

Taken from **SLAVE NARRATIVES, A folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews With Former Slaves**, TYPE WRITTEN RECORDS PREPARED BY THE FEDERAL WRITERS PROJECT 1936 – 1938 ASSEMBLED BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PROJECT WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SPONSORED BY THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, 1941

DELICIA HAD SOME TEMPER

The subject of this sketch is Delicia Ann Wiley Patterson, better known as Lucinda Paterson, 92 years of age and lives in a 3 room kitchenette apartment at 2847 Delmar Boulevard, apartment 103.

The old woman is a very neat little brown skinned, white haired person. She lives alone in her neatly furnished snug little quarters. When the writer introduced herself and asked for an interview, Lucinda seemed rather peeved and she said:

“I’m hot, and mad because the landlord sent the paper hanger here and started to clean up my apartment, then come and taken him away before he finished, because I am old.

“I got plenty temper and I been sick, and when I get mad I get sick all over again. I turned off the radio, cause I don’t want nobody talkin’ to me and I don’t want to talk to nobody, I’ve told my history enough I don’t want to tell it no more anyhow, and especially today the way I feel.”

But she seemed too good a subject to let go on with a merely perturbed mood, so I visited with her until she was in good humor, and very willingly gave me the following story:

“I was born in Boonville, Missouri, January 2, 1845. my mother’s name was Maria and my father’s name was Jack Wiley. Mother had five children but raised only two of us. I was owned by Charles Mitchell until I was 16 years old. They were fairly nice to all of their slaves and they had several of us. I only got whipped once in the whole 15 years there, and that was because I was working in the garden with one of my owner’s daughters and I pulled up something that she did not want pulled up, so she up and slapped me for it.

“I got so mad at her, I taken up a hoe and run her all the way in the big house, and of course I got whipped for that. I did not even have to sleep in the cabins. I slept on a pallet in the bedrooms with old marse’s children. I was a pet anywhere I worked, because I was always very neat and clean, and a good worker.

“When I was 15 years old, I was brought to the courthouse, put on the auction block to be sold. Old Judge Miller from my county was there. I knew him well because he was one of the wealthiest slave owners in the county, and the meanest one. He was so cruel all the slaves and many owners hated him because of it. He saw me on the block for sale, and he knew I was a good worker so when he bid for me, I spoke right out on the auction block and told him: ‘Old Judge Miller don’t you bid for me, ‘cause if you do, I would not live on your plantation, I will take a knife and cut my own throat from ear to ear before I would be owned by you.’

“So he stepped back and let someone else bid for me. My own father knew I was to be for sale, so he brought his owner to the sale for him to buy me, so we could be together. But when father’s owner heard what I said to Judge Miller, he told my father he would not buy me, because I was sassy, and he never owned a sassy niggah and did not want one that was sassy. That broke my father’s heart, but I couldn’t help that. Another nigger trader standing right beside my father’s owner said, I wouldn’t own a nigger that didn’t have some spunk. So I was sold to a Southern Englishman named Thomas B. Steele for \$1500. He had an old slave he had in his home for years as their housekeeper, and his wife did not like her and, he had to

sell her to keep peace at home so he put me in his buggy and taken me home to his wife and told her, 'I bought you another girl, Susanna, but I don't want you to lay the weight of your finger on her when she disobeys. Let me know and I will punish her myself.'

"I lived in that family until after the Civil War was over. Mr. Steele's wife's people had a big family and they visited the Steeles a great deal. My Tom didn't like them because they were Yankees and the Steeles were Union. So one time Mr. Tom was going away on a rip and he knew when he was gone, his wife would have all of her folks in the home visiting, and that was against his wishes. He told me to keep tab on every time her relatives come to the house and how long they stayed, and tell him when he come back home, and that he would leave orders in the home to let me work in the field, so I would not have to bother with that great big family, when he left all his wife's folks come right down on our plantation, so I had to work in the house for them so hard, I did not have time to even look at the field.

