de reason I ain't no 'count, I'se worked to death. I fired de furnace for three years. Stan'in' front wid hot fire on my face. Hard work, but God was wid me. We'd work 'till dark, quit awhile after sundown. Marster was good to slaves, didn' believe in jus' lashin' 'em. He'd not be brutal but he'd kill 'em dead right on the spot. Overseers 'ud git after 'em and whop 'em down.[Pg 107]

"I'se seventeen, maybe, when I married to slave of Boles. Married on Saturday night. Dey give me a dress and dey had things to eat, let me have something like what you call a party. We just had common clothes on. And then I had to work every day. I'd leave my baby cryin' in de yard and he'd be cryin', but I couldn' stay. Done everything but split rails. I've cut timber and ploughed. Done everything a man could do. I couldn' notice de time, but I'd be glad to git back to my baby.

"Log cabins had dirt floor, sometimes plankin' down. I worked late and made pretty quilts. Sometimes dey'd let us have a party. Saturday nights, de white people give us meat and stuff. Give us syrup and we'd make candy, out in de yard. We'd ask our frien's and dance all night. Den go to work next day. We'd clean off de yard and dance out dere. Christmas come, dey give us a big egnog and give us cake. Our white folks did. White folks chillen had bought candy. We didn' git any, but dey let us play wid de white chillen. We'd play smut. Whoever beat wid de cards, he'd git to smut you. Take de smut from fireplace and rub on your face.

"Doctor take care of us iffen we sick, so's git us well to git us to work.

"Iffen dey had a pretty girl dey would take 'em, and I'se one of 'em, and my oldest child, he boy by Boles, almost white.

"We had to steal away at night to have church on de ditch bank, and crawl home on de belly. Once overseers heered us prayin', give us one day each 100 lashes.[Pg 108]

"Den when de Yankees come through, dey 'ud be good to de slaves, to keep 'em from tellin' on 'em. Freedom was give Jan. 1, 1865, but de slaves didn' know it 'till June 19. We'se refugees. Boles, our marster, sent us out and we come from Holmes County to Cherokee County in a wagon. We was a dodgin' in and out, runnin' from de Yankees. Marster said dey was runnin' us from de Yankees to keep us, but we was free and didn' know it. I lost my baby, its buried somewhere on dat road. Died at Red River and we left it. De white folks go out and buy food 'long de road and hide us. Dey say we'd never be free iffen dey could git to Texas wid us, but de people in Texas tol' us we's free. Den marster turn us

loose in de world, without a penny. Oh, dey was awful times. We jus' worked from place to place after freedom.

"When we started from Mississippi, dey tol' us de Yankees 'ud kill us iffen dey foun' us, and dey say, 'You ain't got no time to take nothin' to whar you goin'. Take your little bundle and leave all you has in your house.' So when we got to Texas I jus' had one dress, what I had on. Dat's de way all de cullud people was after freedom, never had nothin' but what had on de back. Some of dem had right smart in dere cabins, but they was skeered and dey lef' everything. Bed clothes and all you had was lef'. We didn' know any better den." [Pg 109]

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