"When old boss come home I told him, I had not worked in the field and why. Him and his wife had a big fight about that, and she hated me for a long time, and said, the idea of her husband taking a nigger's word to her's and mistreat her on account of it. But he did not let her bother me about nothing, so I stayed on with them until one day, while I had a fly brush in my hand fanning flies while they ate, she told him something I done she didn't like. Just to please her, he taken the fly brush out of my hand and just tapped me with it. It didn't hurt a bit, but it made me so mad I just went straight to the kitchen left all the dishes, put on my sunbonnet and run away. I stayed two weeks. He sent everybody he thought knew where I was after me, and told them to tell me if I would only come on back home, no one would ever bother me anymore. I hid in the woods that whole two weeks and was not afraid. I would be afraid out in those woods now, but I wasn't then. At night I would come up to some of the slave cabins who were my friends and eat and stay all night. So I went back home after my 2 weeks off as a runaway nigger and no one ever bothered me any more either. I came to St. Louis with them, during the Civil War.

"When freedom was declared Mr. Steele told me that I was as free as he was. He said I could leave them if I please, or could stay, that they wanted me and would be glad to have me if I would stay and his wife said, course she is our nigger. She is as much our nigger now as she was the day you bought her 2 years ago and paid \$1500 for her. That made me mad so I left right then. Since she was so smart. Her husband told her, now Sue you might as well face it. There are no more slaves and won't ever be any more, regardless of how much we paid for them. So just quiet yourself down, she don't have to stay here if she don't want to, but till this day some of their children come to visit me, but they never give me anything ever.

"I hired myself out to a family named Miller's at \$3.00 a week, and lived on the place. I had a baby about 3 years old. I married before the war and when my baby was 2 weeks old they taken my husband in the army. He died in the army. I worked for the Millers about 11 months. One day Mrs. Miller misplaced her silver thimble and she accused me of stealing it. She did not tell me that but she told the white nurse girl, and the nurse told me. I got so mad at her for that, 'cause I never stole anything in my whole life and never been accused of stealing, so I quit. The very next day she found her thimble in the nursery where she remembered she put it herself, but forgot about it at the time. She thought it was lost.

"I don't know what the ex-slaves expected, but I do know they didn't get anything. After the war we just wandered from place to place, working for food and a place to stay. Now and then we got a little money, but a very little. I only voted once in my life and that was when working for Mr. Gerhardt. He was a real estate dealer and he taken me to the polls and showed me how to vote for a Republican president. It has been so long ago I don't even remember who the president was, but I do know he got elected. I think the time will soon be

when people won't be looked on as regards to whether you or black or white, but all on the same equality. I may not live to see it but it is one the way. Many don't believe it, but I know it.

"My father's owner's children use to take my father in their basement and teach him to read in a blue back spelling book. I never got any education. My English is good because I boarded all the first Negro school teachers and Negro principals St. Louis ever had for years. Charlie Brown, the late Hutchinson Inge, Charles Hubbard, William turner and Charles Newton, the old pioneer Negro teachers had their meals in my home. I had a lovely home, and have lived well in my time right her in St. Louis. I thing this young generation should advance much faster than they do. Their advantages are very good, but they don't seem to be appreciative of them. If I would have had their chance in my day, I really would make good use of it and improve every moment of my life.

"Charlie Brown started me to attending night school, but I couldn't keep my mind on my studies, I was always thinking of home and my business. I was afraid the girl that helped would forget to grind the coffee for breakfast or fail to put everything on the table for breakfast next morning. May of the teachers had a great ways to go and had to have an early start, and I could not afford to be using the time in the morning doing the things that should be done at night. I always believed in doing things as they should be done, on time.

"That's why my services were valuable, any place I worked, whether as a slave or free, and I still stand by that idea. I have done laundry work so satisfactory that I got \$5.00 for doing up one white dress, 50 cents each for embroidery skirts and 25 cents a piece for vests. I never did work for nothing but wealthy white people."

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